Journal of West African Languages XVII, 1 (1987)

WHEN IS LANGUAGE PLANNING NOT PLANNING?

Ayọ Bamgbọse
University of Ibadan
Nigeria

This paper examines the three major strands in the development of the theory of language planning and makes a critique of that model of language planning that mirrors a planning model. This canonical model of language planning presupposes the identification of some language problem through fact-finding, a plan of how to cope with the problem and the possible outcomes - a policy decision, implementation, and evaluation. Contrasted with actual experience of language development activities particularly in the developing countries, it is shown that the model cannot account for many significant developments in language policy, and that it should be modified if language planning, as a field of study, is to be relevant to most language situations, and consequently more meaningful and fruitful.

There are three discernible strands in the development of the theory of language planning.[1] The first is a reaction against unplanned growth in language. The natural process of language change, such as sound changes, meaning shifts, loans and loan creations, are slow and generally uncoordinated. Language planning can quicken the pace of such changes and impose a definite direction on them. This approach is typified by Haugen's work, particularly in connection with Norwegian (Haugen, 1961, 1966a). Such language planning tends to concentrate on language development processes. Although it also involves the factor of selection of norm and acceptance by the community (Haugen, 1966b), its emphasis is on standardisation and various aspects of corpus planning (including vocabulary expansion, orthographic reform, and guide to pronunciation).[2]

The second strand in the development of the theory of language planning is a reaction to the linguist's non-normative and egalitarian attitude to language which is expressed in such statements as 'All languages are equal. There is no concept that cannot be expressed in any language, if the need to do so arises. The job of the linguist is to describe not prescribe language use'. These well-known concepts are believed to run counter to the basic conception of language planning. If the linguist is right, so the argument goes, there will be no basis for interfering with language. This approach to language planning is typified by Tauli (1974:51-52) who goes as far as to assert that: 'No language can express everything adequately...there are also many imperfections in languages which need not occur...It is a well-known fact that language lags behind thought'. The language planner is, therefore, supposed to re-shape an imperfect tool, impose order on

disorder, and bring out the 'beauty' of the language. This type of language planning concentrates mainly on corpus planning, with excessive emphasis on changing features of an existing language code.

The third strand in the development of the theory of language planning is that language planning is a reflection of the planning model generally. As in economic planning, 'goals are established, means are selected, and outcomes are predicted in a systematic and explicit manner' (Rubin, 1971:218) and the planner makes 'a conscious choice between alternative ways of solving a problem - a choice that is made on the basis of a conscious effort to predict the consequences of the proposed alternatives' (Thorburn, 1971:254). Applied to language planning, this approach presupposes the identification of some language problem through fact-finding, a plan of how to cope with the problem and the possible outcomes, a policy decision, implementation, and evaluation at every stage (Rubin, 1971). It is this canonical model of language planning that has become most influential in the theory of language planning. In this paper, it is suggested that the model is inadequate because it does not account for a lot of language planning situations, particularly in the developing countries of the world.

A Critique of the Canonical Model of Language Planning

The canonical model of language planning is defective in five major respects: it forces language behaviour into the narrow mould of economic planning, its operative processes are idealistic and Eurocentric, its emphasis is on the negative aspects of language, it is weighted in favour of corpus planning, and it is too much government-oriented.

Although language planning may gain something from the rigour of economic planning models, and insights such as that planning is 'problem-solving', 'future-oriented' and susceptible to 'cost-benefit analysis' (Thorburn, 1971), it is an over-simplification to assume that language can be treated like any other resource that can be easily regulated (Jernudd and Das Gupta, 1971). Language is not just a commodity or resource (like butter or machinery) which you can order more of at will. Besides, while economic behaviour is largely predictable, social behaviour is less easy to predict. For example, we cannot easily predict the reaction to a new word or competing variants.

Pool (1979) has drawn attention to the important fact that, in so far as language planning involves change in language habits, it may also be said to involve another kind of planning which he calls 'identity planning'. Das Gupta (1976:210) has also shown that language planning differs substantially from economic planning in terms of resource allocation, political versus economic constraints, and the consequences of delay in implementation. What all this shows is that there cannot be an exact fit between an economic planning model and a language planning one. The latter has to take account of the societal and idiosyncratic aspects of language behaviour.

The canonical model of language planning assumes an ideal situation in which the so-called planning is rational and systematic. As described by Jernudd and Das Gupta (1971:196):

> 'The broadest authorization for planning is obtained from the politicians. A body of experts is then specifically delegated the task of preparing a plan. In preparing this, the experts ideally estimate existing resources and forecast potential utilization of such resources in terms of developmental targets. Once targets are agreed upon, a strategy of action is elaborated. These are authorized by the legislature and are implemented by the organizational set-up, authorized in turn by the planning executive. The implementation of the tasks may be evaluated periodically by the planners'.

Even when allowance has been made for the further qualification that this is an ideal scheme described in general terms (Jernudd and Das Gupta, 1971:196) and that it only relates to language planning at the national level (Jernudd, 1973:12), not many of the existing cases of language planning may be said to fall into this scheme, and such cases are almost invariably associated with the developed countries.

Instances of language decisions taken by non-governmental agencies such as private companies, media houses, societies and individual authors are excluded from the realm of language planning (Jernudd, 1973:18-19). As Rubin (1973:7) puts it, 'By restricting the definition of language planning to that kind of treatment which is governmental and close to the planning ideal, we can then fruitfully explore differences in types of treatment [of language problems]'.

There is no doubt that the canonical model of language planning has been influenced by the situation in the Western democracies with their parliaments, commissions of inquiry., planning commissions and bureaucratic procedures. For example, the adoption of the Official Languages Act in Canada in 1969 was preceded by the setting up of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism in 1963 (McConnell, 1977). In some countries, language matters are routinely discussed in Parliament. For instance, the Norwegian Storting debating which norm of Norwegian is to be adopted (Haugen, 1961:139) or the Israeli Knesset debating a resolution on the need to combat deterioration in the use of Hebrew (Rabin, 1976).

In contrast to the above, the situation in most of the developing countries is very different. Quite often, no preparatory steps are taken to identify problems, consider alternative solutions and forecast possible outcomes. Rather, decisions are simply taken and one is confronted with the problems of implementation. For example, in Zambia prior to independence in 1964, the language policy in education allowed for a mother tongue medium at the primary school level. This policy was abruptly replaced by an English medium policy in 1965. As Duggal (1981:77) comments, it

was only after the decision had been taken that any consideration was given to how it should be carried out: 'After the decision... mechanisms had to be developed for implementing it at the primary level, where the medium had formerly been the mother tongue'.

In quite a number of developing countries, particularly in Africa, one has to reckon not with parliaments and democratic processes of decision-making, but with military rulers and arbitrary decisions and decrees which are supposed to be 'with immediate effect'. Language planning in such a context will obviously not conform to the canonical model described above. One example from Nigeria is the reintroduction of Hausa as a medium of instruction in the then North-Western State of Nigeria. The official policy had been an English medium from the first year of the primary school, but according to the Nigerian Daily Times of April 25, 1972 the Military Governor of the State simply announced the re-introduction of Hausa as one of the highlights of his 1972/73 Budget! Other language policy measures announced on the same occasion included the introduction of Hausa as a principal subject in Advanced Teachers' Colleges, recognition of qualifications in Hausa on an equal basis with other languages for the purposes of employment, and the re-introduction of the Hausa colloquial examination for civil servants. Needless to say, whatever planning may be involved here has to be taken up at the point of implementation.

Because of the need to justify planning against the background of perceived needs or problems, the tendency in the canonical model of language planning has been to emphasize 'language inadequacies' for which remedial action is required. The term 'language treatment' also implies diagnosis of a linguistic ailment. As Kubchandani (1975:163) has rightly pointed out, it may be more useful to abandon the 'handicap model' in favour of the 'adaptation model' which takes into account both the assets and the inadequacies of the language in question. In this connection, it is worth mentioning that one of the recurrent 'problems' identified in language planning is that of linguistic heterogeneity. It is as if the ultimate ideal is the emergence of one common language and one standard variety of this language. As has been repeatedly observed by Third World scholars (Das Gupta, 1968:24; Kubchandani, 1975:163; Bamgboṣe, 1978:62-63), the path to national development for many developing nations may not necessarily be via this Eurocentric ideal.

In spite of the claim of the canonical model of language planning to cover both status planning and corpus planning, one finds that the examples cited in the literature that fit the model tend to be of corpus rather than status planning. Thus, the activities of the Swedish Language Committee, the Swedish Centre for Technical Terminology, the Academy of the Hebrew Language etc. conform to the model of problem identification and decision-making. But when we take a look at decisions on language choice, the model invariably breaks down, and the processes of such choices are said not to fall strictly within the ambit of language planning. For

example, the emergence of New Guinea Pidgin in Papua New Guinea (Wurm, 1978) or the choice of Swahili as Kenya's national language (Gorman, 1973). In fact, Gorman was so struck by the inapplicability of the model to status planning that he suggested limiting the term 'language planning' to corpus planning only, and introducing a new term 'language allocation' for decisions on language choice (Gorman, 1973:72-73).

The canonical model of language planning is not only too much government-oriented, it even places undue emphasis on the existence of a central authority to the neglect of subsidiary levels of government. In a federal set-up, for instance, in which states have concurrent jurisdiction over language matters, it is to be expected that there will be several dimensions of planning (Das Gupta 1976:209). It is even possible that divergent policies may be pursued at the different levels. Even in a unitary form of government where a central authority is much in evidence, it is not unknown that subsidiary organs of government, such as local government councils, pursue their own independent policies. A good example is the aggressive bilingual policy of the Gwynedd County Council in Wales which has invested a large sum of money in making Welsh, in addition to English, a language of debates in the Council, as well as a medium of instruction in the primary schools (Fishlock, 1977).

Actual experience with language development efforts shows that much significant, and sometimes much more effective, work is done by non-governmental bodies such as language societies, teachers' associations, broadcasters etc., yet proponents of the canonical model of language planning insist that such activities do not amount to planning, since they do not conform to the 'planning ideal' (Rubin 1973:7; Jernudd 1973:19).[3] Dissentient voices, such as those of Alisjahbana (1971:186) and Karam (1974:108) who would like to see language planning as being both governmental and non-governmental do not appear to have had any impact on the model.

Planning and Non-Planning

Arising from the narrow model of language planning which has been the subject of the above critique, adherents of the canonical model have had to make a distinction between what is planning proper and what is not. What is not planned is a happening (Jernudd and Das Gupta, 1971:199). In fact, Neustupný, one of the most brilliant theoreticians of the canonical model of language planning, has evolved the notion of 'language treatment'.[4] All attempts to tackle language problems, no matter by whom and in what circumstances, can be regarded as language treatment. However, only the systematic treatment which conforms to the planning model qualifies to be considered as 'language planning' (Neustupný, 1974). Hence, the new slogan 'Language planning is...one kind of language treatment (Rubin, 1973:7; Jernudd, 1973:12).

Coupled with the notion of language treatment is the introduction of the concept of 'language correction'. According to Neustupný (1978:245), wherever there is a language inadequacy, a

correction rule is triggered off. Language correction systems may vary from 'a rigorous system of language planning at one end and a whole set of phenomena of decreasing complexity following it: normative linguistics, language teaching, translation and interpreting, correction of children's language, request for clarification within a discourse...' (Neustupný, 1983:1).

The 'correction model' has the distinct advantage of providing the widest possible framework for all kinds of treatment of language problems. But, in its conception of what constitutes language planning and what does not, it is no different from the canonical model. Evidence of this is provided by Neustupný himself when he says:

> 'The term language treatment has been coined to refer broadly to all organized forms of societal attention to language problems, both in the past and at present. On the other hand, language planning is most suitably used to denote only such language treatment that is informed by a language planning theory: normally it will be systematic, theoretical, rational (in other words, 'rigorous') and future-oriented'. (Neustupný 1983:2).

How valid is the narrow conception of language planning that excludes much of language decision-making in most developing countries? Let us consider three case studies from Africa: Kenya, Somalia, and Nigeria. In Kenya, the decision to adopt Swahili as the national language was taken by the Governing Council of the ruling political party via a resolution at a party meeting. Implementation steps included the requirement that all Kenyans were to speak Swahili at all times with fellow Kenyans, that Government business was to be conducted in Swahili, that all civil servants were to be required to pass an examination in the language, and that Swahili would be given greater prominence than English in the schools (Gorman 1973:77). As can be seen from the nature of this decision as well as the generalized steps of implementation, this is definitely not planning in the canonical sense, but it is nonetheless an important attempt to enhance the status of Swahili.

The second case study concerns Somali. With three types of script (Latin, Arabic, and indigenous), successive governments before the 1969 Revolution were completely powerless to decide on a common script. However, on October 21, 1972, the Supreme Revolutionary Council decided in favour of the Latin script and proceeded to take measures to enforce it. Leaflets showing the new alphabet were dropped from helicopters, civil servants and members of the armed forces were required to learn the new script within three months, and the medium of all primary education was to become Somali instead of the former English in the north and Italian in the South (Andrzejewski, 1979). Although the Somali Language Commission had been at work preparing teaching materials before the decision on the script was taken, there is no evidence that its work influenced the decision. Again, this revolutionary action hardly fits the canonical model of language planning.

The third case study concerns the formulation of the National Policy on Education in Nigeria, which of course embraces language policy in education. A seminar was organized by the Federal Government in 1973 at which recommendations on a new policy were considered. This was followed in 1977 by the promulgation of a White Paper setting out the various aspects of the policy. However, the policy statements were couched in such general terms that another committee had to be appointed to spell out the implications of the policy and the steps required for implementation. This committee, known as the Implementation Committee, submitted a massive Blueprint in 1978 and this was followed by another White Paper in 1979 setting out Government's views on the Blueprint. A 'revised' National Policy on Education was published in 1981. In spite of the superficial appearance of planning in this case, one suspects that the cycle of policy statements and restatements is more a declaration of intent than a programme of action.

Considering the disparity between theory and practice as illustrated above, it appears that there are two possible options: to maintain the canonical model, or to modify it so as to take due cognizance of language planning practices all over the world. The first option would involve a severe restriction in the scope of language planning such that it excludes much of significant language development activity, particularly status planning in the developing countries. The second option would mean a considerable watering down of the neat pattern of the planning model along the lines indicated in Karam (1974:108) so that it will embrace a wider range of language activity at different levels involving governmental and non-governmental effort.[5] There can be little doubt that the second option is more likely to make language planning a more meaningful and fruitful field of study.

NOTES

[1]An earlier version of this paper was presented at the XIIIth International Congress of Linguists, Tokyo, August 29 - September 4, 1982. A summary of this earlier version is published in the Proceedings of the Congress. I am grateful to J.W. Neustupný and Björn Jernudd for their comments on the paper.

[2]Ferguson's approach to language planning is very much the same as Haugen's. His categories of 'graphization', 'standardization' and 'modernization' (Ferguson, 1968) can be subsumed under Haugen's as follows: 'graphization' is an aspect of 'codification of form', 'modernization' corresponds to 'elaboration' and 'standardization' corresponds to 'selection, codification, and acceptance'.

[3]Jernudd (personal communication December 3, 1982) claims that he does not interpret the planning model to refer only to a central authority. If so, this appears to be a modification of his earlier position.

[4]Although, in view of his own 'correction model', Neustupný does not consider himself to belong in this group, as will be shown below, the concept of 'planning' in his model is the same as in the canonical model.

[5]It is not unlikely that this view will gain acceptance in due course. For example, Neustupný (1983:3) noting that 'rules established for Western societies cannot be automatically imposed on the Third World', has called on language planners to 'develop special sets of approaches, within the same paradigm, but specifically suited to language situations of differing linguistic types'.

REFERENCES

Alisjahbana, S.T. 1971. Some Planning Processes in the Development of the Indonesian - Malay Language. In Rubin and Jernudd, 1971, 179-187.

Andrzejewski, B.W. 1979. The Development of Somali as a national medium of education and literature. African Languages 5.2:1-9.

Bamgbose A. 1978. Models of Communication in Multilingual States. West African Journal of Modern Languages 3:60-65.

Das Gupta, J. 1968. Language Diversity and National Development. In Fishman et al (eds.) Language Problems of Developing Nations, New York: John Wiley and Sons, 17-26.

_____. 1976. Practice and Theory of Language Planning: The Indian Policy Process. In O'Barr and O'Barr (eds.) Language and Politics, The Hague: Mouton, 195-212.

Duggal, N.K. (ed.) 1981. Toward a Language Policy for Namibia. Lusaka: United Nations Institute for Namibia.

Ferguson, C.A. 1968. Language Development. In C.A. Ferguson. Language Structure and Language Use. 1971. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 219-232.

Fishlock, T. 1977. Gwynedd uses two languages in its corridors of power. London Times July 26, 1977.

Fishman, J.A. (ed.) 1974. Advances in Language Planning. The Hague: Mouton.

Gorman, T.P. 1973. 1973. Language allocation and language planning in a developing nation. In Rubin and Shuy. 1973, 72-82.

Haugen, E. 1961. Language Planning in Modern Norway. In E. Haugen. 1972. The Ecology of Language. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 133-147.

_____. 1966a. Language Conflict and Language Planning: the case of Modern Norwegian. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

_____. 1966b. Dialect, Language, Nation. In E. Haugen. 1971. The Ecology of Language. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 237-254.

Jernudd, B.H. 1973. Language planning as a type of language treatment. In Rubin and Shuy. 1973, 11-23.

_____ and J. Das Gupta. 1971. Towards a Theory of Language Planning. In Rubin and Jernudd. 1971, 195-215.

Karam, F.X. 1974. Towards a Definition of Language Planning. In Fishman (ed.) 1974, 103-124.

Kubchandani, L.M. 1975. Review of Rubin and Shuy. 1973. International Journal of the Sociology of Language 4:159-164.

McConnell, G.D. 1977. Language Treatment and Language Planning in Canada. Language Planning Newsletter 3 (3).

Neustupný, J.V. 1974. Basic Types of Treatment of Language problems. In Fishman (ed.) 1974, 37-48.

_____. 1978. Outline of a Theory of Language Problems. In J.V. Neustupný. 1978. Post-Structural Approaches to Language. Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press.

_____. 1983. Towards a Paradigm for Language Planning. Language Planning Newsletter 9 (1).

Pool, J. 1979. Language Planning and Identity Planning. International Journal of the Sociology of Langauge 20:5-21.

Rabin, C. 1976. Language Treatment in Israel. Language Planning Newsletter 2 (4).

Rubin, Joan. 1971. Evaluation and Language Planning. In Rubin and Jernudd. 1971, 217-252.

_____. 1973. Language Planning: Discussion of some current issues. In Rubin and Shuy. 1973, 1-10.

_____ and B.H. Jernudd. (eds.) 1971. Can Language Be Planned? Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii.

_____ and R. Shuy. (eds.) 1973. Language Planning: Current Issues and Research. Washington: Georgetown University Press.

Tauli, V. 1974. The Theory of Language Planning. In Fishman (ed.) 1974, 49-67.

Thorburn, T. 1971. Cost-Benefit Analysis of Language Planning. In Rubin and Jernudd. 1971, 253-262.

Wurm, S.A. 1978. Towards Language Planning in Papua New Guinea. Language Planning Newsletter 4 (3).