BEYOND EXPLICIT POLICIES: UNVEILING THE IMPLICIT DIMENSIONS OF LANGUAGE POLICY AND PLANNING

Muhammad Zeeshan

Chairperson, Department of Linguistics and Philology, University of Balochistan

zeeshan.english@um.uob.edu.pk; mzeeshana@yahoo.com

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Corresponding Author: *
Dr. Muhammad Zeeshan

Abstract
Language policy and planning (LPP) research has traditionally focused on explicit policies, such as governmental regulations and institutional language planning. However, recent scholarship has emphasized the importance of implicit, conceptual, and ideological aspects in shaping language use and policy. This review paper aims to highlight the significance of both explicit and implicit dimensions in LPP research, arguing that a holistic understanding of language policy contexts requires an integrated approach. The paper begins by discussing various conceptualizations of language policy, distinguishing between explicit policy formulations and the implicit roles of ideology, discourse, and agency. It then provides a brief historical overview of LPP scholarship, tracing its evolution from structuralist models to more dynamic, agency-focused perspectives. The study further emphasizes the increasing recognition of implicit factors in LPP, illustrating how language ideologies, societal attitudes, and power dynamics influence policy outcomes. Finally, the paper proposes a theoretical framework that accounts for both explicit and implicit aspects of LPP, enabling a more comprehensive analysis of language policy contexts. By synthesizing these perspectives, this paper contributes to the ongoing discourse on LPP, advocating for an inclusive and multidimensional approach to language policy research that better captures the complexities of language use and planning.

Introduction

This review paper explores the significance of both explicit and implicit (or conceptual) aspects of language policy and planning (LPP) in providing a holistic understanding of language policy contexts. Traditional language policy research has often focused on explicit, government-driven policies, overlooking the implicit and conceptual dimensions that shape language use and ideology at various societal levels. A comprehensive analysis of LPP requires an integrated approach that considers both these dimensions.

To achieve this objective, the paper begins by examining how LPP has been conceptualized in academic discourse. Language policy has been defined in multiple ways, ranging from formal legislative measures to informal language ideologies and practices. This study highlights both explicit and implicit conceptualizations and evaluates their significance in LPP research. Subsequently, a brief historical overview of LPP scholarship is provided, with a particular focus on the role of implicit factors and agency in shaping language policy. The discussion then moves toward a theoretical framework that can effectively analyze both explicit and implicit aspects of LPP. By synthesizing these perspectives, this paper contributes to a deeper

understanding of LPP, advocating for a more inclusive and comprehensive approach to language policy research.

Conceptualization of language policy and planning

Language policy has been conceptualized in several ways. For instance, Kaplan and Baldauf (1997, p. xi) define language policy as "a body of ideas, laws, regulations, rules and practices intended to achieve the planned language change in societies, group or system." Kaplan and Baldauf's (1997) description primarily focuses on the explicit nature of language policy and planning. However, conceptual/implicit aspects are also an important component of language policy and planning (McCarty, 2011; Schiffman, 1996). Schiffman (1996) proposes that language policy as consisting of both explicit and conceptual aspects. This is defined and elaborated below:

"Language policy is primarily a social construct. It may consist of various elements of an explicit nature – juridical, judicial, administrative, constitutional and/or legal language may be extant in some jurisdictions, but whether or not a polity has such explicit text, policy as a cultural construct rests primarily on other conceptual elements-belief systems, attitudes, myths – the whole complex that we are referring to as linguistic culture, which is the sum totality of ideas, values, beliefs, attitudes, prejudices, religious strictures, and all the other cultural 'baggage' that speakers bring to their dealings with the language from their background" (Schiffman, 1996, p. 276).

Schiffman's definition highlights both the explicit and conceptual aspects of language policy and he draws more attention towards the conceptual aspects of language policy. Conceptual aspects refer to the micro/implicit aspects of language policy wherein individual members of a given speech community may uphold certain types of beliefs, attitudes, myths, prejudices regarding language(s) which may tend to influence their practices (Schiffman, 1996). He views those conceptual aspects as an integral part of language policy which reveals what actually happens on a grass root levels. Therefore, he stresses that the conceptual aspect should also be the focus of language policy and planning studies (Schiffman, 1996).

Explicit aspects of language policy cannot be considered in isolation. McCarty (2011, p. 2) takes the concept of language policy "as processual, dynamic, and in motion". Building on such conceptualization, she further elaborates that they (i.e., researchers who draw such conceptualization) do not restrict/confine their "analysis to or even primarily focus on official declarations and texts. This is not to dismiss the gravity of official documents or government acts, but to place these in context as part of a larger sociocultural system" (p. 2). Like Schiffman (1996), McCarty (2011) also recognizes both the explicit and conceptual aspects of language policy processes with a stronger emphasis on conceptual aspects while suggesting that the policy analysis should not be confined to merely policy texts rather both the policy aspects/processes should be analyzed/situated in their respective broader social cultural context so that one has a better understanding of the consequences of such policy in the society (McCarty, 2011). Recognizing that language policy is a way to impact "the structure, function, use, or acquisition of language[s]" (Johnson, 2013, p. 9) in a given context, one may draw from these definitions that both explicit and conceptual aspects are important language policy processes which should be viewed in a given context so as to gain a holistic insight.

A brief history of LPP scholarship

In this section, I review the LPP scholarship with a focus on the major approaches used in LPP research so as to justify an ethnographic approach to LPP for the present study. To achieve this end, I used the first phase (1950s-1960s) and the second phase of LPP scholarship (1970s- late1980s), two out of the three phases/periods of Ricento's (2000) classification of the history of LPP scholarship, because they suffice for the purpose of situating an ethnographic approach to language policy development. In the first phase, largely macro language planning happened, specifically, corpus and status planning. In the second phase critical approaches to language policy emerged, followed by ethnographic approaches to language policy development. These approaches will now be discussed in their relevant periods.

Early phase of LPP scholarship (1950s-1960s)

Early conceptualization of LPP is characterized as the classical period of language policy and planning (Ricento, 2000). During this phase, language scholars who were interested in solving the language problems of new developing or postcolonial nations were recruited to develop grammar, writing system and dictionaries for the indigenous languages. Hence, such development formed the foundation for the field of language planning (Johnson & Ricento, 2013, p. 8) and out of this development, "an interest in how to best develop the form of language, i.e., corpus planning – grew" (Johnson, 2013, p. 27). The term corpus planning is associated with Haugen (1959). Corpus planning refers to the activities directed to look into the form of language such as constructing the writing system, creating news words, enriching the lexicon, creating and building the grammar, and so forth (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997).

While some scholars were concerned with the development of the form of language, others were interested in how to allocate the function of a language in a given polity, i.e., status planning (Johnson & Ricento, 2013). For instance, Hornberger (2006) defines status planning as "those efforts directed towards the allocation of functions of languages/literacies in a given speech community" (p. 28). Such planning may include selecting an official or a national language or both in a given polity. Kamwangamalu (2011) asserts that status planning "regulates the power relationship between languages and their respective speakers" in a "linguistic marketplace" (Bourdieu, 1991). It refers to "the social context in which language is used" and it is "often associated with official recognition that national governments attach to various languages, with authoritative attempts to restrict language use in various contexts" (Kamwangamalu, 2011, p. 891). There are several models for language planning, but Haugen's (1959) framework is considered as the most influential (Johnson, 2013). The process of language planning can be explained by using Haugen's (1983) framework. Here, I use Kaplan and Baldauf's (1997) explanation of Haugen's (1983) framework because it provides a detailed and succinct description of each of its components. According to this framework, the planning process often initiates with the status planning decision (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997, p. 30). Status planning involves two major steps, i.e., *language selection*, followed by *language implementation*. Selection of a language or languages involves the development of language policy. Choosing a language or languages by/for a given polity or society is performed through political leadership. The choice of a national language seems a simple task on the surface. However, since it involves selection among competing languages of a polity, the choice is not an easy one. Moreover, since people tend to have emotional attachments with their language(s), opposition to their language may lead to violence. Therefore, Kaplan and Baldauf (1997) proposed that such selection should be made in a way that causes the least possible disruption to or in a given polity.

Although early language planning laid the foundation for language planning (Johnson & Ricento, 2013), it has been criticized on several grounds. For instance, Kaplan (2011) reports several possible problems associated with the early language planning including its failure to link with politics, its faulty association with moderation and development, and its construction of top-down perspective (for details, see, Kaplan, 2011). Moreover, according to Ricento (2000), much of the early work was criticized because it was grounded on the positivist orientation. Such orientation does not take into consideration the social and political context of the polity for which the plans were designed (Johnson, 2013). For McCarty (2011), the earlier approaches were "largely linear and technocratic" (p. 6). In other words, the policy makers adopted a linear approach to policy making – that is to say – they first identified the problem, then they produced, followed by implementation and evaluation, and subsequently revision of the policy accordingly (McCarty, 2011).

Second phase of LPP scholarship (early 1970s - late 1980s)

The focus has shifted in the second phase of LPP scholarship. The first phase of LPP largely focused on corpus and status planning whereas the second phase focused more on the social, economic and political implications of language use or contact in a given context (Ricento, 2000). The emergence of critical language policy (CLP) characterizes the second phase of LPP (Johnson & Ricento, 2013; Ricento, 2000).

According to Tollefson (2006), 'critical' in language policy research refers to three interrelated meanings. First, it is a critique on the traditional mainstream approach to language policy research. The main criticism of traditional research is that it takes an apolitical stance towards the language policy development rather than taking social and political factors affecting language policy into the consideration. Furthermore, unlike the traditional approach, critical approach to language policy research draws on the assumption that "policies often create and sustain various forms of social inequality, that policy makers usually promote the interests of dominant social group" (Tollefson, 2006, p. 42). Second, CLP research aims to bring social change. The CLP-focused research investigates the function of language policies in perpetuating social, economic and political inequalities, "with the aim of developing policies" so that various forms of social inequalities can be reduced (Tollefson, 2006, p. 42). Third, meaning relates to the work which is influenced by critical theory. CLP is an approach to language policy development which aims to investigate the process by which systems of inequality are created and sustained through language in a given polity or context (Tollefson, 2006). Although scholars assert that critical approach to language policy have enriched the field, they have not yet fully captured the process of LPP (Johnson & Ricento, 2013). While they may provide insight about one of the aspects of the LPP process, i. e., the macro component of language planning and process, they have "underestimated" the micro aspect of language policy process (Ricento & Hornberger, 1996; Hornberger & Johnson, 2007). Regarding this, Hornberger and Johnson (2007) argue that ethnography of language policy provides "unique insight into LPP processes through thick description of policy interpretation and implementation at the local level" (p. 510). Therefore, they propose that an ethnography of language policy can incorporate "textual and historical analyses of policy texts but must be based on an ethnographic understanding of some local contexts" (Hornberger & Johnson, 2007, p. 528). The following section presents the theoretical approach which can be used to explore the enlarged language policy perspective.

Theoretical approach for the exploration of enlarged language policy perspective

As mentioned previously, in the earlier period of LPP scholarship, the language planners and policy makers considered LPP as a linear process. Hence, they largely conducted the activity through a top-down perspective (Kaplan, 2011; McCarty, 2011). However, in recent LPP scholarship, there is a growing recognition that LPP is a complex and dynamic process and hence, a bottom-up perspective has begun to be seen as an essential dimension of the process (Baldauf, 2006; Chua & Baldauf, 2011; Kaplan, 2011; Liddicoat & Taylor-Leech, 2021; McCarty, 2011). Chua and Baldauf (2011) argue that LPP is a complex endeavor which is subject to multiple interpretations by different stakeholders. They also argue that implementation of LPP is hampered by a host of contextual factors such as the language ecology of a given polity, the implications of allocating a functional role to a given language, the power of teachers as gatekeepers (teachers' agency), individuals language learners' intrinsic choices, parental support, and so forth. Therefore, these scholars draw our attention towards the importance of understanding and incorporating a micro dimension into the macro aspects if the policies are to be effective and successful, while also making an argument that both the macro and micro aspects should be seen as an integrated whole rather than as distinct aspects (Chua & Baldauf, 2011; Liddicoat & Baldauf, 2008). This is illustrated below:

Macro level language planning alone is often inadequate to understand or to bring about the changes desired at the macro level in a society, and micro level studies and planning are required to properly understand how local phenomena implicate language change [...] it is essential to look at both macro and micro planning processes when considering any language planning [...] they are interdependent [...] macro planning may remain only a symbolic set of standardized policies, goals and strategies if it fails to focus on the finer implementation process and the different actors involved in the planning process (Chua & Baldauf, 2011, p. 948).

This enlarged LPP perspective can be investigated/analyzed through an ecological

approach to LPP (Ricento & Hornberger, 1996) because such orientation aims to approach the LPP issue holistically (Hornberger & Hult, 2008). Bronfenbrenner (1979) offers multiple promises of ecological orientation. Firstly, it looks at how the individual interacts with the environment. To be specific, it looks at how the individual interacts beyond their immediate settings, meaning that its prime focus is to explore the individual's interaction not only with their immediate settings (i.e., microsystem) but also with other levels of the ecological environment (i.e., meso-macrosystems). Secondly, it views this interaction as two-way, meaning that individuals may influence the environment, or they may also be influenced by the environment. Thirdly, it primarily seeks to understand the issue from participants' points of views (for details, see, Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Building upon LPP as a multilayered construct, Ricento and Hornberger (1996) proposed an ecological perspective to understand the policy development processes (i.e., the interaction between top-down/explicit and bottom up/ conceptual policy processes). They deployed the metaphor of an onion to describe the whole process from top-down policy formulating to bottom-up policy realization. In other words, they introduced the metaphor to suggest "the multiple layers through which language policy moves

and develops" (Han et al., 2019, p. 69). Moreover, such conceptualization also tends to illuminate the complexity involved in the process and tends to reveal the complex interplay between the macro and micro aspects of the policy development processes. Ricento and Hornberger (1996) contend that the construct is composed of agents, levels and processes which "are layers that together compose the LPP whole (the "onion") and that permeate and interact with each other in a variety of ways and to varying degrees" (p. 402). The ecological approach is relevant and appropriate to language policy studies because it seeks to understand language policy development from the enlarged perspective (i.e., explicit and conceptual language policy processes). That is to say, how do micro level policy actors (i.e., language teachers and students) conceptualize languages (English, Urdu and indigenous languages) and what are their subsequent practices in relation to the macro aspects of language policy development (i.e., government language policy and print media writers' perspectives) in the multilingual context of Pakistan? In other words, researchers may adapt Ricento and Hornberger's (1996) ecological framework for language policy research to illustrate how macro-micro policy processes interact. For example, Figure 1 illustrates the ecological conceptualization of the language policy context in Pakistan.
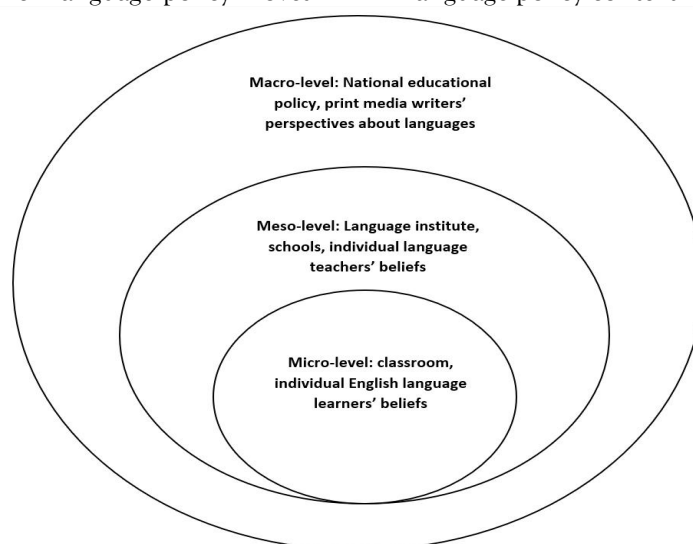

Figure 1. Ecological Framework of the Language Policy Context in Pakistan

The outer layers represent the macro aspect of language policy processes (i.e., Pakistan language policy and print media texts), the middle layer represents the meso aspect of language policy process (i.e., language institution, teachers) and the inner layer represents the micro aspect of the policy

respectively (i.e., classroom, students). Although researchers discuss layers or levels in different ways, there is consensus that "an understanding of multiple levels is necessary to fully understand how policy works" (Johnson & Johnson, 2015, p. 223) or how policy is conceptualized. In this regard, in applying "[...] the onion metaphor, the goal is to slice through the onion to illuminate the connections across various layers [...]" (Hornberger & Johnson, 2007, p. 509) so that holistic insight may be gained. Specifically, researchers could use ethnographic data collection methods to gain insight of both explicit and implicit aspects of the language policy process of the given context (for detail, see, Zeeshan, 2025). Moreover, the studies that tend to analyze language ideologies or language conceptualizations of the different policy stakeholders (macro-micro policy agents) can use Ruíz's (1984) language theorizations as the analytical framework (for detail, see, Hult & Hornberger, 2016; Zeeshan, 2023; Zeeshan, 2025).

Conclusion

This review highlights the necessity of considering both explicit and implicit aspects of language policy and planning to achieve a comprehensive understanding of language policy contexts. While traditional LPP research has largely emphasized explicit, formalized policies, growing scholarly attention has been directed toward the implicit factors that shape language ideologies and practices. By examining both conceptualizations, this paper underscores the role of agency, societal discourse, and ideological underpinnings in language policymaking.

The historical overview provided in this paper illustrates how LPP scholarship has evolved to recognize the interplay between structured policies and the informal, yet powerful, influences of implicit language planning. Furthermore, the proposed theoretical framework provides a structured approach to examining language policy and planning (LPP) by integrating both its explicit and implicit dimensions. This integration allows for more nuanced and inclusive analyses of language policy processes. Specifically, researchers can employ ethnographic data collection methods to explore these dimensions within a given context, thereby uncovering how policies are both articulated and interpreted in practice (Zeeshan, 2025). Additionally, studies aiming to investigate language ideologies or the conceptualizations held by various policy stakeholders—ranging from macro-level authorities to micro-level agents—may adopt Ruíz's (1984) language orientation framework as a guiding analytical tool. This approach has been effectively utilized in prior research to examine language beliefs and attitudes in diverse policy settings (Amorós-Negre, 2017; de Jong, Li, Zafar, & Wu, 2016; Nguyen & Hamid, 2018; Shank Lauwo, 2020; Zeeshan, 2025b).

Ultimately, this paper calls for a broader methodological and theoretical engagement with LPP, encouraging researchers to adopt perspectives that account for both explicit regulations and the deeper, less visible forces shaping language policies. By doing so, future research can better capture the complexities of language planning, contributing to more effective/inclusive and socially responsive language policies.

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