

Agency in language planning and policy

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Agency in language planning and policy

The role of agency in language planning and policy (LPP) is a recent focus of scholarship. Interest in agency has seen new issues and contexts being given prominence in LPP research. In this introduction, we present an overview of theoretical definitions of agency and the ways it has emerged as a concept in LPP scholarship. We consider how developments in methods and approaches to LPP research have led to a greater focus on social actors and their agency in LPP decision-making. We also consider how agency can be conceptualised within the field of language planning, how it may be exercised and who may exercise agency.

Keywords: language policy and planning; free will, human agency, critical realism, constructivism, LPP actors, ecological view, structure

The term ‘agency’ has a long history and has been examined and theorised from a range of disciplinary perspectives. The literature on human agency is also extensive. To open with a small selection of definitions, in sociology it has been defined as the ability of individuals to influence their contexts rather than merely react to them. As Ahearn (2001, p. 110) notes, the social upheavals in Central and Eastern Europe in 1980s and 90s led many scholars to focus on the relationship between human agency and social structure and to investigate how practices can either individually or collectively reproduce, resist or challenge the structures that shape them. Giddens (1984, p. 14), for example, defined agency as “the capacity of the individual to make a difference to a pre-existing state of affairs or course of events”. Agency has been defined as the intention or the capability of an individual to act, initiate, self-regulate, or make differences or changes to their situation. It has also been defined as a form of resistance (Giddens, 1984; Ortner, 1984) or an exercise of choice (Pickering, 1995). Other scholars have recognised that agency is often constrained by context and circumstance. and can also involve reflection on the impacts or effects of policy decisions. For example, Archer (2000), a social realist theorist, developed the idea of reflective agency, in which individuals reflect on the world

around them, and this internal conversation shapes their subsequent actions, while Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001, p. 148) describe agency as “constantly co-constructed and renegotiated with those around the individual and with the society at large”. As Ahearn (2001) counsels, anyone who uses the term ‘agency’ should define it carefully. We will return to a deeper theoretical discussion of theoretical definitions of agency later in this paper.

When it comes to language policy and planning (LPP), it is recognised that policies are interpreted and translated by diverse actors in the policy environment, rather than simply and uncritically implemented (S. J. Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012). If we accept that, as Spolsky (2009, p. 1) states, “[l]anguage policy is all about choices”, this means that decision-making is at the heart of all LPP and thus a focus on who makes decisions, how they are made and what characterises the decision-making process play a central part in understanding LPP. A focus on LPP as choices means that agency, or the capacity and power of individuals to act independently and to make their own choices of action (Bouchard & Glasgow, 2019; Coburn, 2016), is important for both theorising and research.

In LPP scholarship, the term ‘agency’ has often been used vaguely in discussions of language-related actions and has been little theorised or analysed in the literature, with work by Bouchard & Glasgow (2019) being a notable exception. If LPP scholars are to focus on agency as a feature of language-related decision-making, it is therefore important for the field to engage with agency, not just as term that highlights the role of individual actions in LPP contexts, but as a more fully elaborated theoretical concept.

The changing focus of language planning and policy research and the focus on agency

The focus on agency in contemporary LPP research is part of an evolving focus in the field that has seen new issues and contexts being given prominence in researchers' work. Language planning research and its epistemologies have been influenced by scholarly thinking in humanities, political and social science and in broader social and public policy, since language planning scholarship began to take a more critical turn towards the end of the 1980s. Three broad periods in the evolution of LPP scholarship provide a useful framework for surveying how agency has been considered and understood in LPP scholarship and how changes in the focus of LPP have led to the notion of agency becoming significant in LPP research (see also Bouchard & Glasgow, 2019; Ricento, 2000).

The earliest period of research dates from the founding of LPP as an area of scholarly work in the 1960s. LPP scholarship at that time was very much focused on processes of decolonisation and development of independent states. Newly independent states often faced problems related to languages and language use relating to status planning, corpus planning and language education. The focus on LPP research at this time was on governmental action to resolve language problems and LPP work was conceptualised as an activity of governments and governmental institutions. In this period of LPP research, the concept of agency received little attention. LPP actors were seen in institutional terms and the nature of their action and capacity for action was not given much critical attention. In fact, in the literature of this period, a more common focus was on 'agencies' rather than 'agency', for example, Indonesia's Pusat Pembinaan dan Pengembangan Bahasa (Rubin, 1977) or the numerous agencies and ministries involved in LPP work in India (Das Gupta, 1977b). However, there was some

consideration of other non-governmental institutional actors such as congresses (e.g. Fishman, 1993), academies (e.g. Fellman & Fishman, 1977), and language associations that were often early advocates of language planning (e.g. Das Gupta, 1977a).

Individual actors also received attention but often the focus was placed on who they were (e.g. Jernudd, 1977) or what they did (e.g. Fellman, 1974) rather than on their capacity to act. The people who were recipients of LPP work were not usually conceptualised as actors and their role was largely limited to accepting or rejecting the decisions made on their behalf (Cooper, 1984). The prevailing view of the period was that language problems were tractable through appropriate planning and that agency was important only for understanding how such appropriate planning was done.

Language planning was seen as a rational and ideologically neutral activity, and actors were essentially neutral and technical designers and enactors of language policies.

In the 1980s and 1990s, LPP scholarship began to take on a more critical perspective. This perspective grew out of the failure of earlier LPP work to achieve equitable social outcomes and scholars began to critique the ways that LPP work was done by institutional actors. In particular, this period saw a movement away from the idea that language problems could be identified by objective processes towards the view that determining whether or not some aspect of a language or its use was a problem was highly subjective and influenced by ideological, attitudinal, economic and politic interests. LPP studies began to show the influence of rights-oriented thinking, greater concern with the historical and ideological processes at work in language planning and the questioning of assumptions about the neutrality of language planning in development (e.g. Phillipson, 1992; Tollefson, 1991). LPP scholarship during this period was increasingly focused on the effects of policies rather than just their

construction and implementation, and particularly on the negative effects that policies could have on non-dominant groups (e.g. Pennycook, 1994).

In terms of agency, however, work from a critical perspective tended to focus on the same LPP actors as in the earlier period, although there was a growing recognition that members of a society were not just recipients of policy, who could accept or reject policies that originated from the top-down. For example, it was recognised that resistance to domination could be enacted through language, for example in the case of the resistance to apartheid in South Africa (Alexander, 1989) or the defacing or removal of English language road signs by Welsh language activists e.g., (Merriman & Jones, 2009). Agency was thus especially considered in the context of resistance to oppression in cases where oppression was manifested through language.

LPP scholarship from the mid-1980s is marked by a post-modern world view and a focus on language rights. LPP came to be seen as ideological and discursive (Liddicoat, 2007, 2013, 2020a; Lo Bianco, 2005) and as taking place in complex linguistic ecologies where actions taken in respect of one language influenced the place, value and use of other languages within that ecology (Mühlhäusler, 1996). One correlate of this emphasis was to begin to consider LPP as something that was distributed in societies and was not just the domain of governments and institutional actors. This change reflects the influence of Foucault's (1975) argument that power is not simply a top-down exercise of control but is also dispersed and horizontal. As LPP was now seen as an exercise of power, it became important to understand how this power was exercised at all levels of society. This idea that LPP is distributed led scholars to devote their attention to different levels of planning: the 'macro', 'meso', and 'micro' (Baldauf, 2006; Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997). While initial thinking about these levels seemed to assign these layers to particular actors – the macro-level being

the level of traditional government LPP actors, the micro-level being the level of local communities, and the meso-level being institutions between the government level and the local community, these levels have increasingly come to be considered as more contextualised in LPP activities. Liddicoat (2020b) argues that it is most effective to consider the macro-level as the topmost level of LPP that is relevant in the context, the micro-level as the most local level of LPP that is relevant in the context and the meso-level as any intervening levels of LPP action. This means that different actors can be considered as macro, meso or micro in different contexts. Moreover, there has been increasing recognition that LPP is not simply a top-down process, but rather that it can work from any level towards any other, as for example in the case of ‘language policy from below’ where the direction of influence is not just from macro to micro (Alexander, 1992).

There has also been a shift in more recent thinking about what constitutes the focus of LPP research and what constitutes planning and policy within LPP work. Traditional LPP scholarship has usually focused on *texts* (language laws, language policy documents, etc.) and, although work continues to consider these documents, the focus of research is now much broader. Language-related decision-making is understood as being informed and revealed by more than documents. The notion of LPP as text involves explicit statements about the place and use of languages in a social context and constitute overt policies about languages (e.g., (Shohamy, 2006). There is a recognition that LPP can also be covert and unexpressed in textual forms and such forms of LPP can be very influential. In order to understand less-overt forms of LPP, scholarship has added the idea of LPP as *discourse* (Lo Bianco, 2005), i.e., the ideas, beliefs, attitudes and ideologies that exist within a social context about languages, their value and their use; and LPP as *practice* (Bonacina-Pugh, 2012, 2020), i.e., the patterns

of practice that reveal tacit understandings, beliefs about languages, their value and their use. These practices are shaped by policies that may be unarticulated but known consciously or unconsciously to participants in communication.

These changes in the focus of LPP scholarship have expanded the ways in which researchers have come to think about LPP actors and their agency. Recent research has focused on many different actors, such as schools (Schneider, 2015; Willoughby, 2014), universities (Hult & Källkvist, 2016; Okuda, 2019; Siiner, 2016), students (Payne, 2006, 2007), teachers (Nguyen & Bui, 2016; Tran, 2019), businesses (Barakos, 2012; Sanden, 2020a, 2020b), immigrant communities (Hatoss, 2006), churches (Obiri-Yeboah, 2019; Souza, Kwapong, & Woodham, 2012), sporting organisations (Djité, 2009), cities (Cadier & Mar-Molinero, 2012; Matras & Robertson, 2015) and families (Gu & Han, 2020; Zheng & Mei, 2020), among others. This enlarged focus on LPP actors has highlighted the individual nature of the exercise of agency in these contexts: Actors are not simply institutions but are also individuals within institutions whose actions create and construct the decisions around language use in the contexts in which they act. LPP agency can thus be exercised communally or individually.

It is not just in micro-level or meso-level contexts that LPP actors exercise agency. Even in the development of most macro-level policy texts, agency is important for understanding how a policy text is formulated and how it evolves. Policy texts are written by policy authors who make choices about how policies are formed and articulated. They are also influenced by others, including politicians, activists, and participants in consultation processes. The elaboration of policy is thus dialogic in that multiple voices are present in its formulation, and actors exercise their agency to shape the final form of these documents. While policies grow from a plurality of positions, policy texts are presented as monologues and as univocal, authoritative statements

(Bakhtin, 1929/1994). In this way, viewing policy as text obscures the agency that is involved in its development and the sense that a policy is chosen from among alternatives in what Bakhtin (1965) calls a single-voiced (одноязычный) discourse that presents its view as unitary and authoritative without reference to other possibilities, as if what it proposes is the only possible version and the final word to be said on the topic.

Theorising agency

The concept of agency emerged as an object of attention in the Enlightenment with the rejection of the idea that human action was bound by tradition, beliefs and the social contract and the affirmation of humans' ability to shape the circumstances of their lives (Locke, 1689/2004). The Enlightenment view of freedom of action saw human action as individualistic and involving a rational calculation of courses of action based on self-interest. Agency consisted therefore in choosing actions in context to achieve the best outcome for the self, based on the application of reason. For other Enlightenment thinkers, however, agency was not simply the result of rational self-interest but also involved a moral dimension involving conscience (Rousseau, 1762/2009). Overall, agency was conceptualised as the application of free will limited by a rational concern for self-interest or a moral concern for taking the right action. In much LPP scholarship, an often unreflective view of agency as free will has tended to predominate in representations of human agency. .

However, agency is far subtler and more complex in its form and enactment. It is not unitary and decontextualised, but rather situated in time and space. Emirbayer & Mische (1998, p. 963) argue that agency is a temporally embedded social process:

Agency as a temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past (in its habitual aspect), but also oriented toward the future (as a

capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and toward the present (as a capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment).

They further identify three different constitutive components in agency that represent different aspects of its overall nature. They call these elements: Iteration, Projectivity and Practical Evaluation.

Iteration is a past-oriented component of agency reflects the idea that capacity to act can involve the reproduction in new contexts of past patterns of thought and behaviour. Actors have a repertoire of routine actions that they can employ in response to the typical situations that they encounter in their worlds and these patterns of response play a role in helping them to sustain identities, interactions and institutions over time. In acting, social actions may be based on the recall, selection, and application of schemas of action based on past experiences of interaction that may be taken for granted to a greater or lesser extent. The concept of iteration shares similarities with Bourdieu's (1972) idea of habitus, which involves the formative influence of past experience on the cognitive, intentional and corporeal structures of action. By incorporating past experiences, actors develop a set of preconscious, and usually naturalised and taken-for-granted, expectations about courses of action, such as languages and their use, that they strategically mobilise in certain situations. Thus, language practices in given contexts may be deployed on the basis that such actions have been deployed in the past and they constitute a heuristic of how to act in this context. This heuristic may apply to very simple levels of everyday language use or may involve a continuation of past language practices as ways of resisting or modifying new (top-down) LPP decisions. Such practices construct temporal and relational patterns that are recursively implemented in social life and construct social realities (Giddens, 1984). Actors exercise agency in iteration by selectively recognising and implementing

schemas of practice. The iteration component of agency emphasises the idea that much human action has habitual dimensions but emphasises that these habitual dimensions involve an engagement with histories of practice rather than simply their reproduction (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). It provides a reminder that the exercise of agency is not just found in cases of innovation and change but also in the continuity of practices over time.

Projectivity is a future-oriented component of agency that involves a process of imagining possible future trajectories of action that are relevant to the actor's hopes, fears, and desires for the future. Agency is not found only in the reproduction of past experiences, but also involves a creative reconstruction of the world that gives shape and direction to it (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). Emirbayer and Mische argue that projectivity is an engagement with possible futures to create something new in their context:

[S]ocial actors negotiate their paths toward the future, receiving their driving impetus from the conflicts and challenges of social life. The locus of agency here lies in the hypothesization of experience, as actors attempt to reconfigure received schemas by generating alternative possible responses to the problematic situations they confront in their lives (p. 944).

They further argue that projective agency involves processes of reflection on the current situation as a response to problems that cannot be resolved through the application of existing ways of thinking and acting. The idea of policies as projective has been articulated by Gee (1994a, 1994b), who conceptualises (macro-level) policy texts as both enacting processes to respond to problems and also constructing representations of desired future worlds. In LPP contexts, projective agency is exercised in the process of developing and implementing new language-related actions to deal

with perceived problems in the local language context. This may be exemplified in the agency of teachers as they seek to enact new ways of working with languages or in the agency of institutions as they seek to formulate new policy responses.

Practical evaluation is a present-oriented component of agency that entails the capacity of actors to make practical and normative judgements in selecting between alternative possible actions in response to the situations in which they find themselves. In any course of action, actors must adjust their actions to the needs and demands of their contexts and circumstances. In each situation, actors must make judgments about the course of action that they will undertake. The practical evaluation component is dialogic as it is through processes of deliberation, with others or self-reflexively, that actors develop the capacity to make decisions about their course of action and, where relevant, challenge existing patterns of action. By making judgments about possible courses of action, actors mediate their social worlds to pursue their projects or bring about desired outcomes in their contexts. Practical evaluation is not simply applied in contexts of transformation; it is a component of action in any form as even very similar moments in time have their own distinctive characteristics. Even when a language situation is constructed through the application of what are considered by actors to be universal norms, the application of such norms is not automatic but the result of a situated judgment about the rules and the context in which they are applied (Nussbaum, 1986). Within the exercise of practical evaluation, Emirbayer and Mische (1998) identify a number of processes that are involved in the exercise of agency:

- *Problematization* – The “recognition that the concrete particular situation at hand is somehow ambiguous, unsettled, or unresolved” (p. 998).
- *Characterisation* – developing an understanding of a problem as being of a particular nature.

- *Deliberation* – the weighing up of plausible choices for future action through a conscious consideration of how best to respond; decision-making choices about how to act.
- *Execution* – carrying out actions intended to bring about the desired result. In LPP terms, these processes reflect processes of planning – working to formulate decisions about how languages will be used and decision-making – arriving at a policy that will guide future courses of action, and implementation.

In LPP work, these various processes may be aligned or they may be in conflict, producing unplanned or unintended consequences (Baldauf, 1994; Eggington, 2002).

Emirbayer and Mische (1998) do not conceptualise these components of agency as independent and separate but rather as present and interacting in particular ways in particular contexts of action; they refer to these components through the metaphor of a chordal triad. Social actors can be said to be oriented toward all three temporalities (past, present, and future) at any given moment, but one of these may be more salient in any emergent situation. These three components may not all agree when actors decide to act and thus there may be conflicting dimensions of the exercise of agency.

In thinking about the ways in which social actors are likely to take up agency in LPP contexts, it is important to consider who such actors are and what motivates them to act. In reality, any person may be an actor in language related decision-making, especially at the micro-level, but it is useful to think who is likely to take on an agentive role in such contexts. Zhao & Baldauf (2012) have identified a number of different possible actors in LPP decision-making:

- *People with power*: Such as those who hold public office or judicial positions and have the power to shape LPP decisions.
- *People with expertise*: Those who can influence LPP decision-making by deploying expert knowledge

- *People with influence*: Those who are influential in society because of standing or esteem; and
- *People with interest*: Those who get involved in LPP decision-making at the grassroots level because of their interest in language issues.

Zhao & Baldauf 's list is useful in that it provides a reminder that agency is not simply an exercise of power but is much more distributed in society. Their list of potential actors was developed for a particular LPP context – macro-level Chinese script reform – and should not be considered to be an exhaustive list of actors. The list does, however, suggest that people who exercise agency in LPP may be quite diverse and range from those whose positions afford them agency, such as lawmakers, ministers of education, or in more micro-level contexts, school and business leaders, etc (see for example Johnson & Johnson, 2015) to those who take on agency in order to achieve a goal, such as language activists.

Another way of thinking about the social actors involved in policy is to focus on the roles and relationships actors have with policy. Ball, Maguire, Braun, and Hoskins (2011) identify a number of such roles for policy implementation in school contexts that appear to be relevant to wider considerations of agency in LPP.

- *Narrators*: actors who interpret policy by selectively focusing on aspects of a policy and making decision about its implementation, creating local versions of policy through the selection and enforcement of meanings in their context of work.
- *Entrepreneurs*: Actors who advocate for the adoption of policy and have a personal investment in the policy and its enactment in their local context.
- *Outsiders*: Actors from outside the local context but who play a role in the implementation of the policy through partnerships with local actors or by monitoring their work.
- *Transactors*: Actors who are responsible for demonstrating that (macro-level) policy is implemented locally and attending to accountability requirements for

implementation and have roles in monitoring and/or enforcement of the policy in the local context.

- *Enthusiasts*: Actors who are positively engaged with the policy, with a feeling of investment in it, model the policy in their practice and provide models for others of how policy can be implemented.
- *Translators*: Actors who produce the events, processes and texts for others to induct them into the new policy and its discourses.
- *Critics*: Actors who resist aspects of the policy or interpretations of it and develop and maintain counter discourses to it.
- *Receivers*: Actors who are dependent on others in the process of interpretation and implementation and seek guidance for their personal practice as they implement a policy.

These roles and relationships are not specific to individual actors, and any actors may take on more than one of these. However, certain roles imply that the actors have institutional roles, power, influence, or expertise as a prerequisite for being able to take on the role (e.g., narrators and outsiders). There are thus possible connections between Ball et al's (2011) and Zhao and Baldauf's (2012) ways of understanding actors and their agency. In addition, Ball et al's (2011) list of actors indicates that not all social actors are invested with power, influence, etc. and may have limited capacity or desire to act in a policy process (e.g., receivers), and that agency is not simply understood in terms of those who can have an impact on the actions of others, but is relevant for considering any actors involved in the process.

It is also important to consider to what extent social actors can exercise agency in any LPP context. While Enlightenment thinkers often considered agency to be free will limited only by rationality or morality, such a view of agency as free will, which often seems to be implied in LPP scholarship, ignores the ways that the exercise of agency is constrained by other, external factors. Agency is not total freedom of action; it is rather a "socio-culturally mediated capacity to act" (Ahearn, 2001, p. 112). Agents do

not act in isolation from other social actors but are part of a complex constellation of agents (Mayntz & Scharpf, 2001) who interact with each other and through action and discussion, etc. to mediate the ways agency can be enacted. Agency is also mediated by structure, or the recurring patterned arrangements that influence or limit the choices and opportunities available to individuals in society. It is the processes that mediate agency that can reveal the nature of agency and its exercise in contexts of action, including LPP contexts. Much work in LPP research, however, has focused on agency in isolation from the social phenomena that mediate it, and Johnson and Ricento (2013, p. 13) argue that “a balance between structure and agency... is precisely what the field needs”.

Social theories of agency rest on a dualism of agency, the capacity to act, and structure, the social relationships within which action occurs (Fuchs, 2001). Structure can be understood as the patterned relationships that exist within a society and which shape the ways that societies function and that people within societies perceive and think about the world in which they live. Structure includes the relationships that exist between individuals and groups within a society, persistent patterns of behaviour and institutionalised norms, ideologies and cognitive frameworks that structure actions in societies.

There is a central debate in the social sciences about how the relationship between agency and structure is conceptualised, although this debate has not had a significant impact on work on agency in LPP research. Generally, there are two main ways of understanding this relationship. One perspective is realist and argues that phenomena exist and are thus empirically discoverable. From such a perspective, social phenomena exist as facts of the social world (Durkheim, 1919). However, the natural world and the social world differ in the terms of the nature of the phenomenon that are found in each and social phenomena are not directly discoverable (Bhaskar, 1997), and

the social researcher can never be positioned outside the social world that is being researched. This socially oriented form of realism is known as critical realism and is eloquently elaborated by Bouchard and Glasgow (2019). In critical realism, it is acknowledged that social phenomena cannot be observed directly and can only be known through the ways that they influence the behaviour of actors in the social world.

Critical realism makes an argument that *structure* and *agency* are distinctly separable elements of the social world and exist as separate strata and with different ontologies and should be studied in ways that keep the differentiation between them clear. This claim may lead to a tendency to see structure primarily in terms of its capacity to constrain agency and limit possibilities for action in context. The other perspective is a *constructionist* perspective, which takes the view that agency and structure are not as sharply bounded and that agency and structure can be viewed from an ecological perspective in which structure and agency are mutually constitutive and have equal ontological status (Giddens, 1984). For Giddens, “(t)he constitution of agents and structures are not two independently given sets of phenomena, a dualism but represent a duality ... Structure is not 'external' to individuals: as memory traces, and as instantiated in social practices” (p. 25). Giddens emphasises structure and agency as a duality. In his view, structure and agency cannot be conceived as separate from one another. He therefore argues that structure is neither independent of actors nor determining of their behaviour, but rather takes the form of sets of rules and capabilities that actors draw on to construct their actions and by acting in reference to these, they reproduce them and their normative impact on action. Constructivists seek to account for structure as a human construct developed through prior action and developing a normative nature through the iterative human actions. Structure is thus the sedimented products of the prior exercise of agency. This perspective sees that agency and structure

are in a dynamic relationship in which structure affects the exercise of agency and agency affects the form of structure, as agentive action can reform structure in new ways. The constructivist perspective focuses on structure that shapes agency but acknowledges that this shaping may both constrain agentive choices but may also provide affordances for the exercise of agency. As Giddens argues, “[s]tructure is not to be equated with constraint but is always both constraining and enabling” (p. 25). It is the interaction between agency and structure that creates the spaces in which human beings can act: an ecological space in which neither voluntarism nor constraints on action predominate but in which each is in a dialectic relationship.

Each of these perspectives has advantages and disadvantages for understanding agency and its place in LPP research. The *critical realist* perspective, as Bouchard and Glasgow (2019) argue, has the advantage of clarity that comes from the neat separation of social reality into separate strata. However, this neat separation may obscure the underlying messiness of the social world and its operation and may sideline consideration of how structure comes into being in the social world. The *constructivist* perspective reflects the contingencies and complexities of the social world but may lead to conflation of the concepts of agency and structure and obscure aspects of their operation. Work on LPP, including the papers in this volume, may take either a critical realist or a constructivist perspective on the relationship between agency and structure, but in many cases, the ways that researchers conceptualise the relationship may not be well articulated in their work.

The consideration of agency and structure in LPP research is particularly important, and language policies may be seen in terms of both structure and agency. LPP research may focus on language policies as structures that shape the actions of social actors. Language policies may constrain the possibilities for action within a

certain language context, as for example, by inhibiting or proscribing certain desired future actions, or they may provide affordances for action by warranting certain actions. In discussing language policies as structure, researchers may orient to the ways that actors respond to and implement policies, and much of the research on agency has looked at the ways that actors work to redirect or reinterpret policy provisions in order to construct or legitimatise their own actions (e.g. Johnson, 2010). However, LPP research may also be viewed as forms of agency in which actors make decisions about languages and their use in context and this is the position that papers in this volume take. It is thus possible to view LPP from different perspectives and as interactions between these perspectives in that the agency of those who develop policies at the macro-, meso- or micro-levels may create texts, discourses or practices that shape future actions.

About this volume

The papers in this volume adopt a variety of frameworks for exploring the nature of agency in LPP and the forms that it takes. We have divided the papers into groups that align roughly with the themes in the literature we have discussed. The first group of papers are based in schools and take an *ecological* view of agency, examining how it is either constrained or enabled by contextual variables. The papers show how teachers and language specialists, even at a grassroots level, can play an agentive role in influencing policy even if they may lack decision-making power. However, they may also be constrained, or exercise their own constraints, in ways that are unhelpful or do not necessarily support multilingualism. All three papers in this group identify complex combinations of local factors that influence actors' ability and willingness to exercise agency. Tsang explores the agency of Chinese as an Additional Language (CAL)

teachers in Hong Kong, where the burgeoning need for language provision for growing number of non-Chinese speaking immigrant students has been neglected in a policy environment that strongly favours Chinese and English. Tsang makes a sophisticated study of the factors that limit the agency of CAL teachers in this context, concluding that the language planning context has constrained teachers' agency in ways that lead to the narrowing of the curriculum and short-termism in teaching goals.

In the United States, Schornack and Karlsson's paper focuses on teachers' agency in relation to provision for English learners in Minnesota State Approved Alternative Programs, where English learners are disproportionately enrolled. The authors suggest that the reason for this is because state-level policy is pervaded by a hidden monoglossic ideology which problematises and pathologises English learners. Characterising this language planning for English learners as unplanned because "the values or powers driving language planning choices are not always immediately visible", the authors adopt the concept of *the critical language policy arbiter* to describe how language development specialists can potentially act to influence policy and disrupt inequitable practices that 'invisibilise' English learners.

In a third paper that takes an ecological view of agency, Weinberg looks at the role of language policy arbiters who exercise a form of communal agency at different levels in three schools in Nepal, where the Nepali government has enacted legal provisions supporting multilingual education. In her study, Weinberg found that each school had a pair of language policy arbiters, or actors with disproportionate power over decisions regarding the use of minoritised languages. The permissive but passive government stance toward the provision of multilingual schooling allows such arbiters to either expand space for the teaching of the local language or close it down. In all three studies in this group, while teachers and specialists seem to be able to step into a

policy leadership vacuum at a certain level and exercise individual or collective agency, the form that this agency takes is highly constrained by the environment in which it is exercised.

The next group of papers looks at the relationship between *agency* and *structure*. In another paper situated in Nepal, Poudel and Choi analyse the different elements of structure that support or restrain policymakers' decisions regarding the medium of instruction. As described in the previous paper, despite professing that they supported multilingualism, the policymakers in this study chose not to enable the medium of instruction in local languages, therefore going against the government policy and effectively sidelining Nepali languages. The unintended outcome of weak government policy, argue Poudel and Choi, is that, encumbered by a range of social and structural constraints, Nepali policymakers reproduced a system that continued to champion standard and dominant languages to the detriment of local languages. Their paper provides insight into ways that agency can be constrained even for agents who would normally be considered powerful agents in the LPP process. It also shows that actors' personal engagements with language issues may be constrained by other non-linguistic factors.

Badwan's paper studies the relationship between agency and structure in Tunisian higher education. Badwan observes that language-planning processes in Tunisian universities are influenced by structural factors beyond the university linked to broader social issues, including globalisation and student mobility, employers' linguistic expectations, national tensions, and parental involvement. The absence of official educational language policies, akin to benign neglect in Badwan's view, has created room for agency to be exercised by local educational stakeholders. She refers to them as *language policy influencers* rather than arbiters because they operate in informal

domains as well as formal social institutions like universities and workplaces. Badwan makes the important point that, while the absence of official policies makes room for agency and the ability to make decisions based on local demands and aspirations, they also create inconsistency, uncertainty and the potential for language policy agency to produce social inequalities.

The next group of papers work with Zhao & Baldauf's framework of actors and agency in LPP. Two papers in this group were situated in China, where recent social and economic initiatives have resulted in some shifts from the top-down, macro-level approach that has traditionally characterised language planning. The effects of these changes on agency is particularly revealing. Cheng and Li's study focuses on tertiary-level English language teaching. As the authors observe, China is the largest English education market in the world, and its policy on English education affects millions of people, from students to scholars, university administrators and teachers. By analysing the layers of individual agency in the College English Program, the authors explore which people have how much scope to exercise agency in planning for the delivery of College English. They find it is *people with influence* in society who have the most obvious impact on macro-level policy making. In addition, they find that, at meso-level, it is administrators who wield a disproportionate amount of power in the way they interpret or even ignore top-down language policy and play the role of de facto policy arbiters. At the same time, as the authors also note, the experiences and views of Chinese university students, the largest number of English learners in the world, have to date received little attention.

Chen, Tao and Zhao analyse agency in context of pressure to diversify foreign language education policy in China. Flowing from the Belt and Road Initiative, an ambitious economic and strategic agenda by which China proposes to economically link

Europe to China through countries across Eurasia and the Indian Ocean, there are planning initiatives to expand China's foreign language provision. Unlike Cheng and Li, the authors find that it is *people with expertise* and *people with power* who make influential decisions regarding LPP in this context. However, they also find that, although these individual actors have demonstrated agency in responding to macro-level language policy changes, the agency that they have exercised is relatively limited and constrained by contextual/structural constraints and their personal limitations.

Finardi and Guimarães also adopt Zhao and Baldauf's framework of actors and agency in LPP and apply it to higher education in a Brazilian tertiary institution. They look at the perspective of the learners (micro level) in relation to language policies at the national (macro) and institutional (meso) levels, as well as from the perspective of *people with interest* and *people with power* (national and institutional stakeholders). Their paper analyses Brazilian national LPP as expressed in perceptions of a government-funded programme called Languages without Borders, created by the Brazilian Ministry of Education in 2014, a response to a long-standing lack of investment in foreign language teaching in Brazil. They argue that more strategies are necessary to support agency in the development of local LPP, since not all members of the academic community or other stakeholders are included (or have their voices heard) in the process of discussion and implementation. Their analysis indicates that certain languages (mainly English) were promoted over others in the Language without Borders program and there was little space for the participation of some agents (especially at the local level) in the formulation and implementation of policies. For example, the authors, who were involved in the development of the program at their university, did not recall one instance when university managers attempted to bring together *people with power* and *people with interest* to keep pace with macro (national), meso (institutional) and

micro (learners) responses to implementation measures. This finding has quite some strong similarities with the other two studies in this group.

Shepherd and McEntee-Atalianis set out to understand the role of *meso-level actors as arbiters* in policy implementation in Vietnam. Their paper focusses on the implementation of the National Foreign Languages Project 2008-2020 (also known as National Project 2020) and explores the socio-cultural context in which educational LPP takes place. Contrary to previous research, which has found that language policy arbiters can in some cases possess a disproportionate amount of power, their paper again shows how governments and institutions can act to disempower rather than empower meso-level agents. The meso-level actors in their study struggled to define, understand and implement their role in communicating with teachers about National Project 2020, due to a lack of information about the policy, lack of experience, training and support, and a disconnect with what policy should look like on the ground, especially in rural schools. In addition, the authors note that participants' weak understanding of the objectives of National Project 2020 prevented them from carrying out an effective role as meso-level agents. Their study suggests that rather than possessing a disproportionate amount of power, agents operating in education institutions are often constrained by the institutional hierarchy within which they operate. The findings from this group of papers suggest first that there are vital links between the macro, meso and micro-levels of LPP which cannot be ignored; second, that there needs to be strong and effective communication at and between each level if policy change and implementation is to be successful; and third, that a willingness for meso-level leaders to consult end users is essential.

The last group of papers look specifically at the nature of agency exercised by teachers and students. Duc, Nguyen and Burns' paper looks at primary school teachers'

agency in LPP, again in the setting of Vietnam's National Foreign Languages Project 2008–2020, in which English was officially introduced as a compulsory subject into the mainstream curriculum from Years 3–12. Their paper explores how English teachers exercise their agency in response to the policy. The Project follows a traditional top-down approach in which policy is initiated, decided, and developed at the macro, or Ministry- level and cascaded down through lower administrative levels and schools to delivery in the classroom. In this system, teachers are not involved in initiating, developing, or negotiating the policy-making process. The authors show that teachers are viewed as passive *policy receivers*, who are expected uncritically to follow and implement the mandates passed down to them, and they were closely supervised and monitored by middle-range leaders. However, in the classroom, the teachers moulded and shaped the policy mandates according to their own interpretations, preferences, choices, and teaching conditions. The study suggests that there is a need for meso-level leaders, such as educational managers and school leaders, to facilitate a more active role for teachers when implementing policy reform.

Mohamed's study of pre-school leaders in the Maldives, explores their agentic role in interpreting and implementing macro language-education policies in the micro-setting of the school. In 2012, a change in the medium of instruction from English to Dhivehi was legally enacted, and a new National Curriculum reinforced the need to prioritise the strengthening of children's first language. Mohamed investigates how two school leaders' ideologies about language, language education, and decision-making processes affected the ways in which these policies were interpreted and implemented in their respective schools. She found that implementation was highly dependent on whether school leaders opted to accept the policies and take on a proactive role in language planning or to resist the policies and distance themselves from external

pressures. The study reveals the critical role that school leaders play in either supporting or opposing pathways to additive bilingual language acquisition. Mohamed's paper chimes with other papers in this collection which show that meso-level actors play an important agentive role in the implementation of macro-level policies in the ways that they wield their power in responding to policy.

The final paper in this collection is by Vennela and Kandaharaja, who look at the end-users in the policy continuum, i.e., students. They use of the notion of *positionality* to interpret Indian students' agentive responses to LPP. Their study perceives agency from an ecological perspective, operating at the micro-level of language planning. This, they argue, enables a deeper analysis of how '*invisible planners*' such as students negotiate, endorse, or question their language reality. The authors argue that agency is multi-layered, and that agentive *positionality* is relative to agentive *foci*. In other words, definitions of agency need to consider the contextual social identities and the sociolinguistic and cultural factors which impact on an individual's linguistic agency. Agency, they argue, is centrally situated between LPP and individuals' linguistic lived experiences.

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