

Book Review

Bernard Spolsky. *Language Policy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2004. 262 pages. ISBN-13: 9780521011754 / ISBN-10: 0521011752. \$29.99 US.

Reviewed by **Michael F. Thomas**

When first approaching a field of study as diverse as 'Language Policy', it's easy to become disoriented under the avalanche of facts and patterns--educational policies, distinct languages spoken in a region, historical factors, legal issues, linguistic ideologies, nationalisms--and then become hard pressed to see how such divergent forces interact.

In his book *Language Policy*, Spolsky seeks to mediate this overload of information by providing a model to organize it. The basic premise of the model is that language 'policy' is best understood as the relationship between three factors; ideology, management and practice. Management is the explicit attempt of a locus of power (such as the state) to manipulate language practices and ideologies. Practice simply means how linguistic resources are habitually utilized in a speech community. Ideology is the system of beliefs about language varieties and linguistic choices. An example of why this tripartite division is important can be seen in the three-language formula in India, which states that all Indians should know the national language, Hindi, the regional language of the state and their mother tongue. In the realm of management, children have a right to mother tongue education. The law reflects the dominant national ideology of valuing all languages in India. However, in practice, relatively few children receive instruction in their mother tongue. This is due to a number of factors, including limited resources for the publishing of educational materials in all of the languages of India, unclear distinctions between languages as in the case of dialect chains, local ideologies differing from national ideologies, etc. When analyzing the language policy of India one must look beyond the law and see if the ideology upon which the law is based is actually reflected in the practices of the various speech communities of the nation-state.

In addition to this three-way distinction for analyzing language policy, Spolsky asserts that three other assumptions are also necessary. First, language policy is not only concerned with named varieties. As illustrated in the example of India, the naming of varieties is in itself sometimes politically motivated (e.g. which variety in a dialect chain gets afforded official status as the standard?) Furthermore, other varieties may have unofficial implications in their use. In the US, decisions made regarding the use of AAVE in the schools are within the realm of language policy whether they are made on an ad hoc basis by individual instructors, as in some areas, or governed by local administrative policy in others. Second, language policy must be understood as operating within a speech community. Ideologies relevant to the same variety of a given language will differ depending on the speech community where it is being used. Third, language policy must be understood as functioning within a complex ecological relationship between linguistic and non-linguistic factors. Often the non-linguistic factors include access to resources; as such, language policy often serves as a surrogate political issue for other ideological agendas.

Chapter 1 gives an overview of these three factors--management, practice and ideology--followed by multiple examples in Chapters 2 and 3. The examples are loosely organized around themes in the regulation of language, such as 'Driving out the Bad' (Chapter 2), and 'Pursuing the Good and Dealing with the New' (Chapter 3). Spolsky's theory of

language policy is laid out in Chapter Four, 'The Nature of Language Policy and its Domains.'

The remainder of the book discusses language policy as it applies to the modern nation-state. Chapters 5 through 10 focus on monolingual polities. Chapter 5 focuses specifically on France and Iceland. Then, in Chapter 6, Spolsky moves on to discuss the current spread of English around the globe, including the implications for any nation-state with an explicit monolingual policy and various reactions to this spread. Chapter 7 discusses the problems of analyzing US language policy. Here, the major points touch on the fact that education policy is set at the state rather than federal level, the hegemony of English as a national although not official language, and the fact that language policy issues are generally approached as civil rights issues under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act. Chapter 8 discusses the various approaches to language rights that have been taken over the centuries in Western societies. Chapter 9 discusses post-colonial countries and the relationship between minority language users and the official and national languages of the countries - the official languages generally being the languages of the colonizers. Chapter 10 discusses monolingual polities with recognized linguistic minority groups.

Chapter 11 begins a discussion of multilingual polities and the problems faced by policy analysts and implementers who hope to partition the linguistic space. Chapter 12 discusses attempts to resist language shift in the context of preserving indigenous languages as well as returning to the discussion of maintaining the standard brought up in Chapter 3. Spolsky wraps up with a review of the model in Chapter 13.

Spolsky's *Language Policy* contains a profusion of data from a broad spectrum of times and places. Every point about policy is discussed in terms of examples. While such thoroughness is commendable and extremely useful for those doing in-depth analysis of policy issues, at times it makes it difficult for the reader to remain focused on the thread of his arguments. With so many examples being offered and the overlapping nature of the different aspects of language policy being discussed, a clearer organizational scheme would have been helpful. This book was used as the textbook for an undergraduate course on world language policies. While the number and variety of examples certainly did much to bring the topic to life, they sometimes obscured the very model which was being put forward to clarify the issues. If the book were more clearly organized along the lines of the model it contains, it would better serve as a course text. There was also one notable absence in the book. Very little was said about language policy in Israel, which is very surprising given Israel's uniquely successful policy of revitalizing Hebrew and Spolsky's own long-standing contributions to the study of that policy. That being said, the book remains an outstanding reference work for anyone wishing to become better informed on language policy issues. The model put forward by Spolsky is likely to serve as a basis for much future research on the subject and the many case studies cited are a testament to the multi-faceted nature of the issues involved in dissecting language policy.

Michael F. Thomas
University of Colorado
Department of Linguistics