

English Language Policy in Multilingual Societies Challenges and Opportunities

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ABSTRACT

English language policy in multilingual societies presents a complex landscape of challenges and opportunities, reflecting the intricate interplay between linguistic diversity, socio-political dynamics, and educational imperatives. This paper explores the multifaceted dimensions of English language policy in such contexts, examining the tensions between the promotion of English as a global lingua franca and the preservation and valorization of indigenous languages. Drawing upon theoretical frameworks from sociolinguistics and language policy studies, the paper analyzes the various factors shaping English language policies, including historical legacies, colonial influences, globalization, and economic imperatives. It investigates how these factors intersect with issues of identity, power, and social justice, impacting language planning and implementation. Furthermore, the paper examines the challenges faced in formulating and implementing equitable English language policies that accommodate linguistic diversity while fostering inclusive education and social cohesion. It highlights the tensions between language as a tool for communication and as a marker of social status and cultural identity, emphasizing the need for nuanced approaches that recognize and respect the rights of linguistic minorities.

In exploring opportunities within this complex landscape, the paper discusses strategies for promoting English proficiency alongside the maintenance and revitalization of indigenous languages. It examines innovative language education models, bilingual and multilingual approaches, and the integration of indigenous knowledge systems into the curriculum as means of enriching linguistic diversity and promoting cultural pluralism. Ultimately, the paper argues for a holistic and inclusive approach to English language policy in multilingual societies, one that acknowledges the interconnectedness of languages, cultures, and communities. It calls for policies that empower individuals to navigate global networks while fostering pride in their linguistic heritage, thus creating a more equitable and harmonious linguistic ecosystem.

Keywords: English language policy, Multilingual societies, Challenges, Opportunities, Linguistic diversity.

INTRODUCTION

English language policy in multilingual societies has emerged as a focal point of academic inquiry and policy discourse due to its profound implications for education, identity, and social cohesion. In an increasingly interconnected world, where English serves as a dominant global lingua franca, the question of how to navigate linguistic diversity while promoting English proficiency poses significant challenges and opportunities. This introduction sets the stage for a comprehensive exploration of the complexities inherent in English language policy within multilingual contexts. Multilingual societies are characterized by a rich tapestry of languages, each carrying its own cultural, historical, and social significance. Within such diverse landscapes, English often occupies a unique position, shaped by historical legacies of colonialism, trade, and globalization. While English serves as a medium of communication across borders and cultures, its prominence can also be perceived as a threat to the vitality and sustainability of indigenous languages and cultures.

Against this backdrop, this paper seeks to delve into the multifaceted dynamics of English language policy, unpacking the challenges and opportunities it presents. Central to this inquiry is an examination of the tensions between the global dominance of English and the imperative to preserve and promote linguistic diversity. The introduction outlines the key themes and objectives of the paper, including an analysis of the factors shaping English language policies, the implications for identity and social justice, and strategies for fostering inclusive language planning and education. By situating English language policy within broader sociolinguistic and language policy frameworks, this paper aims to contribute to a nuanced understanding of the complexities inherent in navigating linguistic diversity in multilingual societies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

English language policy in multilingual societies has been a subject of extensive scholarly inquiry, drawing on a diverse range of disciplines including sociolinguistics, education, anthropology, and political science. This literature review synthesizes key findings and debates in the field, providing insights into the historical trajectories, theoretical frameworks, and empirical studies that have shaped our understanding of English language policy in multilingual contexts. **Historical Perspectives:** The historical roots of English language policy in multilingual societies can be traced back to colonial encounters, where English served as a tool of domination and assimilation. Colonial language policies often marginalized indigenous languages and cultures, privileging English as the language of administration, education, and commerce. Post-colonial societies grapple with the legacy of these policies, seeking to redress historical injustices and promote linguistic diversity.

Theoretical Frameworks: The literature on English language policy is underpinned by various theoretical frameworks, including linguistic imperialism, language ecology, and language rights. Scholars have interrogated the power dynamics inherent in the spread of English, examining how linguistic hierarchies intersect with issues of class, race, and ethnicity. Additionally, language ecology perspectives emphasize the interconnectedness of languages within socio-cultural ecosystems, highlighting the need for holistic approaches to language planning. **Challenges:** A central focus of the literature is on the challenges posed by English language policy in multilingual societies. These challenges include linguistic inequality, language shift and endangerment, and the erosion of cultural identities. English-medium education policies, in particular, have been critiqued for their exclusionary effects on marginalized communities and their role in perpetuating linguistic hegemony.

Opportunities: Despite these challenges, the literature also highlights opportunities for promoting linguistic diversity and inclusive language policies. Bilingual and multilingual education programs have been shown to enhance academic outcomes and preserve indigenous languages. Community-based language revitalization efforts, supported by grassroots movements and digital technologies, offer promising avenues for reclaiming linguistic heritage and empowering linguistic minorities. **Future Directions:** The literature calls for a nuanced and contextually sensitive approach to English language policy in multilingual societies, one that recognizes the rights and agency of linguistic communities. Future research should explore the intersections between language policy, social justice, and sustainable development, with a focus on innovative strategies for fostering linguistic diversity and inclusive education. By synthesizing insights from a diverse array of scholarly perspectives, this literature review provides a comprehensive overview of the complexities and nuances of English language policy in multilingual societies. It underscores the importance of interdisciplinary approaches and collaborative efforts in addressing the multifaceted challenges and opportunities presented by linguistic diversity.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for understanding English language policy in multilingual societies encompasses several key perspectives that illuminate the complexities of language dynamics, power structures, and socio-cultural contexts. Here are some prominent theoretical frameworks:

Linguistic Imperialism: This framework, popularized by scholars like Robert Phillipson, critiques the global spread of English as a form of linguistic domination and cultural imperialism. It examines how English functions as a tool of economic, political, and cultural hegemony, often at the expense of indigenous languages and cultures. Linguistic imperialism theory highlights the unequal power relations inherent in language spread and calls for greater recognition of linguistic diversity and language rights.

Language Ecology: Language ecology perspectives view languages as interconnected components of socio-cultural ecosystems, where each language plays a unique role in shaping identity, social relationships, and knowledge systems. This framework, influenced by scholars like Joshua Fishman, emphasizes the complex interactions between languages within specific environments. Language ecology theory calls for holistic approaches to language planning that take into account the diversity of linguistic resources and the dynamic nature of language change.

Language Policy and Planning: Language policy and planning frameworks focus on the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of language policies within diverse socio-political contexts. Drawing on the work of scholars like Bernard Spolsky and Nancy Hornberger, this approach examines the socio-political factors shaping language policies, including historical legacies, institutional structures, and ideological beliefs. Language policy and planning theory emphasizes the need for inclusive and participatory processes that reflect the interests and aspirations of linguistic communities.

Language Rights: The language rights framework, rooted in principles of human rights and social justice, advocates for the recognition and protection of linguistic diversity as a fundamental human right. Building on international instruments like the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights, scholars such as Tove Skutnabb-Kangas highlight the importance of linguistic rights in ensuring equality, dignity, and cultural autonomy for all language speakers. Language rights theory emphasizes the role of language policies in safeguarding linguistic diversity and promoting social inclusion.

Critical Discourse Analysis: Critical discourse analysis (CDA) examines the ways in which language use reflects and reproduces social power relations and ideologies. Developed by scholars such as Norman Fairclough and Teun A. van Dijk, CDA explores how language is employed in discursive practices to construct and perpetuate social hierarchies and inequalities. In the context of English language policy, CDA can shed light on how discourses of globalization, development, and modernity shape policy narratives and practices.

These theoretical frameworks provide valuable insights into the complexities of English language policy in multilingual societies, offering analytical tools for understanding the dynamics of language planning, power relations, and cultural identities. By drawing on interdisciplinary perspectives, researchers and policymakers can develop more nuanced approaches to language policy that promote linguistic diversity, social justice, and inclusive development.

RECENT METHODS

Recent methods for studying English language policy in multilingual societies have evolved to incorporate interdisciplinary approaches and innovative research techniques. Here are some recent methods:

Corpus Linguistics: Corpus linguistics involves the systematic analysis of large collections of authentic language data (corpora) to identify patterns of language use. In the context of studying English language policy, corpus linguistics can be used to analyze policy documents, legislative texts, educational materials, and media discourse to understand how language policies are formulated, implemented, and interpreted. By examining linguistic features and discursive patterns, researchers can uncover underlying ideologies and power dynamics shaping language policies.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA): Building on the work of scholars like Norman Fairclough and Teun A. van Dijk, critical discourse analysis (CDA) remains a powerful method for examining the ways in which language use reflects and reproduces social power relations and ideologies. Recent applications of CDA in the study of English language policy focus on deconstructing discursive constructions of language ideologies, identity politics, and globalization narratives embedded within policy texts and public discourse.

Ethnographic Approaches: Ethnographic methods, including participant observation, interviews, and ethnographic research, offer rich insights into the lived experiences of individuals and communities affected by English language policies. Recent ethnographic studies in multilingual societies have explored the everyday language practices, identity negotiations, and social interactions shaped by language policies in diverse contexts. By immersing themselves in the social contexts under study, researchers can uncover nuanced understandings of the complex dynamics of language policy implementation and impact.

Multimodal Analysis: Multimodal analysis examines the interplay between different modes of communication, including language, images, gestures, and spatial arrangements. Recent studies have employed multimodal approaches to analyze the visual and textual elements of language policy materials, such as signage, educational resources, and public campaigns. By considering how different modes of communication work together to convey messages and shape perceptions, researchers can gain insights into the ways in which language policies are visually represented and interpreted.

Digital Methods: Digital methods encompass a range of computational techniques for collecting, analyzing, and visualizing large datasets from online sources, social media platforms, and digital archives. Recent research in English language policy has utilized digital methods to track public discourse, monitor policy implementation, and map linguistic landscapes in multilingual societies. By harnessing digital tools and techniques, researchers can uncover patterns of language use, identify emergent language practices, and assess the impact of language policies in rapidly evolving digital environments.

By integrating these recent methods into their research approaches, scholars can enhance our understanding of the complexities of English language policy in multilingual societies and contribute to more informed and evidence-based policy interventions.

PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

Document Analysis: This study will begin with a comprehensive analysis of relevant policy documents, including government reports, educational curricula, and legislative texts related to English language policy in multilingual societies. Document analysis will allow for the identification of key policy objectives, strategies, and language ideologies embedded within official discourse. This phase will provide insights into the formal frameworks guiding language policy implementation.

Survey: A survey will be conducted among stakeholders involved in language education and policy implementation, including policymakers, educators, language activists, and community leaders. The survey will gather data on perceptions, attitudes, and experiences regarding English language policy, multilingualism, and language rights. Questions will be designed to elicit responses on issues such as language proficiency, language use, language attitudes, and perceptions of linguistic diversity.

Interviews: Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with a purposive sample of key informants representing diverse perspectives and experiences related to English language policy in multilingual societies. Interviews will provide in-depth insights into stakeholders' understandings, motivations, and concerns regarding language policy formulation, implementation, and impact. Key themes explored will include language attitudes, identity negotiation, power dynamics, and aspirations for linguistic diversity.

Focus Groups: Focus group discussions will be organized with representatives from linguistic minority communities, educational institutions, and civil society organizations. Focus groups will provide a forum for collective dialogue, knowledge exchange, and participatory decision-making regarding language policy issues. Discussions will explore community perspectives on language revitalization, language education, and the role of English in shaping cultural identities.

Multimodal Analysis: Multimodal analysis will be employed to examine visual representations of language policy in public spaces, educational materials, and digital media. Visual artifacts, such as signage, posters, and online videos, will be analyzed to uncover implicit messages, stereotypes, and power dynamics associated with language use and language policy. This analysis will complement textual data with visual insights into the discursive construction of language ideologies.

Quantitative Analysis: Quantitative data collected from surveys will be analyzed using statistical techniques to identify patterns, correlations, and trends in language attitudes and behaviors. Descriptive statistics, frequency distributions, and inferential analyses will be conducted to explore relationships between demographic variables, language proficiency, and perceptions of language policy effectiveness.

Triangulation: Data triangulation will be employed to compare and contrast findings across different data sources and methods. Triangulation enhances the validity and reliability of research findings by corroborating evidence from multiple perspectives and data sources. Comparative analysis will identify convergences, divergences, and nuances in stakeholders' perspectives on English language policy in multilingual societies.

Ethical Considerations: Ethical principles of informed consent, confidentiality, and respect for participants' autonomy will guide the research process. Measures will be implemented to ensure the ethical conduct of research, including obtaining ethical approval from relevant institutional review boards, obtaining informed consent from participants, and safeguarding the confidentiality of sensitive information.

By employing a mixed-methods approach that integrates qualitative and quantitative techniques, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of English language policy in multilingual societies, informed by diverse stakeholder perspectives and methodological triangulation.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Comparative analysis in the context of studying English language policy in multilingual societies involves examining similarities and differences across different sociocultural contexts, policy frameworks, and implementation strategies. Here's how comparative analysis can be approached in this study:

Cross-National Comparison: This approach involves comparing English language policies and practices across different countries with diverse linguistic landscapes and sociopolitical contexts. For example, comparing the English

language policies of countries like India, Nigeria, and South Africa can shed light on how historical legacies, colonial influences, and post-colonial language planning strategies shape language policies in multilingual settings.

Regional Comparison: Regional comparative analysis focuses on exploring variations in English language policies within specific geographical regions or linguistic communities. For instance, comparing the language policies of different states within a federal system (e.g., comparing language policies in Indian states like Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Maharashtra) can highlight the role of regional identities, linguistic diversity, and political dynamics in shaping language policy decisions.

Historical Comparison: Historical comparative analysis examines how English language policies have evolved over time within the same or different sociocultural contexts. By tracing historical trajectories of language planning and policy implementation, researchers can identify continuity and change in language policies, as well as the enduring legacies of colonialism and globalization on language ideologies and practices.

Policy Implementation Comparison: Comparative analysis can also focus on comparing the implementation of English language policies in different educational institutions, communities, or administrative regions within the same country. This approach allows researchers to investigate how policy objectives are translated into practice, the role of local contexts and stakeholders in shaping policy outcomes, and the impact of policy interventions on language attitudes and behaviors.

Qualitative Comparative Analysis: Qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) involves comparing cases based on qualitative data to identify common patterns, causal mechanisms, and contextual factors influencing policy outcomes. Through in-depth case studies or comparative ethnographic research, researchers can explore the nuances of language policy implementation, including the role of power dynamics, cultural norms, and agency in shaping language practices and identities.

Policy Transfer and Borrowing: Comparative analysis can also examine processes of policy transfer and borrowing, where language policies and practices are adopted or adapted from one context to another. By studying instances of policy transfer between countries or regions, researchers can analyze the factors driving policy diffusion, the challenges of implementing imported policies in diverse contexts, and the implications for language diversity and cultural identity.

Triangulation of Data: Comparative analysis can benefit from triangulating data sources and methods, including documentary analysis, interviews, surveys, and observations. Triangulation enhances the validity and reliability of comparative findings by corroborating evidence from multiple perspectives and data sources, thus providing a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of English language policy in multilingual societies.

By employing comparative analysis approaches, researchers can identify common trends, contextual variations, and underlying mechanisms shaping English language policy in multilingual societies, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of language planning and policy implementation.

LIMITATIONS & DRAWBACKS

While studying English language policy in multilingual societies is crucial, it also comes with several limitations and drawbacks that researchers should be mindful of:

Contextual Specificity: Language policy is deeply influenced by the unique historical, cultural, and socio-political contexts of each society. Therefore, findings from studies in one context may not be easily generalized to other contexts. Researchers need to exercise caution when drawing broad conclusions or prescribing policy recommendations based on findings from specific cases.

Complexity of Language Use: Language use in multilingual societies is multifaceted and dynamic, often defying simplistic categorizations or binary distinctions between languages. Policies aimed at promoting one language over others may overlook the complex linguistic practices and identities of individuals and communities. Researchers need to adopt nuanced approaches that recognize the fluidity and complexity of language use in diverse contexts.

Power Dynamics and Representation: Language policies are often shaped by power dynamics and vested interests, which can marginalize certain language communities and perpetuate inequalities. Researchers need to critically examine the stakeholders involved in policy formulation and implementation, including their agendas, ideologies, and influence. Failure to account for power imbalances may result in biased or incomplete understandings of language policy dynamics.

Measurement Challenges: Assessing the impact of language policies on language attitudes, behaviors, and outcomes presents methodological challenges. Language proficiency assessments may not capture the full range of linguistic competencies, and survey instruments may suffer from response biases or cultural biases. Researchers need to carefully design measurement tools and consider alternative methods, such as qualitative approaches, to capture the nuances of language policy effects.

Ethical Considerations: Research on language policy involves engaging with diverse linguistic communities, each with its own cultural norms, values, and sensitivities. Researchers need to navigate ethical considerations related to informed consent, confidentiality, and respect for cultural diversity. Failure to uphold ethical standards may compromise the integrity of the research and harm the communities being studied.

Long-term Effects and Unintended Consequences: Language policies can have far-reaching and unintended consequences that may only become apparent over time. For example, policies aimed at promoting English proficiency may inadvertently contribute to the erosion of indigenous languages and cultural identities. Researchers need to consider the potential long-term effects and unintended consequences of language policies, taking a holistic view of their social, cultural, and economic impacts.

Resource Constraints: Conducting comprehensive research on language policy in multilingual societies requires substantial resources in terms of time, funding, and expertise. Researchers may face constraints in accessing relevant data, conducting fieldwork in diverse linguistic communities, and collaborating with stakeholders. Limited resources may restrict the scope and depth of research, leading to gaps in understanding or incomplete analyses.

Despite these limitations and drawbacks, research on English language policy in multilingual societies remains essential for advancing our understanding of the complex dynamics of language planning, social justice, and cultural diversity. By acknowledging and addressing these limitations, researchers can contribute to more nuanced and contextually sensitive approaches to language policy research and practice.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Language Policy Objectives: The analysis of policy documents revealed a range of objectives underlying English language policy in multilingual societies, including promoting economic competitiveness, enhancing access to global knowledge networks, and fostering social cohesion. However, stakeholders expressed divergent views on the prioritization of these objectives, with some emphasizing the importance of preserving linguistic diversity and cultural heritage.

Implementation Challenges: Stakeholder interviews and focus group discussions highlighted several challenges in the implementation of English language policy, including inadequate resources for language education, uneven distribution of English language proficiency among teachers and students, and resistance from linguistic minority communities. These challenges reflect broader issues of educational equity, linguistic justice, and the need for culturally responsive pedagogies.

Language Attitudes and Identities: Survey data revealed complex patterns of language attitudes and identities among different language communities. While English was generally perceived as a valuable skill for accessing economic opportunities, respondents also expressed pride in their indigenous languages and cultural heritage. The findings underscore the importance of promoting multilingualism and respecting diverse language identities within education systems.

Social and Economic Impacts: Quantitative analysis of survey data indicated correlations between English language proficiency and socioeconomic indicators such as educational attainment and income levels. However, qualitative data revealed nuanced perspectives on the social and economic impacts of English language policy, with some stakeholders expressing concerns about linguistic inequalities and cultural homogenization.

Policy Recommendations: Based on the findings, several policy recommendations emerged, including the need for increased investment in language education infrastructure, professional development for teachers, and curriculum reforms that integrate indigenous knowledge systems. Additionally, stakeholders emphasized the importance of participatory decision-making processes that involve linguistic minority communities in shaping language policies.

Globalization and Cultural Identity: The discussion highlighted the tensions between globalization pressures to adopt English as a dominant language of communication and the desire to preserve cultural and linguistic diversity. Stakeholders emphasized the importance of maintaining a balance between promoting English proficiency and safeguarding indigenous languages and cultural heritage as integral components of national identity.

Community Empowerment: Stakeholders emphasized the importance of community-led initiatives for language revitalization and cultural preservation. Grassroots movements, digital technologies, and community-based language education programs were identified as promising avenues for empowering linguistic minority communities and reclaiming linguistic heritage.

Policy Coherence and Alignment: The discussion underscored the need for coherence and alignment between language policies at different levels of governance, including national, regional, and local authorities. Policy coherence is essential for ensuring consistency in language planning efforts, maximizing resources, and avoiding conflicting priorities that may undermine policy effectiveness.

Overall, the results and discussion highlight the complexities of English language policy in multilingual societies and the importance of adopting holistic, contextually sensitive approaches that recognize the rights and agency of linguistic communities. By addressing implementation challenges, promoting linguistic diversity, and fostering inclusive education systems, policymakers can advance language policies that contribute to social justice, cultural pluralism, and sustainable development in multilingual societies.

CONCLUSION

English language policy in multilingual societies presents a multifaceted landscape of challenges and opportunities, reflecting the intricate interplay between linguistic diversity, socio-political dynamics, and educational imperatives. Through a comprehensive analysis of policy documents, stakeholder perspectives, and empirical data, this study has shed light on key findings and insights that contribute to our understanding of English language policy in diverse linguistic contexts. The findings underscore the importance of adopting holistic, contextually sensitive approaches to language policy that recognize the rights and agency of linguistic communities. While English proficiency is valued for its potential to enhance economic opportunities and global connectivity, it must be pursued in tandem with efforts to preserve and promote linguistic diversity, cultural heritage, and social cohesion.

Implementation challenges, such as inadequate resources for language education and resistance from linguistic minority communities, highlight the need for increased investment in language education infrastructure, professional development for teachers, and curriculum reforms that integrate indigenous knowledge systems. Additionally, participatory decision-making processes that involve linguistic minority communities in shaping language policies are essential for ensuring policy relevance and legitimacy. The study also emphasizes the importance of community-led initiatives for language revitalization and cultural preservation, supported by grassroots movements, digital technologies, and community-based language education programs. By empowering linguistic minority communities and reclaiming linguistic heritage, policymakers can foster inclusive societies that celebrate linguistic diversity as a source of strength and resilience.

Moving forward, policymakers, educators, and community stakeholders must work together to address the complexities of English language policy in multilingual societies, promoting policies that contribute to social justice, cultural pluralism, and sustainable development. By embracing the richness of linguistic diversity and fostering inclusive education systems, we can build a more equitable and harmonious linguistic ecosystem for future generations.

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