Chapter 2.
Trajectories of Language Policies Appropriation in a Municipality of Cundinamarca

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Abstract

In the implementation process of language policies, we find a long path where agents from the macro, meso, and micro levels determine their experiences, therefore, helping or obstructing the process. These situations respond to a set of colonial mechanisms of globalization and whiteness where language policies are framed. Macro-level agents impose policies for economic reasons, forgetting the meso and micro-level agents' participation. This causes language policies to lack context and to have a strong foreign dependency, thereby neglecting other languages and local knowledges. Hence, teachers become invisible and participate in the process as technicians or even booksellers. In a municipality where most people belong to low social-economic strata, questions arise about the ways in which language policies have been appropriated by different actors of the educational system (teachers, students, publishers, parents, coordinators, principals, and administrative officers) and the ways they trace their trajectories through time.

Keywords: language policies, stakeholders, levels in language policies, implementation processes.

Roots of the Research

I am a Doctoral student at the Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas in Bogotá (Colombia). I also hold a Master's degree in Communication-Education from the same university and a Bachelor's degree in Spanish and Foreign

Languages from the Universidad Pedagógica Nacional (Colombia). I had the opportunity to conduct studies in Proficiency of English at Aptech Institute in New Delhi (India) and Leeds University (United Kingdom), and I also studied French at Sorbonne Université (France) and Val-de-Marne University in Paris, and Bilingualism at Université Sorbonne Nouvelle. I worked at Universidad Pedagógica Nacional as a French teacher for the pre-service teachers' program and as a language teacher (English and French) at Universidad La Gran Colombia and Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas.

I have taught in four public schools: one in Wakefield (England), where I worked a Spanish assistant for a year, and in three schools in Cundinamarca (Colombia) that belong to the municipality of Soacha´s Education Office (Secretaría de Educación), where I have worked as an English teacher for fifteen years. My profession, my working experience, the experience of living abroad, and the context where I live and work nowadays lead me to ask myself about how language policies have been accepted and appropriated by different stakeholders of the educational system and how they can help trace a path of English teaching in a municipality of Cundinamarca.

To start tracing those trajectories, it is necessary to understand that language policies have been designed and implemented over time in different countries to intensify economic relations or to reinforce power practices through the use of colonial procedures. However, with time, language policies have gained importance around the world from the moment UNESCO started to refer as "multilingual" to a person who uses his mother language (the national language) and, at least, one foreign language. Bearing in mind this, UNESCO asks governments "to identify the main lines of a language education system that adapts to the country, but also facilitates international communication and also preserves the inalienable linguistic and cultural legacy of all people to humanity"[5] (cited in Reyes *et al*., 2011, p. 173). Similarly, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) believes that "because English is the most used language in economic transactions, it is a factor of competitiveness that can be decisive for starting businesses"[6] (cited in Reyes *et al*., 2011, p.173). OCDE also recognizes that "a *lingua franca* increases cooperation and economic co-dependence, but cautions that this should not be done by undermining cultural and linguistic

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5 "[…] identificar las líneas principales de un sistema de Educación en lenguas que se adapte al país pero que también facilite la comunicación internacional y preserve igualmente el inalienable legado lingüístico y cultural de cada pueblo a la humanidad" (translated by the author).

6 "[…] estima que por ser el inglés la lengua más usada en las transacciones económicas es un factor de competitividad que puede ser determinante para iniciar negocios" (translated by the author).

diversity"[7] (cited in Reyes *et al.*, 2011, p.174). On the other hand, though the European Council supports "plurilingualism", they do not agree with the idea that students should obtain a native proficiency in a foreign language because they believe it is not necessary, since the idea is that a person may be able communicate clearly in different languages. In this way, governments can intensify student mobility in Europe through social and economic collaboration, and can also avoid prejudices and discrimination (cited in Reyes *et al.*, 2011, p. 174).

The international language policies promoted by international institutions such as UNESCO, OCDE and the European Council motivated the race between countries around the world to start the arduous work of creating their own language policies to become globally recognized. The macro structure is activated through institutions like the IDB (Interamerican Development Bank), the IMF (International Monetary Fund), and the OEI (Organization of Ibero American States). This is the reason many studies affirm that educational and language policies respond to economic interests. Shohamy (2009), for example, explains that "they [linguistic policies] are driven by wishes and aspirations, by political and economic aspirations" (p. 47). In the Colombian context, Guerrero & Quintero (2016) state that "Colombian educational policies do not seek in any way to benefit teachers and students, but to advance economic agendas, improve the country´s competitiveness and its location in the global market"[8] (p.14).

We cannot forget that language policies are power practices where policy makers impose their beliefs and their ideologies, reinforcing political and individual control. As Shohamy says, "It is clear by now that LP is not neutral as it represents a significant tool for political power and manipulations" (2009, p. 21). In fact, language policies incorporate ideology, ecology, and management (Spolky, 2004, cited in Shohamy, 2009), and some policy mechanisms exist "which refer to tools that serve as mediators between ideology and practice and create *de facto* policies" (Shohamy, 2009, p. 11). Examples of those mechanisms are laws, rules, regulations, language education policies, language tests, and the absence of teachers; all of them intensify the colonial mechanism that supports globalization.

Many studies from countries around the world coincide with the idea that teachers are not included in language policy planning processes, even if they, in

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7   "[…] reconoce que una lengua franca incrementa la cooperación y co-dependencia económica, pero advierte que esto no debe llevarse a cabo menoscabando la diversidad cultural y lingüística" (translated by the author).

8   "Las políticas educativas colombianas no buscan de ninguna manera beneficiar a docentes y estudiantes, sino avanzar en agendas económicas, mejorar la competitividad del país y su ubicación en el mercado global" (translated by the author).

the end, are the ones who are in charge of their implementation (Shohamy, 2009, p. 55). The teachers' expertise and their academic and pedagogical knowledge are underevalued, as Guerrero & Quintero (2016) believe:

> In the first, about invisible teachers, it is shown how, even though Colombian teachers are professionals who graduated from a university, they are not seen as such by policy makers. Despite the fact that teachers are summoned by government agencies to inform them about the actions taken, they are not consulted about the feasibility, necessity, content, etc., of a new policy, their expertise and knowledge are not considered for such purpose[9] (p. 37)

Bearing in mind that teachers are kept aside from language policy planning, they end up becoming 'technicians' and clerks who follow rules and standards. Their local knowledge is devaluated and neglected; consequently, teachers become invisible (Guerrero-Nieto, 2010).

Furthermore, language education policies do not consider the context where they will be applied. For instance, countries like China, Japan, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Taiwan, as well as the regions of Hong Kong and Korea, implemented language policies without noticing that most of the teachers lacked the proficiency in the foreign language or even the pedagogical knowledge to teach it: "Teacher education and the English language skills of teachers in public-sector institutions are inadequate" (Nunan, 2003, p. 606). Policy makers do not pay attention to the students' reality in terms of resources and cultural, language, or geographical diversity, thereby fostering inequality between them: "Considerable inequity exists in terms of access to effective English language instruction. In China, for instance, this manifests itself in the haves versus the have-nots and city versus rural divides" (Nunan, 2003, p. 605). The same situation happens in Brazil: "Despite the fact that policies have been transformed theoretically and discursively, in practice the teacher continues to have only a 'board, saliva, and chalk' to implement these changes"[10] (Pagliarini & Assis-Peterson, 2008, cited in Montoya, 2013).

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9   "En la primera, de los maestros invisibilizados, se muestra cómo, a pesar de que los maestros colombianos son profesionales que se gradúan de una universidad, no son vistos como tales por los formuladores de políticas. A pesar de que los maestros son convocados por los organismos gubernamentales para informarles sobre las acciones tomadas, estos no son consultados sobre la viabilidad, necesidad, contenidos, etc., de una nueva política, y mucho menos son considerados su experticia y conocimiento para tal propósito" (translated by the author).

10   "[…] a pesar de que las políticas se han transformado teórica y discursivamente, en la práctica el profesor sigue contando únicamente con "tablero, saliva y tiza" para implementar esos cambios" (translated by the author).

Unfortunately, language policies come from other countries. Europe, for example, has the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which includes a description of competence levels. This framework is applied in Colombia in curriculum learning material, methodology, tests, and standards, but it is key to bear in mind that it was created in a different context, whereas in Colombia "Teachers must deal with juvenile crimes, gangs, members of guerrilla and paramilitary groups, drug dealers, young parents, displaced children, mentally challenged children, and others like this"[11] (Guerrero & Quintero, 2016, p. 55).

Under the excuse that teachers lack a high level of English and that there is a need to obtain better results with language policies, governments decide to implement native-speakerism as a strategy to implement foreign language teaching, which perpetuates foreign dependency and the colonial mechanism of whiteness as a control system, drives social classism, and affects local identity. For instance, in the Asia-Pacific Region, governments think that "Investment in elementary foreign language education may well be worth it, but only if the teachers are native or native-like speakers and well trained in the needs of younger learners" (Marinova-Todd *et al.*, 2000, cited in Nunan, 2003, p. 607).

This situation is also lived in Latin American countries like Chile, Ecuador, Mexico, and Colombia, where the idea of bringing native speakers to the country carries with it the idea of the superiority of the English language, fostering an "imperialist" model through imported teachers' training, methodologies, textbooks, material, and certifications, which, in the end, become a lucrative business for educational institutions with global reach like the British Council (Le Gal, 2018). For example, in Colombia, "the Colombian Ministry of Education declared that having native speakers of English as teachers in public education 'will be vital to achieve President Santos's target of making Colombia the most educated country in the region in 2015" (El Tiempo, January 20th 2015, in González & Llurda, 2017, p. 98). Likewise, in Mexico, "If it is necessary to bring teachers from other places to substitute them, even from countries with better educational levels, there should be no doubts" (El Universal, April 17th 2013, in González & Llurda, 2017, p. 98).

Until now we have been discussing the macro-level, which includes the role played by international organizations, government and education offices, as well the micro-level, which include the teachers and their daily struggles. However, these are not the only agents involved in the implementation of linguistic

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11 "[…] los profesores deben hacer frente a crímenes juveniles, pandillas, miembros de grupos guerrilleros y paramilitares, distribuidores de drogas, jóvenes padres, niños desplazados, niños con problemas mentales y otros por el estilo" (translated by the author).

policies. In fact, we can also find parents and students in the micro-level, and coordinators, principals, and administrative officers in the meso-level. Despite the research tendencies described above, little is known about the "other" agents involved in language policy and their roles. This issue will be addressed in the next section.

Tracing Trajectories in a Municipality of Cundinamarca

The situations described above are lived in a municipality of Cundinamarca (Colombia), where the present research took place. This municipality has undergone dramatic changes during the last 30 years in terms of social, economic, cultural, urban, and educational development due to varied reasons: the amount of people who arrive daily from other Colombian cities or even from other neighbor countries like Venezuela and Ecuador, the low levels of economic resources received by the central government, and the widespread culture of corruption in both the public and private sectors.

The municipality´s Education Office (Secretaría de Educación) oversees 23 public schools distributed in the urban area, of which only one is in the rural area. Throughout the years, educational and language policies have been applied in the municipality in accordance with national requirements, but sadly the results have not always been adequate due to various aspects.

As is the case of the country, language policies in the municipality have been applied according to Kaplan's top-down model. In this model, language policies are created by the Government and the Ministry of Education at the macro-level, which are later interpreted and implemented by the local Education offices, principals, and coordinators at the meso-level, and, finally, implemented and appropriated by school teachers, students, and parents. During this process, many failures occur which are probably invisible in current literature on the historicity of English Language Teaching. Therefore, I will analyze the information that I found on language policies and the situations lived by the municipality in its process of language policy appropriation.

In the first place, language policies have a lack of continuity in Colombia. In fact, there is no visible difference between the National Bilingualism Program (NBP), the Colombia Very Well program (CVW) and the Colombia Bilingue program (CB): "There are no clear distinctions between the NBP, CVW, and CB either" (Bonilla & Tejada, 2016, p. 11). Apparently, some years ago the municipality started a process whose attention was focused on English teaching: teachers received training and took exams without a clear view about the programs and their objectives. In fact, some teachers state that many programs and activities were started, but they did not finish them or were cancelled. It seems that those

activities and programs were improvised or were only a set of tasks to be accomplished by administrative officers of the Education Office. In a general review of language policies in Colombia we found that "the constant changes have affected the continuity, consistency, and articulation of the strategies, resulting in a slow work pace and a feeling of low-achievement and frustration" (Gómez, 2017, p. 148). Unfortunately, the documents supporting such programs and activities in the municipality are not known by teachers, which means there is a lack of administrative information on the subject.

With the start of an active English teaching field in the country, all stakeholders who take part in language policy implementation (macro, meso, and micro levels) started to talk about bilingualism without knowing exactly what it meant. In the municipality, the term "bilingualism" came to mean the "intensification of English teaching" rather than having the skills to talk in two different languages and to use both correctly in different places and situations; teachers were, for example, asked to create a bilingual project to celebrate an English Day in which the English language was imposed and took a privileged position over other languages or topics. In fact, today most people in Colombia associate the term "bilingualism" with the use of English only in the classroom (Gómez, 2017, p. 149; Le Gal, 2018).

With the bilingualism project, teachers were asked to implement the curriculum based on documents like the Basic Standards of Competences in Foreign Languages, the Learning Basic Rights on English, and the Common European Framework. However, research has found that these language policies are uncontextualized to the Colombian reality: "[…] language policies originate from policy makers whose decisions about policies are driven by ideologies, politics, economics, all important dimensions, but they lack a sense of reality" (Shohamy, 2009, p. 46). The same situation happens in different countries: "In Mexico, the same thing happens with respect to the teaching of English as with Indigenous languages, language policy is more symbolic than substantive"[12] (Terborg & García, 2006, cited in Reyes et al., 2012, p. 186). For instance, someone who wants to work as an English teacher in the Colombian municipality needs to be aware that school groups are composed by 45 or even 55 students who come from low or very low socio-economic strata and that their families, with low academic backgrounds, come from other Colombian cities after facing violence issues and displacement, making English the last thing that they want to learn.

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12   "En México, respecto de la enseñanza del inglés sucede lo mismo que con las lenguas indíge-
     nas, la política lingüística es más simbólica que sustantiva" (translated by the author).

Despite this, the municipality teachers try most of the time to find solutions and ways to resist language policies in a positive way. Teachers are creative, active agents who negotiate with external pressures and can enact policies in creative ways (Cruz, 2018). These teachers try to contextualize their pedagogical practices by creating new material and promoting activities that showcase their expertise and social sensitivity. Unfortunately, most of them fail to keep a written account of their experiences; if they do, the information stays with them and is not shared with other teachers, which causes teachers and their experiences to stay in the shadow. There is the case, for example, of a bilingual public-school program created by a math teacher. This experience was excellent because the students were able to obtain high levels of proficiency in English; regrettably, the program received no help from the administrative officers and the program was forced to finish. It would be significant to explore in the near future this invisible and local knowledge on English Language Teaching and give it the voice it deserves.

According to Cruz (2018), the Colombian rural sector has been historically neglected and has been characterzed by poor education, a deficient health system, economic marginalization, lack of work and study opportunities, lack of public funding, and government misrecognition. Therefore, policy makers have little awareness of the challenges faced by the rural context. In the municipality, language students and teachers feel they have been forgotten, which is why teachers work hard to adapt language policies creatively to their students´ learning processes.

Secondly, considering that different agents take part in language policy implementation, we must go from language policy analysis to agents' analysis. Whereas in the first section I discussed the macro-level agents, in this section I will refer to the meso-level and micro-level agents. It is important to emphasize that all agents are important and that all of them have distinct functions to guarantee the process´ success. Among the meso-level agents we find administrative officers, principals, and coordinators; sadly, there is little information in the available literature about their role in language policy implementation. These agents are in charge of managing the economic, social, and educational resources, as well as facilitating the communication process along the way to improve the implementation of language policies. However, it is important to recognize that

> […] part of the success of the PBB implementation depends not only on the decisions and actions of the SED and the managers, but also on the effort, interest, support and work of all members of the community in order to understand, assume and commit to the reasons and purposes that justify the

implementation of pilot projects of bilingualism or intensification of English[13] (Bermúdez *et al.*, 2014, p.158).

Sadly, this recommendation is difficult to implement because many times those agents have limited hope on the projects or assume that they are temporary. They may also lack the knowledge to conduct the implementation process, or even to propose the projects based on their personal interests (Bermúdez *et al.*, 2014). In the municipality it is difficult to determine how these agents are implementing the language policies and the ways these have been appropriated because, as of today, there is no information about those processes.

Thirdly and lastly, in the micro-level agents we can find teachers, parents, and students. Since I have already described the struggles faced by teachers in language policy implementation, I will expand the discussion to include students because they are, ultimately, the reason behind the English Language Teaching profession and, of course, language policies. As Montoya (2013) explains, "Policies and institutional planning end up influencing the attitudes that students express towards languages"[14] (Ndlangamandla, 2010, cited in Montoya, 2013, p. 244). This is why it is important to explore how language policies have impacted students' lives, because, in the end, they determine the students' attitudes towards their native language and the foreign languages they are learning. Unfortunately, once again, there is a lack of information on the impact of language policies in students' lives.

As for the parents´ participation, I believe it is essential to understand how they help in language policy implementation. They can shape the path through their attitudes and ideologies and, therefore, help students and teachers achieve their objectives in foreign language learning and teaching. Regrettably, the parents' role on language policy planning is non-existent, at least in Colombia; their participation is claimed by the teachers but, sadly, they lack the knowledge to take part in it (Flaborea *et al.*, 2013). Nowadays, it is difficult to identify parents' participation in the municipality and the way they have appropriated language policies due to a lack of information on the subject.

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13   "Es de vital importancia reconocer que parte del éxito de la implementación del PBB depende no sólo de las decisiones y acciones de la SED y de los directivos, sino también del esfuerzo, el interés, el apoyo y el trabajo de todos los miembros de la comunidad educativa por entender, asumir y comprometerse con las razones y los propósitos que justifican la implementación de proyectos piloto de bilingüismo o intensificación del inglés" (translated by the author).

14   "Las políticas y la planeación institucional terminan incidiendo en las actitudes que los estudiantes expresan hacia las lenguas" (translated by the author).

All these situations respond to the colonial mechanism of globalization and whiteness. Since English language is imposed for business matters around the world, it is seen as more important than the native language, and governments, in their quest to become globally recognized and improve the country´s economy, assign a higher importance to the English language and the imported teaching materials and methodologies, thereby neglecting local knowledge and language and forcing teachers to implement language policies without the proper context and needed resources; in short, fostering imperialism. Although UNESCO's objective is to facilitate international communication between countries without harming cultural and linguistic heritages, sadly countries are abandoning their local diversity to comply with foreign economical guidelines, which denies micro-level agents' participation and makes them invisible in the process.

Teachers in the municipality of Cundinamarca are forced to follow language policies to respond to economic agendas imposed by the Education Office without the required monetary resources, pedagogical and technological material, and teacher training. Unfortunately, this situation is present not only in the municipality, but in different cities and municipalities in the country. Few literature has been found on the experiences of stakeholders in language policy implementation in Colombia, the ways they are impacted by language policies, and the actions they have carried out in their implementation within a specific context.

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