From language policy ‘on paper’ to the design of bilingual pedagogy: drawing insights from the ethnography of literacy

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Outline of my talk

• The research field of language policy and planning: a brief genealogy

• New directions in language-in-education policy in Wales and the special case of bilingual vocational education

• Insights from an ESRC-funded research project in a Further Education college in North Wales
The field of language policy and planning (LPP)

1960s to present: three ‘moments’ in the study of language policy and planning.

1. Early research on language planning: the ‘rational’ approach
2. Critical approaches, including the historical-structural approach
3. The recent turn towards ethnography and discourse analysis
The early research on language planning 1960s-1980s

• Focus on language in nation-building in post-colonial contexts
• Multilingualism seen as a “problem that states have to solve” (Ricento & Hornberger, 1996)
• Choice of research methods guided by a positivist view of social science (e.g. attitude surveys)
• Primary reliance on quantitative data
Critical approaches: late 1980s to present

• Dominant strand: historical-structural approach (Tollefson, 1991)
• Major goals: (1.) “to examine the historical basis of policies” (1991: 32) and to show how policy decisions are tied to political & economic interests; (2.) to uncover the language ideologies underpinning policy decisions.
• Research focus on the formulation of language policy ‘on paper’ and policy-makers working at national or regional level
• Research methods: historical analysis, combined with analysis of policy documents, elite interviews etc.
Critical ethnographic approaches: unpeeling/slicing the policy ‘onion’ (mid-1990s)

- Emerging from linguistic anthropology (USA) (e.g. McCarty 2011), linguistic ethnography (Europe) & post-colonial literature on language policy.
- Acknowledging advances of critical approaches but arguing for more attention to: “agents, levels & processes” in language policy & planning (Ricento & Hornberger, 1996: 408; Johnson, 2009).
- Choice of research methods guided by the interpretive traditions in the social sciences (e.g. interviews, participant observation, analysis of bilingual talk, ethnography of literacy practices).
The layers of policy-making

Policies change as they move down through administrative levels, either explicitly in new written documents or through interpretation of existing documents. Only the most authoritarian political structures leave little room for variation in the implementation of official language policy (Ricento & Hornberger, 1996:417)
A focus for ethnographies of language policy

• We need to turn our attention to the specific ways in which policies are translated into practice and to the “intersticies where strategies of implementation have to be invented” (Heller, 1995: 70)

• “We place the classroom practitioner at the heart of language policy (at the center of the onion)” (Ricento & Hornberger, 1996: 417)
Goals for language policy ethnography

To provide independent analysis and critique; so as to assess the limits and potential of existing provision (Rampton, 1995)

To illuminate the complexity of language planning and policy processes and the ways in which they create or restrict ideological and implementational spaces for multilingual pedagogies (Hornberger & Johnson, 2007: 510-511)
From language policy ‘on paper’ to classroom practice

An ethnography of language policy can include textual and historical analyses of policy texts but must be based in an ethnographic understanding of some local context. The texts are nothing without the human agents who act as interpretive conduits between the language policy levels

(Hornberger & Johnson, 2007: 528).
Different foci for current ethnographic research on LPP processes

• A focus on how policies are ‘translated’ into communicative practices in bilingual schools and classrooms (analysis of bilingual talk combined with ethnography)

• A focus on mismatches between communicative practices in school and out-of-school settings

• A focus on the ways in which literacy practices mediate LPP processes
New directions in language-in-education policy-making in Wales

1999
Vote for devolution: a new political era

1999 – 2012
The language policies of the Welsh Assembly Government have become the main drivers of change in language-in-education policy. There has been a broad redefinition of the value of Welsh on the linguistic market in Wales.
Language policy moves ‘on paper’ over the last decade (since Iaith Pawb)

- An opening up of ideological spaces for the use of Welsh as a language of learning and teaching (LoLT) in all sectors of education

- But what about local implementational spaces in different regions of Wales? How are Welsh-medium and bilingual learning environments being created?
The case of bilingual vocational education

- Current policy promotes the use of Welsh in public & voluntary sector workplaces

- There is increased demand for bilingual vocational education

- There are policy commitments to the expansion of bilingual education in the post-16 educational sector i.e. vocational education (in Further Education colleges) & Higher Education (in Welsh universities)
A research project in North Wales

Bilingual literacies for learning in Further Education

Dwyieithrwydd, Ilythrennedd a dysgu mewn Addysg Bellach

2005-2007

Research Team:

Marilyn Martin-Jones, Roz Ivanic, Daniel Chandler, Buddug Hughes, Beryl Davies, Margaret Lewis, Anwen Williams
Questions guiding our research

• What constraints are there on the production and use of teaching/learning materials in Welsh?

• What literacy practices and what kinds of texts predominate in college courses? How can they be characterised?

• How do these practices and texts compare with those of the work worlds that the students hope to enter
Some of the participants in the project

Bilingual teachers in two vocational courses: Agriculture and Early Years (Childcare)

28 students enrolled in their courses:

15 in Agriculture
13 in Early Years (Childcare)
The nature and scope of the study

Ethnographic research, with two dimensions:

**College-based case studies of each class**
- Classroom observations and recordings
- Interviews with bilingual teachers
- Teachers’ literacy logs

**Multi-site research with bilingual students**
- Following students’ trajectories across different domains: college, workplaces (p/t) and home
Insights from the research with teachers: the textual challenges of course design

- Developing course specifications in Welsh
- Compensating for the shortage of teaching/learning materials in Welsh
- Dealing with the lack of specialist terminology in Welsh
- Developing pedagogic strategies for working bilingually with monolingual texts e.g. UK-wide legislation on workplace practices
The paradox at the heart of the current vocational education curriculum

• The end-of-course qualifications (BTEC* Level 3) have to be equivalent to the traditional academic qualifications (A-level) for access to university

• The assessment therefore focuses on traditional genres of academic writing

• This was the greatest challenge for the teachers and students in this study

* Business and Technology Education Council
Multi-site research with the bilingual students

- Literacy diaries (using a clockface)
- Diary-based interviews
- Student photos of literacy events in their lives
- Photo-based interviews
Danielle’s Non-College Day and College Day Clocks
Danielle’s Non-College Day Clock
Clockface interview with Manon
Louise 1’s photo interview

‘Take out any 3 pictures that you think represent literacy practices that are really important to you personally’
Photographs do not ‘speak for themselves’
Captions as ‘anchorage’ (Barthes)

Louise 1’s Top 3
Coding & analysis of the student data

• Transcription & coding of the interviews

• Coding categories: domains of literacy; uses of literacy; literacy technologies; characteristics of their literacy practices

• Vertical slicing to build case studies (triangulating with other data sources)

• Horizontal slicing
Insights from the research with the bilingual students

Different worlds of literacy:

- Bilingual literacies at college
- Bilingual literacies at work
- Bilingual literacies at home/in local life worlds
Four agriculture students: bilingual literacy at work

Cadwaladr

Sasha

Bryn

Ceunant
Cadwaladr
Cadwaladr
Cadwaladr
Welsh & English literacies at work: Cadwaladr

- Running a lawn-mowing business (mostly English)
- Seasonal work in sheep shearing (only Welsh)
- Assisting his mother with farm ‘paperwork’ & digital record-keeping (Welsh & English)

Print and screen literacies included: creating invoices, record-keeping, reading equipment manuals, creating databases, filling in forms, email correspondence with customers etc.
Ceunant
Bilingual literacy at work: characteristics of the young people’s practices

- Self-determined & purposeful
- Varied – a range of genres
- Multi-media
- Multi-modal
- Shared & interactive
Bilingual literacy at college: characteristics

- Oriented to the requirements of the curriculum and designed for assessment purposes
- A narrow range of reading & writing practices, focused on traditional academic genres e.g. monolingual essays & project reports
- Limited use of media e.g. computer for word processing or web browsing
- Rarely multi-modal
- Mostly solitary, not shared
Mismatch of characteristics of college & non-college literacies: implications?

- Language planning and policy initiatives focus on expanding and consolidating language provision.

- But, the *nature* of the provision also needs to be considered, taking account of curriculum content and the literacy practices associated with teaching, learning and assessment.
Working with teachers navigating the constraints on language policy implementation

- Deepening our understanding of the situated nature of bilingual pedagogy

- Documenting the local ways in which teachers design and redesign their pedagogy as policy and classroom conditions shift and the ways in which they create specific new forms of educational practice e.g. bilingual talk as a resource for unpacking monolingual texts
The value of ethnography in LPP research

- Ethnography is a means of moving away from superficial questions such as “What works?” to questions such as “What does working mean?” (Fred Erickson, 2010).
- It is based on sustained researcher-practitioner engagement and on dialogic approaches to research.
- Ethnography of literacy is particularly well tuned to research in contemporary education contexts because of the textually-mediated nature of social life in the twenty first century.
References to the research in Wales


LPP: General References


