OFFICIALISING LANGUAGE

A DISCOURSE STUDY OF LANGUAGE POLITICS IN THE UNITED STATES

Joseph Lo Bianco

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I certify that the work contained in this thesis is original and references to others’ material is cited in the bibliography.

Joseph Lo Bianco
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To the interviewees, those who spoke directly with me about their views I also say thank you. I found members of Congress and their staff especially generous with their time given that I came from far away and would not remain to participate in the issues. All my American colleagues were by turns helpful, interested and collegial (even indulgent when this was required). I hope that I have done justice to you.

I enrolled in the thesis program at The Australian National University as a part-time candidate in May 1995. Most of the research and writing was conducted in between direct involvement in language policy work in Australia, in Scotland and in Sri Lanka. This ‘reality’ language planning underscored the wide relevance of language issues in very different societies, and how language planning carries national aspirations, cultural politics, socially transforming ideologies and various kinds of resistance, nationing principles and globalising force. It is natural that ‘language people’ see the overwhelming relevance of the language question, we trip over it everywhere and it seems that nothing could be more important. It is ‘arresting’ when ‘non-language people’ tell us that language issues are neither important nor interesting. Fortunately we know they are wrong. Not all of the research and writing has been hard slog fitted in between earning the daily bread. Some of it was wonderfully idyllic: three months mountain biking in the wooded hills of Siena Italy writing about American language policy in the evenings, a great time in marvellous Washington DC in 1995 with return visits every 18 months; long cool evenings writing by the banks of the Mahaweli outside Kandy Sri Lanka, while grappling with language politics in that (very much harder) setting, and a great time coming to know the remarkable scene in post-devolution Scotland. There are many people in all these places that I will have forgotten to thank, and many who helped without knowing or intending to do so; so to everyone I have had a conversation with since May 1995 I say: Mille Grazie!
DEDICATION

Antonia Ferraro and Vincenzo Lo Bianco
ABSTRACT

This is a study of the discourse contest concerning the officialisation of English in the United States. It consists of an analysis of the language of that discourse shaped by a belief that discourse is a rather neglected but potentially illuminating area of examination of language and literacy policy. The study seeks to understand the processes and content of language policy as it is being made, or performed, and is influenced by a critique of the theory and practice of language policy which tends to adopt technicist paradigms of examination that insufficiently elucidate the politics of the field.

Accordingly a systematic gathering of the texts of language disputation in the US was collected. These texts were organised in response to the methods of elicitation. Semi-elicited texts, elicited texts and unelicited texts were gathered and tested to be sure that they constituted a fair representation of the concourse (what had been said and was being said about the issue) over a 15 year period. Those statements, or texts, that had particular currency during the 104th Congress were selected for further use. An empirical examination of the subjective dispositions of those activists involved in the making of official English, or of resisting the making of official English, was conducted.

This examination utilised the Q methodology (inverted factor analysis) invented by William Stephensen. The data from this study provided a rich field of knowledge about the discursive parameters of the making of policy in synchronic and diachronic form. Direct interviews were also conducted with participants, and discourse analysis of ‘naturally occurring’ (unelicited texts) speeches and radio debates and other material of persuasion and disagreement was conducted.

These data frame and produce a representation of the orders of discourse and their dynamic and shaping power. Against an analysis of language policy making and a document analysis of the politics of language in the United States the discourses are utilised to contribute to a richer understanding of the field and the broad conclusion that as far as language policy is concerned it is hardly possible to make a distinction with political action.

The theoretical implications for a reinvigorated language policy theory constitute the latter part of the thesis. In the multi-epistemological context that postmodernity demands, with its skepticism about the possibility of ‘disinterest’, the thesis offers its own kinds of data triangulation, and the making central of subjective dispositions and political purposes and engagements of the principal antagonists.
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CHAPTER OUTLINE

Chapter I
Chapter one comprises three sections. The first section addresses the reasons for the selection of official English as the focus of the present research. The second section introduces language policy and planning as a field of both scholarship and intervention, and sets out a series of criticisms to which it has been subjected in recent years. The third section discusses the anomaly of heightened attention to language within the social sciences contrasted to the insecure status of language policy and planning within the academy.

Chapter II
Chapter two gives a general description of US linguistic demography, the policy framework and periods within which policy work has occurred, and analyses three domains of policy in which official English is involved: voting, bilingual education and citizenship swearing-in ceremonies.

Chapter III
The methodology for the research is presented in this chapter. Three kinds of data are gathered: texts that were directly elicited by the researcher, texts that were semi-elicited, and texts that were not in any way elicited by the researcher. Q-methodology is used to analyse the ‘subjective dispositions’ of key actors and observers engaged in official English politics. From Q-analysis the overall discourse formations of official English are identified and these in turn are subjected to analysis. The results are reported in Chapter IV. Second, there is an examination of three radio debates and a book chapter on official English. The results appear in Chapter V. The third data source and analysis comprises semi-structured interviews undertaken with 44 participants in official English politics during the 104th Congress, and the researcher’s participation in official Hearings at both the Senate and House of Representatives. This is reported in Chapter VI.

Chapter IV
This chapter reports the results of the Q-analysis. 54 participants rank 64 statements that were collected as a structured sample of what has been said (the concourse) on official English-bilingual education and multiculturalism over a representative period of 15 years. All of these statements, regardless of who uttered or wrote them originally, were selected because they were encountered in actual discourse and argument during the 104th concourse. The resultant discourse organisation of the statements is analysed at content level and also in relation to its underlying ideological structuring.

Chapter V
The first debate is of a single advocate for official English, George Tryfiatis, the debate moderator and twelve callers. Analysis is undertaken of the language of the advocate, and since he provides extended exposition of his case the transcript contains the details of long elaborated turns. The advocate
concerned is from the *English First* organisation, a more radical break-away group from the main *US English* organisation. The responses of the callers are discussed in detail because these interrupt, challenge and sustain the advocate’s arguments and introduce a dialogic component to the essentially monologic character of the first part. The second debate is a dyad between one of the official English Congressional sponsors Bill Emerson and a key opponent, Jim Lyons from the National Association for Bilingual Education. Three callers’ statements are also analysed. The third radio text has a polyadic format with the US Chamber of Commerce and three Democrat and Republican Congressmen, a moderator, and an announcer. The final text analysed is a written one, House Speaker Newt Gingrich’s *English as the American Language* from his best-selling book *To Renew America*. This piece located official English within the overall program of the ‘Conservative Restoration’ that the 104th Congress represented.

**Chapter VI**
This chapter analyses and presents data under various themes that emerged from the semi-structured interviews conducted with participants in the arguments/debate/talk on official English in the 104th Congress. The excerpts refer to the transcripts which are located under corresponding (but not identical) headings in the appendices. The interview evidence extends the discourse organisation and arrangements contained in the previous two chapters. At the conclusion of Chapter VI a diagrammatic representation of the overall argument (policy on the move) is included. This diagram seeks to represent the totality of the organisation of official English talk and politics as a structure of specifications within which the performance of the acts of officialising English occur. Thus it is a map of the ‘officialisation territory’; two sets of claims, both of which preclude compromise and negotiation and which form the perimeter within which is located a space where dialogue, conversation and compromise are possible and occurring.

**Chapter VII**
The final chapter returns to the theme of the performance of language policy and planning in discursive politics. The chapter considers the main theorisations of *lpp* and how ideology and modernity have been critiqued in scholarship that has identified dialogical encounter, discourse, as a key site of struggle and contest in contemporary society. The chapter concludes with implications for a re-invigorated theory of *lpp* that employs these insights.