

Economics and Language Policy

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**UNIVERSITÉ
DE GENÈVE**

Handbooks of Applied Linguistics

Communication Competence
Language and Communication Problems
Practical Solutions



Editors

Karlfried Knapp and Gerd Antos

Volume 9

Mouton de Gruyter · Berlin · New York

Handbook of Language and Communication: Diversity and Change

Edited by

Marlis Hellinger and Anne Pauwels

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Language and communication: Diversity and change – An introduction

Anne Pauwels and Marlis Hellinger

Volume IX of the Handbook Series focuses on language-related problems and issues arising in the context of linguistic diversity and change and how applied linguistic perspectives and approaches may contribute to solving or managing some of these problems. The contributions in this volume also bear witness to the diversity in the conceptualisation of applied linguistics as outlined in the General Introduction by the Series Editors. This volume is perhaps more diverse in its topic coverage than many of the other volumes in the Handbook Series. Consequently there is some similarity and overlap with themes and topics covered in other volumes, especially Vol. IV (Communication in the Public Sphere), Vol. V (Multilingual Communication) and Vol. VII (Intercultural Communication). However, the approach here is explicitly on problem identification, explanation and management: What unites the contributions in this volume is the theme of planning, management and policies of language issues.

We have organised the volume in four sections each focussing on different approaches to and/or perspectives of applied linguistic work on diversity and change:

Part I **Language minorities and inequality** approaches the theme of linguistic diversity from a regional or geographic perspective describing and discussing multilingual communities across the globe. Our primary aim for this section of the volume is to present the many facets of applied linguistic work on different types of multilingual situations found in diverse regions of the world.

The emphasis in these contributions is on the management of multilingualism by both state/government agencies and community organisations. Although we have attempted to cover as many regions of the world as possible it was not feasible within the confines and orientation of this volume to be either comprehensive or exhaustive. Consequently some large regions such as Central and South America have not been covered. The regions that are covered in this volume vary substantially in complexity – political, social and linguistic – resulting in contributors having to make different decisions about depth or breadth of coverage. In the case of the chapter on Europe, Guus Extra and Durk Gorter decided to combine a pan-European perspective (i.e. at the level of the European Union) with country-specific approaches to the management of linguistic minorities distinguishing between those indigenous to Europe and those resulting from migration to Europe.

9. Economics and language policy

François Grin

1. Introduction

Economics is increasingly often called upon to help analyse macro-level language issues, and to assist in the selection, design and evaluation of language policies. An economic perspective on language can be used to assess the consequences associated with various policy options and to provide answers to fundamental questions that other disciplines tend to bypass. These key questions can be informally summed up as: "Should we follow this or that course of action with respect to language issues?" or, more simply, "*What* should be done?". Since a question of this type can only be answered by invoking explicit criteria, it immediately raises the question of what constitutes an appropriate set of criteria, and therefore the question of "*Why* should this or that course of action be followed?".

Turning to economics for answers to such questions represents, however, a recent development. Traditionally, the analytical perspectives brought to bear on language policy and planning (two notions between which we will not need to make a distinction for the purposes of this chapter) have tended to emphasize the contribution of disciplines other than economics.

First, most of the language policy discourse is, of course, anchored in applied linguistics and sociolinguistics; however, these fields of inquiry usually emphasize another set of questions, which may be summarized with the question "*How?*". Indeed, their focus usually is on how language policy and planning actually operate, how different groups of actors respond to policy plans, and how such policy plans mesh with a given social and political context (see Ricento, this vol.). However, general discussions of the reasons for particular measures to be adopted (or, on the contrary, avoided) remains largely side-stepped. Much the same can be said of educational perspectives on language policy, which emphasize the modalities of language education (that is, how best to teach languages) rather than the choice of languages to teach, or the reasons society may have for teaching them.

Secondly, among the disciplines that do address the questions of "what" and "why", law plays a major role. The legal perspective defines states' obligations regarding the treatment of various languages, thus determining what should be done; this perspective is often articulated in terms of language rights, which provide a rationale for answering the question of why it should be done (see also Skutnabb-Kangas, this vol.).