

Language and Social Change

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The series explores the relationships between language, society and social change, and encompasses both theoretical and applied aspects of language use. Books in the series draw on naturally occurring language data from a wide variety of social contexts. The series takes a broad view of the relationship between language and social change. It includes work on groups that are socially marginalized and that were previously neglected by sociolinguists. It also includes books that focus primarily on wider social issues concerning language, such as language ecology. The series takes a critical approach to sociolinguistics. It challenges current orthodoxies not only by dealing with familiar topics in new and radical ways, but also by making use of the results of empirical research which alter our current understanding of the relationship between language and social change. Above all, language will be viewed as constitutive of, as well as reflective of, cultures and societies.

1. *An Introduction to Language Policy: Theory and Method*
Edited by Thomas Ricento



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Theory and Method

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Language Policy and National Identity

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It is an unfortunate situation for social scientists, but the world is not neatly divided into monolingual states. Consequently, official administrative belonging – being a citizen of a state – is a poor indicator of sociolinguistic belonging, let alone of language behavior in general. The relationship between national *identity* and the language-oriented activities of the state is even less straightforward, if for nothing else because of the elusiveness of “identity.” Whenever we talk about identity, we need to differentiate between “achieved” or “inhabited” identity – the identity people themselves articulate or claim – and “ascribed” or “attributed” identity – the identity given to someone by someone else. The two do not necessarily coincide, as will become clear further on, and matters are considerably complicated by this. This chapter will consequently have two aims: to clarify the general issues involved in the relationship between language policy and national identity, and to illustrate this relationship by means of an example.

The title “Language Policy and National Identity” presupposes the existence of each of the constituent terms and their collocations: “language,” “policy” (language policy), and “national,” “identity” (national identity). The overall collocation suggests that there is an effective relationship between language policy and national identity. I shall propose that there is one, but that it must be seen as an *ideological* relationship and as a *specific* one. I must start with basics, though: a reflection on the nation and the state.

Nation (and) State

It is a common feature of much academic writing in this field to use “nation” and “state” as near-synonymous terms. As soon as a state

acquires sovereignty, it seems to acquire the label of “nation-state.” This label, then, suggests that the “state” – a formal system of institutions – is also a “nation” – the result of *nationalism*, a very specific political and ideological process. Though at first glance commonsensical, the collocation is by no means warranted as a default description of states. Empirically, there are a good number of states where a true nationalist project (as defined, e.g., by Hobsbawm, 1990) does not exist, or where, in fact, the “nation” is organized around *coercion* rather than around ideological *consent* and where, consequently, a term such as “statism” would be more appropriate. There is abundant evidence for this in my own field of study, Africa, and no doubt elsewhere as well. Second, nationalism does not require a state. Very often it emerges as a *reaction against* the state, and a good number of successful nationalisms were in fact anti-state nationalisms (as in Flanders–Belgium, Catalonia–Spain, Québec–Canada). The success of these nationalisms generated new state structures at the regional level, and thus transformed the nationalist project into a statist one. So for sound analytic reasons, it is advisable to separate “nation” and “state,” and consider the “nation-state” as one specific combination of the two, the existence of which needs to be empirically established, not posited *a priori*.

In the era of globalization, one also frequently encounters statements about the demise of the nation-state. It is argued, then, that contemporary social processes, notably in the fields of labor and culture (including identity processes), develop in “transnational” networks no longer responding to “national” dynamics of labor division and identity categorization (see, e.g., Castells, 1998, for a discussion). This is partly true, but again we need to differentiate between the nation and the state. It may well be that a classic, modernist project of nationalism becomes far more difficult to accomplish under conditions of globalization, and that consequently, the traditional nation is on its way out. But that does not entail that the state is on its way out. If we follow Immanuel Wallerstein (1983, 2000), the contemporary (globalized) capitalist World System hinges on a complex of *inter-state* relations in which macro-scale labor divisions and value-allocations are organized unequally. We need not go into Wallerstein’s argument in detail here, but we should note the way in which he emphasizes the active role of states in shaping and defining processes we now call globalization.¹ So under globalization the nation may be under pressure, but the state appears to do well.

But of course, the state does not remain untouched by globalization, and the notion of “state” itself suggests not only the internationally

acknowledged existence of a "state" – like, for example, Somalia, Congo, or Sierra Leone – but also the effectiveness and autonomy of this state as a system of organizational and administrative apparatuses. This can by no means be taken for granted, and it is again a matter for investigation and not for positing. The examples given above – Somalia, Congo, and Sierra Leone – are "states" in the first sense of the term, but not in the second sense. Governments of these countries have hardly any effective control over their territories, and their capacity to enforce measures taken by the "state" over the totality of their territory is non-existent. All kinds of core "state" functions, ranging from organized (military and police) violence to education and medical services, are in effect performed by "non-state" agents such as rebel movements, international NGOs or international organizations such as UNHCR and UNICEF, local sub-state organizations, international businesses, and so on (Ferguson & Gupta, 2002). This is true not only for clear cases such as the ones given, but also for contemporary states in the center of the World System. Governments now share "state" power (e.g., in the fields of defense, economic, and monetary affairs) with international business, international organizations such as the European Union, the World Bank, NATO, regional or local autonomous governments (e.g., the states in the United States), and "civil society" organizations such as trade unions. The term "state" as a descriptor for "state activities" can thus technically pertain both to "sub-state" institutions, ranging from civil society organizations to regional and local governments, and to "super-state" institutions, such as business and other networks, the EU, NATO or the United Nations.

What does all this mean for our discussion here? It means that our object of investigation is in effect a rather narrow and highly specific category of cases: those countries where an effective state system manages to conduct nationalist policies through language policy. It also means that we should be careful with the term *national*: a national language policy may only seemingly be "national," that is, confined and specific to the territory of a single state, and effected exclusively by state actors. Actors and influences in the field of language policy can be manifold and involve both sub-state, state, and super-state actors in processes of considerable complexity (see the essays in Blommaert, 1999a).

In fact, one of the challenging new areas of research into language policies could precisely address the way in which language policies emerge out of an interplay of actors at very different levels, including,

but not exclusive to, national governments. "National" language policies can be imposed by super-state forces, or these policies can be an effect of national governments seeking new international alliances with certain partners. The EU has a self-image of multilingualism, which it enforces through nationally ratified educational policies. The growing emphasis on the use of English in education in the peripheries of the World System, articulated in national language and educational policies in several countries, is based on an image of globalization as monocentric, with an English-dominant economic, financial, and political center. And the promotion of English in countries such as Congo and Mozambique, where English used to be a marginal linguistic commodity, is motivated by a desire of national governments to align themselves with the United States and international organizations such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

Finally, it also means that *national identity* seen in relation to *language* becomes a very problematic category. To this issue I now turn.

Language, Policy, and Identity

Let us recall some of the theses articulated in classic studies on nationalism: Anderson (1983), Gellner (1983), Greenfeld (1992), and Hobsbawm (1990). Interestingly, all these authors emphasize the importance of language in the process of nation-building. But it is a specific kind of language: the printed word circulating in mass quantities and stimulating the growth and dissemination of "standard national languages." In fact, print capitalism was central to the becoming of modernity – the historical phase in which the nation-state as we now know it was created (Bauman, 1991; Habermas, 1984, 1987; Latour, 1993). But print capitalism also became the instrument for the massification of specific *language ideologies*, and at this point I should introduce my main argument.

The notion of language ideologies grew out of Sapirian and Whorfian linguistic anthropology, and it stands for socially and culturally embedded *metalinguistic* conceptualizations of language and its forms of usage (Kroskrity, 2001; Silverstein, 1979; see the essays in Schieffelin, Woolard, & Kroskrity, 1998). Language users have conceptions of language and language use: conceptions of "quality," value, status, norms, functions, ownership, and so forth. These conceptions guide the communicative behavior of language users; they use language

on the basis of the conceptions they have and so reproduce these conceptions. These are ideological constructs, and they are sites of power and authority. Language use is ideologically stratified and regimented, and the “best” language/language variety is distinguished from “less adequate” varieties in every instance of use (Gal & Woolard, 2001; see the essays in Kroskrity, 2000). Thus, written language would be valued more highly than spoken language; standard more highly than dialect, specific expert registers more highly than general lay registers, and so forth.

The advent of print capitalism offered an instrument for the dissemination of language ideologies that attributed the highest prestige to an autonomous, structured, semantically transparent (written) language variety – an elite variety over which the educated (upper) middle classes had control, but which was now imposed on the whole of society as *the* (only) Language and opposed to the “jargons,” “speech,” “dialects,” and other forms of “imprecise,” “vulgar,” or “confused” (oral) language of the less educated masses. It was the sort of Language that would be laid out in grammars and dictionaries and then offered normatively, as a collection of strict rules, in the emerging national education systems.

Bauman and Briggs (2003) trace this language ideology to Bacon and, more prominently, Locke. Locke developed a highly elitist view on language as something that needed to be decontextualized and “purified” as part of the program of rationalist and detached individualism, central to modernity. Language, in this sense, became detached from (oral folk) “tradition” – the vernacular stories and anecdotes told by the common people and perceived by Locke as anti-rational, emotional, chaotic. It became the “standard” language of modernity. But before that could happen, a second intervention was required, according to Bauman and Briggs (2003). The oral and folk tradition, rejected by Locke, was rescued by Herder and the Grimm brothers and elevated to the level of “national character.” But “tradition” had been *rationalized*, so to speak: the tradition needed to become modulated by the kind of transparent, standard language promulgated by Locke. And it is the combination of tradition seen as national identity and rationalist perceptions of standard speech that offered the launching platform for national (standard) languages as we now know them: linguistic items with a name (“English,” “German,” “Zulu”), defined as a set of decontextualized rules and norms, and confined to *national* spaces within which they could become the emblems of national identity.²

Important is the way in which both the emergence and dissemination of “the language” as well as its relation to the state (i.e., a relation that is seen as symbolizing the state as a “nation”) are *ideological* processes, that is, processes that need not in any significant way reflect what people in the nation actually use in the way of language. It is a sociolinguistic truism that societies are almost by necessity *multilingual*, in the sense that many varieties, genres, styles, and codes occur, despite self-perceptions of societal monolingualism. Societies do reflect and sustain the *sociolinguistic regime* in a country, that is, the relative hierarchies normatively maintained and the dominant ideas surrounding them. Such ideas would include ownership, membership, and authority: “this is *our* language,” “we are Americans and speak English,” “this language doesn’t belong here,” “he doesn’t speak the language well.”

Consequently, and following Silverstein (1998), we should distinguish between “linguistic communities” and “speech communities,” where the former are groups professing adherence to the normatively constructed, ideologically articulated “standard” Language (“we speak English”) and the latter are groups characterized by the actual use of specific speech forms (e.g., professional jargons, but also dialects and even “standard” varieties of languages). The two, as said earlier, are not isomorphic, and the distance between the sociolinguistically definable community and the linguistic-ideologically definable community reveals the degree of hegemony of the language ideologies, often resulting in blind spots for sociolinguistic phenomena. In my own case, Belgian-Flemish language laws compel me to deliver my academic courses monolingually “in Dutch,” and Flanders is a region characterized by unshakable perceptions of Dutch monolingualism in public life (seen as a Flemish-nationalist victory over Belgian-Francophone imperialism). I do teach in Dutch – at least if “teaching” is reduced to my oral contribution to class performances. The bulk of my course materials, however, are in English and French, and my research output is likewise multilingual. So students who wish to take my courses are, in actual fact, subjected to a *multilingual* complex of communicative practices, despite a strong feeling that they study “in Dutch” and despite my university’s (and my regional government’s) emphasizing the Dutch-speaking character of academic life in Flanders.

Silverstein (1996) calls this phenomenon a “monoglot” ideology. It rests on an ideologically configured belief that a society is *in effect* monolingual – that monolingualism is a fact and not an ideological perception – coupled with a denial of practices that point toward factual

multilingualism and linguistic diversity (Blommaert & Verschueren, 1998). The phenomenon rests on associations between “pure,” standard language, membership of an ethnolinguistically defined “people,” and a particular region occupied by these (ethnolinguistically homogeneous) people. This ideology has effects, and I shall discuss three crucial ones:

- 1 It *informs practical language regimes* in education and other crucial spheres of public life. Language policy is invariably based on linguistic ideologies, on images of “societally desirable” forms of language usage and of the “ideal” linguistic landscape of society, in turn often derived from larger sociopolitical ideologies. Thus, a monoglot ideology may not only deny the existence of linguistic diversity, it may also sustain practices that actually and effectively prohibit linguistic diversity in the public domain. Examples abound, and recently some scholars have qualified such practices as “linguicide” (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). In effect, much linguistically articulated nationalism constructs language policies aimed at *reducing* linguistic diversity in society, sometimes even while explicitly advocating societal multilingualism (see the essays in Blommaert, 1999a).
- 2 It also *produces and regulates identities*. The state often appears as the guardian of the monoglot idealization of the link “language–people–country,” and thus offers (and often imposes by coercion) particular ascriptive ethnolinguistic identities for its citizens. This is a very widespread phenomenon: since this is Indonesia, people speak Bahasa Indonesia; since this is Tanzania, people speak Swahili; since this is Flanders, people speak Dutch; and so on. The processes by means of which this happens are intricate, manifold, and often also “automatic,” that is, implicit and not spectacular, assuming the shape of what Foucault called “governmentality” (the network of measures aimed at regulating people’s lives) and leading to what Bourdieu called “habitus,” a set of naturalized predispositions that “automatically” guide our behavior and can thus be converted into “inhabited” identities. The most common and powerful ethnolinguistic identity promulgated by the state is that of “monolingual speaker of (one of) the national language(s),” assuming that people are intrinsically monolingual and that such monolingualism is an organic feature of being a citizen of that country. The state is thus very often the actor that sustains and elaborates the belief in the existence and value of “a Language” in the sense of language

names – Dutch, English, Chinese, Zulu. Initially, “national identity” is therefore almost invariably an *ascriptive* identity attributed by the state or state-affiliated institutions such as education systems, and it most often revolves around a monolingually imagined one-to-one relation between national-administrative belonging and language use. This may then lead to an *inhabited* identity in which people effectively adopt the ethnolinguistic-national identity as part of a broader repertoire of identities.

- 3 Finally, it also has had a tremendous *impact on scholarship*. The reified and stratified, monoglot image of “a language” has informed language description – the image of ethnolinguistically bounded and internally homogeneous communities characterized by a (pure, decontextualized, normative) language was projected onto languages spoken elsewhere in the world (Fabian, 1986; Irvine & Gal, 2000), and was later adopted by postcolonial governments as the model of “good” language (e.g., Blommaert, 1999b). Similarly, this same ideology informed much of linguistics and sociolinguistics, in which authors even today assume the existence of bounded, rule-governed, and reified “languages” as their units of study (see Blommaert, 1996; Hymes, 1996, for a critique).

All of this has a profound impact on our thinking on identity, of course. We have failed to see the fine shades of identity often articulated not by one monoglot “language,” but by delicate and moment-to-moment evolving variation between *varieties* of language, including accents, registers, styles, and genres. As mentioned above, identity is best seen not as one item, but as a repertoire of different possible identities, each of which has a particular range or scope and function. In that sense, a term such as “national identity” is, as said above, best seen as a *specific* ascriptive label attached to people. In the best of cases it can occasionally be an “achieved,” adopted identity of people, but always with restricted sociolinguistic functions, often related to interactions between individuals and the state (filling in administrative forms, responding to survey questions and opinion polls, or in my case, accounting for my teaching practices in my university). If taken as the dominant, overwhelming (single) identity of people, it does not help us much in understanding the multiple, often unpredictable and volatile identity work we effectively perform when we communicate.³ In scholarly traditions based on such notions, it has led to rather simplistic associations between “a language” and “an identity,” which

again overlook (and render invisible) the multiplicity and complexity of identity-work on the ground (see, e.g., Myers-Scotton, 1993).

The Ideological Process Illustrated

I will now turn to an illustration of the processes discussed in the previous sections and provide an account of language policy in Tanzania (East Africa). My focus will be on demonstrating how the language-political process was primarily an ideological process. Space restrictions prevent me from engaging with the details of the sociolinguistic situation and the history of language policy; I will have to refer readers to Blommaert (1999b and references therein) for more detailed information and discussion. Tanzania, I should emphasize, qualifies as a state where language policy and national identity effectively occur as an issue: it was a nationalist state (at least during one phase of its existence) and language was explicitly thematized in this context.

The postcolonial Tanzanian (then still Tanganyikan) state was one of the first to declare an indigenous language, Swahili, the national language of the country. It also became an official language alongside the former colonial language, English. Despite the absence of any formal language planning, a lot of language-policy measures ensued from this. Swahili was immediately introduced as the medium of instruction in primary education, alongside English as the (inherited) medium of instruction in post-primary education. Swahili also instantaneously became the language of political life (Tanzanian leaders systematically used Swahili when addressing their constituencies, and the language of parliamentary proceedings was Swahili) and of the majority of the mass media, both radio and printed press. Literature in Swahili was actively encouraged.

The real boost for Swahili came when the state embarked on a massive campaign of nation-building in the mid-1960s. This nation-building campaign was an attempt toward establishing socialist hegemony, and Swahili was given a crucial role in this. The language was defined as the language of African-socialist ("*Ujamaa*") ideas and values, and the generalized spread of Swahili would be a measurable index of the spread of socialism across the population. In terms of national identity, the *mwananchi* ("citizen") of *Ujamaa*-Tanzania would be a socialist and an African, and a monolingual, Swahili-speaking individual. National identity in Tanzania was defined in

political-ideological and linguistic terms, not in ethnic or other cultural terms.

In terms of what has been discussed in the previous sections, a few qualifications are in order here. First, the ideal situation envisaged by the architects of the nation-building campaign was monoglot. The campaign would be a success when the population would use *one language imbued with one set of ideological loads*: those of *Ujamaa*. "Homogeneity" was the target (Blommaert & Verschueren, 1998), and the spread of Swahili-and-*Ujamaa* would have to go hand in hand with the *disappearance* of other languages-and-ideologies. The first target, obviously, was English – the language of imperialism, capitalism, and oppression; but the same went for the local languages, which were seen as vehicles for traditional, pre-colonial cultures, as well as for "non-standard" varieties of Swahili (e.g., code-switching, urban varieties), which were sensed to indicate the incompleteness of the process of hegemony. The "better" and "purer" one's Swahili would be, the better a socialist Tanzanian patriot one would be. We have here a typical Herderian cocktail of one language–one culture–one territory as an ideal organization for society. Recall also Herder's adoption of the Lockean emphasis on "purified" language as the vehicle of true authenticity: African socialists would be authentic if and when their African language – the vehicle of their "values" – would be purified and standardized.

Second, not only was the conception of language as a vehicle for a specified (politically defined) set of ideological values a typical case of Herderian imagination (and thus an inherited ideology from colonial language descriptions), but the whole *operational* conception of language was that inherited from colonial predecessor regimes as well (in ways similar to those described by Irvine & Gal, 2000; cf. Blommaert, 1994). Swahili was standardized by academic experts and its main vehicle was (normative) literacy produced through formal education systems. Scholarly and political efforts concentrated on standardization, language "development and modernization," purism, and so forth; in short, on the construction of Swahili as a purified (Lockean) artifact of normativity focused on referential functions.

There was a model for such a degree of "full languageness": English. Throughout the history of postcolonial linguistics in Tanzania, scholars kept referring to English whenever they discussed the kind of level of "development and modernization" that needed to be attained for Swahili. English was perceived as the language of a leading world

power with a flourishing economy, a fabulous cultural history, and world-wide prestige, and this was what a "real" language should stand for.⁴ Pending the accomplishment of such "full languageness" for Swahili, English would *have* to be used in higher education in order to produce a class of top-notch intellectuals needed for specialized service to the country. Thus, while Swahili was spread to all corners of the country and was used in almost every aspect of everyday life, post-primary education remained (and still is) a domain where English was hegemonic.

Thirty years of concentrated efforts toward the goal set forth in the 1960s resulted in the generalized spread of Swahili. Sociolinguistically, Swahili and its varieties have become the identifying code of public activities throughout Tanzania. The campaign in that sense was exceptionally successful. But what did not happen was the ideological homogenization of the country. While Swahilization was manifestly a success, the monoglot ideal in which language, political ideology, and identity would be coterminous was a failure. Neither English nor local languages and "impure" varieties of Swahili disappeared, and in the eyes of the language planners, this meant that Tanzanians had still not fully become *Ujamaa*-socialists but still displayed adherences to bourgeois values (through English) and to pre-socialist modes of life (through local languages). And the spread of Swahili did not galvanize the hegemony of *Ujamaa*: the one-party system collapsed in the late 1980s and was replaced by a multiparty, liberal capitalist state-organization, which, ironically, adopted Swahili as its vehicle for nationwide communication.

What does this mean? It means, first, that there was a widening gap between the intended ascriptive identity constructed by language planners – the monolingual, Swahili-speaking, socialist Tanzanian – and the inhabited identities of the people. Swahili, as mentioned, was spread to almost every corner of the country, where it was adopted as part of the speech repertoires of the local people. They used it for specific purposes: interaction across ethnolinguistic boundaries, administrative contacts, and primary education. When doing so, they articulated an inhabited identity which aligned them with the projected ideal *mwananchi*. But they did more than that, of course. The language planners had been wrong in their totalizing conception of socialist hegemony and the use of Swahili. Politics, in reality, was one domain of language usage, and Swahili was absolutely dominant in that domain. But it was *only* one domain, and for other domains, people continued to use local languages or other newly emerged forms

of communication (Msanjila, 1999). So to the extent that only *one* identity was envisaged, the campaign was a failure. Adopting a more realistic perspective in which people are seen as having a repertoire of (domain-bound) identities, the campaign was a success. The momentous sociolinguistic change induced by the generalized spread of Swahili offered people a collection of new opportunities for "inhabited," achieved identities, a richer and more diversified repertoire of identities. But only one ascribed identity was used to cover this repertoire: that of the *mwananchi*. It was hopelessly inadequate; the monoglot, Herderian ideology adopted in language policy created huge blind spots in assessing the true impact of the Swahilization campaign.

The Tanzanian state was, and is, part of the world. It was encapsulated in a dynamics from below – the persistent usage of local languages, the genesis of Swahili-based new urban varieties, accents in Swahili, and subcultural jargons and slangs – and one from above – the historical and world-wide dominance of monoglot ideologies and ideologies of linguistic purification, the market pressures for English, and so on. In its role as a switchboard between these different levels it adopted perhaps the worst possible language-political instrument, one that denied its insertion in the dynamics from below and above and stressed the autonomy of a particular space, that of the state. Its projected "ideal" identity for citizens could never work *in terms of the ideology that guided the process*.

Conclusion

The case of Tanzania may offer a lesson which other nation-building states may want to pay attention to. Singular projections of language onto national identity do not work any more. In a mature sociolinguistics, the state and its operations should be seen as part of what goes on in the sociopolitical and cultural field in a country. It results in *specific* domains, activities, and relationships, not (unless, perhaps, in totalitarian systems) in *general* ones. Apart from these specific domains, activities, and relationships, several others exist and will continue to exist, and they will respond to (sometimes very) different sets of norms and rules of language and communication produced by actors operating at different levels and scales. Language policy, consequently, should best be seen as a *niche* activity, and the same goes for its desired

product, national identity. We can now identify it as a niched *ideological* activity, necessarily encapsulated in and interacting with many others, regardless of how dominant it may seem at first sight.

Annotated Bibliography

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A standard reference for "World Systems analysis," with its emphasis on scales and processes of inequality in the interstate capitalist system of division of labor.

Discussion Questions

- 1 Given the niched activity of the state, are there any other “niches” that can be identified, in which other actors impose language-ideologically informed norms and rules and thus call for very different forms of sociolinguistic behavior?
- 2 Can you identify such other sociolinguistic regimes as “oppositional,” that is, acting against state-imposed regimes?
- 3 Try to describe the kind of state-organized or state-oriented practices you find yourself in, and describe the linguistic norms and codes valid there.
- 4 Could you reflect on globalization processes (e.g., the world-wide spread of internet literacy) in terms of “niched” sociolinguistic activity?
- 5 Could you reflect on election campaigns in the same terms?

NOTES

- 1 This, one could note, invalidates the “TINA” argument (There Is No Alternative) about globalization, often used by politicians. Globalization is presented as a massive and impersonal force on which national governments have hardly any impact. See Giddens (1998) for an example.
- 2 This, then, became the classic “Herderian” triad *people-language-territory*. A “people” (*Volk*) is characterized by a “language” which is spread over a “territory.” This Herderian image of ethnolinguistic-national community became one of the dominant language ideologies in the field of language policy. Note that Herder systematically used “*Volk*” in two ways: as the “ethnic” or ethnolinguistically defined people and as the “common” people, the *plebeian* section of society (Bauman & Briggs, 2003, p. 183). The site of national authenticity, consequently, was not among the intellectuals or the upper classes (often characterized by multilingual repertoires), but among the “common people,” imagined by Herder as being monolingual. Note also that often, the territorial dimension is overlooked in commentaries on Herder, despite the fact that the nation-state as imagined by Herder was clearly a territorially bounded unit – the territory populated by the ethnolinguistically homogenous *Volk*.
- 3 Ben Rampton’s work is exemplary in this respect. Rampton provides an analysis of the various ways in which ethnically mixed groups of young adolescents in Britain articulate identities, using each other’s accents, elements from subcultural jargons such as that of reggae, imitations of teachers’ speech styles, references to class-based codes, and so

- forth (Rampton, 1995). This volatility – and the problematic nature of such volatility – are also manifest in cases where people become “deterritorialized.” Asylum seekers, for instance, perform intricate identity-work through complex shifts in speech styles and varieties. The gaps are dramatic between people who by definition do not belong to any “national” sociolinguistic regime but whose life is spent migrating, and the “national” codes of official services in charge of refugees (Maryns & Blommaert, 2001).
- 4 Irvine and Gal (2000) call this process “iconization”: the suggestion that qualities of language mirror qualities of societies.

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Language Policy and Minority Rights

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This chapter explores the interconnections between language policy (LP) and minority rights (MR). Minority rights may be described as the cultural, linguistic, and wider social and political rights attributable to minority-group members, usually, but not exclusively, within the context of nation-states. This definition is, in turn, based on the usual distinction between so-called minority and majority groups employed in the sociological and political literature; a distinction that is based not on numerical size, but on clearly observable differences among groups in relation to power, status, and entitlement.

The focus of the chapter is on the often complex and contested history surrounding the individual trajectories of LP and MR, with particular reference to the interconnections between LP and minority language rights. This focus will also highlight the importance of adopting a wider sociohistorical, sociocultural, and sociopolitical analysis of LP. In particular, ongoing questions surrounding the status, use, and power of minority languages in the modern world will be explored, along with the *material* implications of these questions for those minority-group members who continue to speak such languages.

A key reason why such a broader sociohistorical, sociopolitical research approach is necessary is because for much of its history, linguistics as an academic discipline has been preoccupied with idealist, abstracted approaches to the study of language. In short, language has too often been examined in isolation from the social and political conditions in which it is used (for useful critiques of linguistics along these lines, see Bourdieu, 1991; Mey, 1985). This ahistorical, apolitical approach to language has also been a feature of sociolinguistics, despite its emphasis on the social, and of many discussions of LP as well. The last is particularly surprising exactly because one might have reasonably expected any analysis of language policies and practices to engage