

THE DESCRIPTIVE LINGUIST'S DILEMMAS WHEN CONFRONTED WITH THE CHALLENGE OF LANGUAGE PLANNING

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ABSTRACT

It is argued in this paper that the linguist is at a loss when it comes to facing the challenges posed by language policy and language planning and, further, that this has to do with their reluctance to recognize the role of prescription in stage-managing the social life of languages. Their steadfast adherence to the principle of rigorous description of facts and at best an attempt to explain them has limited their ability to intervene in the destiny of a language that is what language politics is all about. It has also stood in the way of there being any fruitful dialogue between the linguist and the lay person.

KEYWORDS: language policy, language planning, description vs. prescription, linguist vs. lay person, language politics.

1 INTRODUCTION: THE PERVASIVENESS OF LANGUAGE POLICY AND LANGUAGE PLANNING

Language policy and language planning (henceforward, LPLP) have had a much longer history than often assumed, although, from a historical point of view, only relatively recently were they raised to the status of institutionally recognized practices and, more significantly, recognized as constituting an area of intense academic interest in their own right (Wright, 2004; Ricento, 2006). According to Hornberger (2006, p. 25), however, unmistakable signs of the presence of the activity can be traced back to ancient times, stretching over several centuries, indeed millennia.

Yet, the topic of language policy and, even more poignantly, that of language planning, is shot through with contradictions and an abiding

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clash of interests, or rather, of research orientations. Halliday (2001, p. 177) captured the essence of this source of tension when he wrote:

Language planning is a highly complex set of activities involving the intersection of two very different and potentially conflicting themes: one, that of “meaning”, common to all our activities with language, and other semiotics as well; the other theme, that of “design”.

It is true that Halliday did try to cushion the full force of the expression ‘conflicting themes’ by the use of the qualifier ‘potentially’, but, as we shall see, the tension between the two ‘themes’ is actually far from merely apparent or passing. Rather, it is enduring and next to impossible to disentangle. In trying to grapple with the thrust of Halliday’s words and make full sense of its implications, I noted elsewhere (Rajagopalan, 2006, p. 328) as follows:

If we understand by ‘meaning’ that which languages – all of them, *tout court*– share in virtue of their very nature, and by ‘design’ that which is imposed on them from the outside, then it is not difficult to see what is at stake in Halliday’s perspicacious remark. Language planning is at the meeting point between *nature* and *culture*. Furthermore, what makes it so “complex” is the fact that the two are in constant (and ultimately irresolvable) tension. Indeed this may partly help explain why professional linguists – especially those among them who are wedded to the view that human languages are *natural* objects are at a loss whenever the topic of discussion is language planning.

Yet, many linguists are given to thinking that the very fact that they have a painstakingly accumulated expertise on language automatically entitles them to have a special say in matters that have to do with LPLP. And, by and large, many defend the position that the best one can do with natural languages is let them run their course on their own; the less one submits them to outside interferences, the better.

In so positioning themselves, many linguists are only acting, most likely unbeknownst to themselves, in accordance with the widespread

popular conviction that Nature is best left untampered with, that it is always wise not to ‘tinker with’ natural phenomena or ‘play God’ lest the wrath of Nature be unleashed on the mortals below. After all, the domain of Nature, according to received wisdom, stretches all the way over to and has its limits precisely where man’s willful action takes over, inaugurating the realm of culture, an idea so tellingly captured by Lévi Strauss’s (1970) memorable culinary metaphor of ‘the raw and the cooked’.

2. LANGUAGE PLANNING: A FIRST APPROXIMATION

Language planning invariably entails a series of deliberate acts of outside intervention into the affairs of a language with a view to bringing about decisive changes in its current configuration or shaping its future course of development. It is usually put in place by a group of people on the strength of their conviction that they have a stake in safeguarding the language’s maintenance and what they consider its built-in native vitality by protecting it from influences that they consider detrimental to its medium or long-term survival. But it can also be the response to a groundswell of popular clamour. In the words of Shohamy (2006, p. xv):

Language policy falls in the midst of [...] manipulations and battles, between language ideology and practice. It is through a variety of overt and covert *mechanisms*, used mostly (but not exclusively) by those in authority, that languages are being manipulated and controlled so as to affect, create and perpetuate “de facto” language policies, i.e., language practices.

It is also not uncommon to come across cases where interested agents seek to carve out and consolidate a distinct and distinguishable variety of an already existing language and give it ‘a local habitation and a name’ in order to assert a nation’s newly acquired independence and national self-esteem. This often takes place in response to pressing political agendas or covert schemes often with unconfessable goals. No matter where the impulse comes from for such initiatives, the end

result is the codification of certain norms of usage, which consists of prescribing some of the existing usages while proscribing others.

Standard languages in the sense we know them today have all been, at some time in the past, through an arduous and painstakingly planned and executed a process of consolidation, which in turn has invariably involved planned action by concerned individuals or groups of individuals deliberately seeking to intervene in the affairs of the language. Their action has been eminently prescriptive inasmuch as they have striven to promote certain uses while condemning others.

2.1 LPLP AS LANGUAGE POLITICS

Deliberate acts of intervening in the affairs of a language with a view to shaping its future direction of development fall within the realm of what can be captured under the umbrella term ‘language politics’. In Davies’ words (2001, p. 580), “The politics of language concerns policies and decisions about official and standard languages, language planning, language academics, and educational policies”. Such a broad-brush definition would seem to encompass almost everything we do with language. Rightly so, one may hasten to note. The very concept of language is intertwined with politics at some level or another. “Language,” Joseph (2006, p. 20) says, “is political from top to bottom” and is, furthermore, “a political-linguistic-rhetorical construct”.

Now, what is it about language that one is foregrounding when one defines language as inextricably and hence inalienably political? Whatever be the definition of politics one wishes to operate with, what one can ill afford to ignore is that in politics one is invariably dealing with a set of options that present themselves all along one’s path. These embody alternatives, where one is required to weigh the advantages as well as the disadvantages of each of them, before finally making up one’s mind. And, from a retrospective standpoint, one’s decisions can always prove to have been wrong-headed or ill-conceived. But, ultimately, one is responsible for the choices one makes. Because the free exercise of one’s options presupposes an agent fully in control of themselves and who chooses to act according to their own free will.

2.2 LANGUAGE POLITICS VERSUS LANGUAGE SCIENCE

But problems begin to crop up as soon as one ponders what relation, if any, there is or can be between the politics of language, as defined in the foregoing paragraph, and the science of language or the linguistic science. Linguistics, to the extent it claims to be a scientifically oriented academic discipline, is wedded to the idea that it works with facts. From an essentially “classificatory science” (Hockett, 1942), it aspired to the goal of “explanatory adequacy” as a result of the revolution sparked off by Chomsky in the late 1950s, but little has changed over the years regarding the question of the existence of those facts, only issues as to what they really were and where one should look for them. To take a random example from the literature, here is how Postman and Weingartner (1966, p. 5) go about in their effort to drive home the scientific nature of the discipline:

The facts of linguistic science in 1935 may be different from the facts of linguistic science in 1960, which in turn may be different from the facts of linguistic science in 1980. But what remain essentially unchanged and continually productive are the process of inquiry that we define as *linguistics* or, if you will, the *linguistic enterprise*.

If linguistics is fact-based, politics is all about value-judgments. Political decisions are about what ought to be the case rather than how they really are. As for the putative reality of the facts themselves, pundits in political science know all too well that one is dealing with *perceptions* of facts rather than facts themselves (leave aside the million-dollar question of how one gets to grips with those facts as they really and truly are!).

3 TUSSLE BETWEEN THE LINGUIST AND THE LAY PEOPLE

The idea that politics of language needs to take into account perceptions of facts rather than those facts themselves introduces into the equation the figure of the lay person, the ordinary speaker of language – the ultimate ‘perceiver’ of facts –, in respect of whom

linguists usually have an ambiguous attitude. On the one hand, as suppliers of raw data that linguists work with, the lay people are considered of critical importance. But their usefulness stops precisely at that point: furnishing raw data so that the linguist can work on them (cf. Rajagopalan, 2005a, 2012). “The informant,” conceded Robins (1964, p. 364) “[...] is a familiar and necessary part of the study of any living language,” but made a point of adding the proviso: “The informant is not a teacher, nor a linguist; he is simply a native speaker of the language”. In his own way, Chomsky (1965, p. 8) was to reiterate this same position of modern linguistics when he decreed that a truly scientific grammar “attempts to specify what the speaker actually knows, not what he may *report about* his knowledge” (emphasis added). As pointed out by Hutton (1996), contemporary linguistics is founded upon the outright rejection of what the ordinary person thinks or has to say about language.

In point of fact, it is a common assumption held by many linguists even today that the ordinary person’s views about how language works can actually hinder rather than aid the linguist’s task. To be a linguist was, before anything else, to be able to divest oneself of all culturally acquired folk wisdom about language and, from then on, to learn to think about language from scratch. That’s how the whole idea of the ‘clean slate’ approach (Aitchison, 2001, p. 613) became the hallmark of the initiation ceremony of new entrants into the restricted and select community of linguists. The novices were first required to relinquish faith in all false idols of the past (and this included the traditional grammarians, viewed by the majority of linguists as their ideal sparring partners) before embracing the new faith.

In his classic paper entitled ‘Secondary and tertiary responses to language,’ Bloomfield (1944) was anxious to distinguish between what was useful to the linguist’s purposes in the sort of responses given by informants from what he thought was totally irrelevant and hence deserving of being set aside. The science of language required the scientist to be totally objective, and part of what being objective meant was that the investigator should avoid being influenced by the opinions of lay people. And this included their informants, no matter how well educated or otherwise enlightened they might be. The only

responses that are useful to the linguist, wrote Bloomfield in the paper referred to above, are statements made by the native informants *in* their native language. But, every now and then, the native informants are wont to volunteer statements *about* their language – of the kind, say, how their great-great-ancestor had received the gift of language from a mysterious bird that descended from the heavens etc. Such statements *about* their language (as opposed to utterances *in* their language) were what Bloomfield wished to designate by the term ‘secondary responses’.

Several peculiarities of these secondary responses deserve further study. The speaker, when making the secondary responses, shows alertness. His eyes are bright, and he seems to be enjoying himself.... The whole process is, as we say, pleasurable. (Bloomfield, 1944: 48)

Several comments are in order here. Notice, first of all, that Bloomfield’s remarks are couched in what one may characterize as a philosophical posture with regard to what the enterprise of science is all about. Science is a rational enterprise, cold and methodical. There is no room for warmth or mirth. As a matter of fact, Bloomfield writes as if there was sufficient justification in the very fact that the natives appeared to be having a great time talking about their language for arriving at the unmistakable conclusion that what they say could not be considered scientifically admissible. His advice to would-be field linguists is to simply ignore such remarks volunteered by the natives and resist the temptation to make them realize how mistaken they are about such folk beliefs. Here are his own words:

The linguist’s cue in this situation is to observe; but if, giving in to a material impulse (or else, by way of experiment), he tries to enlighten the speaker, he encounters a tertiary response to language. (Bloomfield, 1944: 48)

And the stage of so-called tertiary responses is the one where the natives are on the defensive and switching on to an argumentative, indeed combative, mode:

The tertiary response is hostile; the speaker grows contemptuous or angry. He will impatiently reaffirm the secondary response, or, more often, he will resort to one of a few well-fixed formulas of confutation. (Bloomfield, 1944: 48)

For Bloomfield, to engage the native informant in any form of dialogic exchange at this stage is a sheer waste of the precious time the field linguists have at their disposal. There is little point, he claims, in trying to make the informants change their beliefs. Any attempt to do so will only distract the field linguists from doing what they are there for – collecting data for future analysis.

4 A BRIEF DISCUSSION OF SOME CELEBRATED CASES OF LPLP FROM HISTORY

The ancient Sanskrit grammarian Pānini had an eminently prescriptive goal when he compiled his monumental work *Ashtadhyai*. His aim was to unify a country of continental proportions by ensuring homogeneity in the use of the sacred language of the land, under imminent threat of disintegration. He did that by distilling *Sanskrita* (the purified language) by weeding out all traces of *Prakrita* (the vulgar tongue, coarse and unrefined).

The same guiding spirit can be discerned in the case of Elio Antonio de Nebrija (1771), who produced his monumental *Gramática de la lengua castellana*. Nebrija knew full well the importance of consolidating the language and its grammar, by way of preparing the nation to assume its imperial role in the next few centuries. In the Preface to his compendium, he wrote, addressing Queen Isabella of Spain: “After Your Highness has subjected barbarous peoples and nations of varied tongues, with conquest will come the need for them to accept the laws that the conqueror imposes on the conquered, and among them will be our language” (cited in Kamen, 2002, p. 3).

Likewise, on the other side of the Atlantic, Noah Webster was doing nothing short of declaring the linguistic independence of his country from Great Britain when he published in 1806 his *A Compendious Dictionary of the English Language*, to be followed by *An American Dictionary of the English Language* – something he

believed had not been achieved by the country's declaration political independence three decades earlier. Fast forward to the 20th century and we have scholars like Blommaert (1999a, 1990b, 2013) advancing their ground-breaking studies into how inseparable language has become from its political substrate.

More recently, there has been a spate of case studies demonstrating clearly detectable repercussions of higher level language ideologies on actual language practices on the ground below, such as classroom conduct – described by Karrebæk and Ghandchi (2015, p. 62) as subject to “political sensitivities”. On his part, Achimbe (2013) backs up with a wealth of data from his thesis of the identity construction of Cameroon's citizenry through the carefully choreographed use of language policies, particularly with regard to the delicate balance of its multilingual practices. Subtirelu's (2013) research on chest-pounding language-based nationalism in the U.S. Congress is yet another illustration of how language ideologies help shape language policies that in turn mould and consolidate specific language attitudes.

What all these glaring examples above and a great many others go to prove is that grammarians were engaged in promoting what, at bottom, were political projects, whether or not they explicitly recognized it as such or even were fully aware of it themselves.

5 LINGUISTS AND THEIR DIFFICULTIES IN CONFRONTING THE ISSUE OF LANGUAGE POLICY AND LANGUAGE PLANNING

It is no secret that, ever since their field of interest defined and consolidated itself as *science*, linguists have often been at their wits' end when faced with issues having to do with LPLP. This is because, these issues, as we have just seen, invariably involve active involvement in and deliberate intervention in the way a given language or set of languages in a given geo-political environment is stage-managed. Now, this is in direct conflict with the rallying cry of scientific linguistics that has long prided itself on its purely *descriptive* attitude to its object of analysis, shying away from every temptation to *prescriptively* intervene in its destiny. Here is an excerpt randomly picked up from the literature that proves the point:

Descriptive linguists strive to present a picture of language as complete as possible as it actually exists at a specific point in time and place; they first describe observable facts about a particular spoken and written language and note generalisations about that information (Witkosky, 2009, p. 57).

And he noted further:

Descriptivism became an important trend in linguistics after 1900. Its theories and principles support an open attitude towards language and linguistic study. It is opposed to prescriptivism. The term most often used to refer to a linguistic school of thought in which individuals seek to promote one particular variety of a language, formulate its rules, and enforce adherence to those rules. (*ibid.*)

6 DESCRIPTIVISM AND THE VOLTE-FACE IN ITS APPEAL

True, those who championed the descriptive “attitude” were mostly interested in combating what they saw as the guiding spirit behind the so-called ‘traditional’ grammarians’ effort to promote, misguidedly in their view, certain usages of a given language and proscribing others. But in so drawing the battle lines by declaring war on everything that smacked of a prescriptive attitude and simultaneously defending a tenaciously descriptive one, they distanced themselves from every possibility of actively engaging in LPLP.

The strongest exhortation to fellow linguists to distance themselves from every temptation to get involved in LPLP was signaled by the very title of a best-seller called *Leave Your Language Alone* (Hall, 1950). However, there were some who occasionally gave vent to their reservations regarding the idea to banning all talk of prescriptivism in linguistics. A case in point is a paper by Archibald Hill (1953) with its tell-tale title ‘Prescriptivism and linguistics in English teaching’ wherein he pleads for a more mellowed and nuanced position, namely “[...] what is taught in an English class must be some form of wise and moderate prescriptivism, checked by the limits of fact as established by linguists” (Hill, 1953: 395). But such voices of dissent, no matter how conciliatory and tentative they were, were simply drowned out by the

deafening roar of what had by now become the battle cry of scientific linguistics.

As one of the greatest ironies of academic history would have it, it only took a little over half a century for another linguist of indisputable international recognition and a meritorious trajectory of language activism and interest in LPLP, to publish a book with a title that said exactly the opposite of Hall's: *DO NOT Leave Your Language Alone* (Fishman, 2006). This is what he had to say in the preface to his book:

In earlier and more innocent times, it was widely believed that language, just as any other gift from God, could neither be “planned” nor “improved”. As those times were coming to an end, an attempt was made by Professor Robert A. Hall (1950) to foster the complete disappearance of language planning by harsh criticism, discouraging scholarly activity in the language-planning direction. His book *Leave Your Language Alone!*, now stands as a monument to a bygone age. (Fishman, 2006, p.ix)

6.1 THE PERSISTENCE OF CONTEMPT FOR EVERYTHING PRESCRIPTIVE

However, echoes from that bygone age can be heard even today. The term “prescriptive” still evokes great discomfort among many who would rather eschew its use at any cost. In 2004, Geoffrey Pullum, currently Professor of General Linguistics at the University of Edinburgh, posted a note on *Language Log*, a collaborative language blog maintained by the University of Pennsylvania phonetician Mark Liberman, which said among other things:

Language Log contributors are almost uniformly of the opinion that judgments about what is a linguistic error have to be based on inference from actual evidence about linguistic behavior. What distinguishes prescriptivists from typical professional linguists is the utter contempt prescriptivists show for that principle. (Pullum, 2004)

Interestingly enough, he hastened to add immediately thereafter:

But that doesn't mean that *Language Log* has no business critiquing gross abuse of elementary linguistic terms.

In other words, what Pullum is saying is that everything is up for grabs when it comes to the blanket rule of applying the principle of descriptivism. Except when what is at stake is the linguists' own *metalanguage*, which is where so-called "terms" of linguistics are to be located. Here prescriptivism based on linguists' own considered judgment can be said to apply and settle matters one way or another. That is to say, linguists are a special category unto themselves and they can be allowed to be prescriptive about the meanings they assign to the terms of their trade and dictate as to how everyone else should be using them.

As it is not my objective here to press the case referred to in the foregoing paragraph any further, I shall move into the larger context of this tension between descriptivism on the one hand and everything else that does not answer to its rigid definition, collectively referred to as prescriptivism – yet another proof of the wisdom contained in the old adage that says "One can always give a dog a bad name and hang it".

6.2 DESCRIPTIVISM/PRESCRIPTIVISM OPPOSITION AND ITS ROOTS IN THE FACT/VALUE DIVIDE

The roots of the distinction between description and prescription that contemporary linguistics vigorously espouses can be traced to the ontological divide defended by many in modern philosophy between facts and values, between what *is* and what *ought to be*. David Hume (1910) is widely credited to have been one of the first philosophers to have explicitly argued the case that conclusions that have to do with value judgments cannot be inferred logically from factual premises. The terms 'positive' and 'normative' are sometimes used alternatively for the two types of statement, the first pointing out facts and the second making claims based on values or norms. In what has been characterized as a closely related argument, G.E. Moore (1903) defended the thesis of 'naturalistic fallacy', which would result from a violation of the injunction proposed by Hume. Simply put, it has to do with the belief, erroneous in Moore's view, that what is natural is *ipso facto* good.

It does not take one a long stretch of the imagination to realize that the distinction that is so dear to contemporary linguists between description and prescription is only one of the several guises in which the

philosophers' distinction between facts and values manifests itself. This 'description/prescription' distinction has been used by the forefathers of modern linguistics to defend the scientific claims of their field of enquiry (i.e. its total objectivity and value-neutrality) and, especially in the early days when the discipline was struggling to establish itself as a respectable field, to distinguish its *modus operandi* from what it considered competing and ill-conceived approaches such as that of so-called 'traditional grammarians' – chastised vociferously as harbouring long-nurtured social prejudices and thoroughly unscientific value-judgments entertained by ordinary, unsuspecting speakers.

7 WHY THE LINGUIST IS AT A LOSS WHEN FACED WITH ISSUES OF LANGUAGE POLITICS

Owing to their unwavering commitment to the principle of descriptivism, the professional linguist is hard put to face up to the fact that many, in fact most, of the language-related questions that are of direct interest to the lay people are infused with political implications. Thus Schalkwyk (2005, p. 98) speaks of "the malaise of modern linguistics: its refusal, in the name of its scientific credentials, to acknowledge the normative character of language." And he goes on to denounce that

[...] this refusal has extremely wide-ranging ramifications. It goes to the very heart of the enterprise of professional linguistics. It is the sign of a systematic blindness, a rigidly dogmatic myopia that arises less from any set of findings or arguments than an obdurate will to keep posing the wrong questions, to remain trapped in a repetitively false set of rhetorical moves. (*ibid.*)

7.1 A QUICK LOOK AT A CAUSE CÉLÈBRE FROM RECENT HISTORY IN BRAZIL

The discrepancy between the interests of the linguist and the lay speaker often leads to heated public debates, almost invariably resulting in a total stalemate and growing distrust between the two sides. The linguist complains that the lay people at large are impervious to their scientifically well-grounded arguments and would rather be guided

by their own ‘folk’ wisdom. The lay person is equally confident in their conviction that the linguist is a self-styled expert who entertains unearthly beliefs about language and willing to vouch for them at any cost. The examples of head-on collisions involving the two are legion all over the world. In Brazil, a noisy controversy was sparked off in 1999 by a Federal Congressman by name Aldo Rebelo (1999) when he proposed a bill banning the use of English in practically every sphere of public life, barring a handful of obvious cases such as foreign language teaching and so forth.

I have discussed elsewhere the aftermath of the heated controversy that took place in the wake of Rebelo’s bill (Rajagopalan, 2002, 2005b, 2008) and will not go into the details here. In hindsight, it seems fair to say that the controversy produced more heat than light as each side refused to budge and stuck to its own guns, as they usually do on such occasions. My 2002 paper that analysed the arguments on both sides in some detail and raised the prospect of linguistics itself becoming largely irrelevant in the public eye for failing to answer to their concerns of language loyalty was later transformed into an edited volume which I published in Portuguese four years later, incorporating into the volume comments from colleagues from Brazil as well as from several other countries across the world.

In his contribution to the volume, Milroy (2004, p.99)¹ wrote:

[The linguists’] attempts at influencing the public on these issues have in general been lamentable failures, and the reason for these failures is obvious. They have almost always taken a *deficit* view of the public understanding of science. The public are assumed to be deficient in their knowledge, so they have to be corrected by those who know best, and the people who know best are – obviously – professional linguists. Therefore, these linguists commonly talk down to the general public and patronize them.

And he went on to note further:

With hindsight we can easily see that Bloomfield’s position was very patronizing to ordinary speakers, and views similar to Bloomfield’s are still being expressed today. But it is perhaps even worse that linguists

have also claimed to be *objective* in their pronouncements, when in fact their positions are almost necessarily ideological also. (*id. ibid.*)

On his part, Chilton (2004, p.132)² took the discussion a notch further when he pointed out that

[...] linguists cannot really contribute much to the political debate by drawing from their scientific research into the nature of the human language capacity. All they can do is *participate* in the social and political debate, and use as much common sense and logic as any one else is capable of.

8 CONCLUDING REMARKS

As I have attempted to show in this paper professional linguists are all too commonly caught with their pants down as they confront problems that fall within the province of what one might broadly call the politics of language. This is because politics is an area where prudence and a certain pragmatic attitude towards tackling issues are called for and where the mostly deterministic rules of science are seldom operative. Furthermore, politics is a game played in the *polis*, the public space where the expert and the non-specialist, or in our case, the linguist and the lay person, have or ought to have an equal voice and the right to be heard and respected, no matter how unearthly or weird their opinions on the matter may happen to be. This means linguists cannot have it both ways. One cannot meaningfully engage in language politics, while at the same time steadfastly and single-mindedly pursuing the scientific objective of remaining objective, value-neutral and a-political.

8.1 POSTSCRIPT

A possible objection to the analysis offered in the foregoing paragraphs regarding the dilemmas that linguists face as they contemplate routine language-related issues with clear political underpinnings would be the very existence of the undeniable truism that, over the years, many prominent linguists have had a decisive role in influencing public decisions and setting right distortions they detect in existing language

policies. While I would hardly dispute the fact itself (corroborated by the three cases highlighted in Section 4 above), what I would like to ask is to what extent their political actions can be regarded as being straightforwardly following from their work as language scientists. I would rather claim that, in getting involved in matters of political interest involving language, many professional linguists are acting in their capacity as citizens like everyone else, whose bounden duty it is to contribute to streamlining major language policies (or, for that matter, any other policy of national interest) being enacted in their country, not in their capacity as linguists, that is, as specialists who have an academic interest in coming to a *scientific* understanding of what language is and how it functions and who are committed to keeping all their *political* interests at bay. In other words, any expertise in the science of language, no matter how authoritative it might be, does not automatically entitle them to have any special say in language politics. Unfortunately, this crucial fact seems to pass unnoticed most of the time in the relevant literature.

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NOTES

- 1,2. Both these quotes contain the wording originally used by their respective authors, as the published versions of the texts were translations into Portuguese from the manuscripts originally submitted by them in English.

DILEMAS DO LINGUISTA DESCRITIVO QUANDO CONFRONTADO COM O DESAFIO DE PLANEJAMENTO LÍNGUA

RESUMO:

Argumenta-se neste artigo que o linguista fica perdido quando se trata de enfrentar os desafios colocados pela política linguística e planejamento

linguístico e, além disso, que isso tem a ver com a sua relutância em reconhecer o papel da prescrição na fase de gestão da vida social das línguas. Sua adesão firme ao princípio da descrição rigorosa dos fatos e na melhor das hipóteses uma tentativa de explicá-las tem limitado a sua capacidade de intervir no destino de uma língua que é o que a política linguística é tudo. Também defende que exista um diálogo frutífero entre o linguista e o leigo.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: política linguística, planejamento linguístico, descrição X prescrição, linguista X leigo, políticas linguísticas.

LOS DILEMAS DEL LINGÜISTA DESCRIPTIVISTA CUANDO SE ENFRENTAN CON EL DESAFÍO DE LA PLANIFICACIÓN LINGÜÍSTICA

RESUMEN:

Se argumenta en este artículo que el lingüista se pierde cuando se trata de enfrentar los desafíos de la política lingüística y planificación lingüística y, por otra parte, tiene eso que ver con su renuencia a reconocer el papel de la prescripción en la fase de gestión la vida social de idiomas. Su firme adhesión al principio de la descripción precisa de los hechos, y en el mejor de un intento de explicar los, ha limitado su capacidad de intervenir en el destino de una lengua que es la política lingüística. También sostiene que hay un diálogo fructífero entre el lingüista y el profano.

PALABRAS CLAVE: política lingüística, la planificación lingüística, Descripción X receta, lingüista X laico, políticas lingüísticas.

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