

Linguistic Planning and Its Relationship to Language Policy

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Abstract:

This study addresses the issue of linguistic planning and language policy, and examines their impact on the role of language in shaping its status and its relationship with other languages. Language evolves in response to changes in its social conditions, circumstances, and historical context, given that languages are in a state of continuous transformation. Such development may lead to either positive or negative outcomes. In the present context, our language requires deliberate intervention by relevant stakeholders, as the absence of such intervention may result in younger generations becoming disconnected from their linguistic heritage. Accordingly, this study explores the concept of linguistic planning and its relationship to language policy through defining both concepts, identifying their objectives, and discussing the overlapping and synonymous terminology associated with them.

Keywords: planning; linguistic; relationship; language policy.

First: Linguistic Planning between the Linguistic and Terminological Concepts

A. Linguistic (Lexical) Perspective:

Classical Arabic lexicographical sources agree that the concept of *planning* (*takhṭīṭ*) fundamentally denotes the act of drawing lines or marking something. Al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī defines *takhṭīṭ* as derived from the verb *khattā* (to draw or write), explaining that *al-khatt* refers to land associated with certain winds, hence expressions such as *rimāḥ khattīyya* (well-crafted spears), and that *takhṭīṭ* is analogous

to lining or ruling. He further notes that *kh att* signifies writing, marking, or inscribing, and that writing itself is a form of *khatt*.

Al-Jawharī concurs with al-Farāhīdī's definitions, stating that *al-khatt* denotes a line, a written line, or a marked place, and that *khattā al-qalam* means to rule with the pen and to write. He also associates *al-khiṭṭa* with an affair, a plan, or a matter of concern.

Similarly, Ibn Manẓūr follows the same line of interpretation in *Lisān al-ʿArab*, defining *takhṭīṭ* as derived from the trilateral root (خ ط ط). He explains that *khattā* means to write with a pen or other instrument, and that *takhṭīṭ* signifies ruling or lining. He cites the narration of Muʿāwiya ibn al-Ḥakam, who asked the Prophet (peace be upon him) about *al-khatt*, to which the Prophet replied that a prophet before him used to draw lines, and whoever coincided with his line possessed knowledge similar to his—thus associating *al-khatt* with writing and inscription.

In contemporary usage, *linguistic planning* (also referred to as *language engineering*) is understood as a deliberate effort to influence the function, structure, or acquisition of languages or language varieties within a speech community. Robert L. Cooper (1989) defines linguistic planning as “the activity of preparing a normative orthography, grammar, and dictionary to guide writers and speakers in a non-homogeneous speech community.” Alongside language ideology and language practices, linguistic planning constitutes a core component of language policy, a framework inspired by Bernard Spolsky's theory of

language policy. According to Spolsky, *language management* is a more precise term than linguistic planning, as it refers to “explicit and observable efforts by individuals or groups who have or claim authority over participants in a domain to modify practices or beliefs.”

Linguistic planning is often associated with governmental action; however, it is also undertaken by a wide range of non-governmental organizations, grassroots movements, and even individuals. Its objectives vary: it may promote more effective communication through the adoption of a dominant language, bring economic benefits to minority groups, or, conversely, be perceived as facilitating political dominance. Linguistic planning involves the establishment of language regulators—such as official or unofficial agencies, committees, associations, or academies—tasked with designing or developing new linguistic structures to meet contemporary needs.

Modern scholars have expanded the concept of planning to reflect practical realities of life. *Al-Mu‘jam al-Wasīṭ* defines planning as a concept linked to real-world application, describing it as outlining or sketching in drawing and design, or as an idea fixed through a drawing or written scheme that does not necessarily require perfection, but rather represents a well-considered plan encompassing various aspects of life.

The Arab Organization’s definition further elaborates this view, explaining that *planning*, linguistically derived from the verb *khatta*, refers to writing, marking, drawing signs, or assuming responsibility. Terminologically, it is defined as the formulation of a well-studied plan across economic, educational, productive, and other sectors, implemented within a specified timeframe—hence terms such as economic planning, educational planning, and linguistic planning.

Based on these lexicographical definitions, planning can be understood as a systematic method of outlining and structuring actions with the aim of opening new horizons and

achieving more effective and successful outcomes.

b- Scholars have offered diverse definitions of *planning* according to their intellectual backgrounds and academic orientations; consequently, concepts have multiplied and varied. For this reason, it is necessary to examine these perspectives before addressing the concept of *linguistic planning* itself.

Sociologists, foremost among them Briev (Brav), have defined planning from a social-environmental perspective. They view planning as “a process of mobilizing forces, coordinating efforts, and organizing social activity within a unified framework, through the integration of objectives, the unification of positions, and the exploitation of expertise, information, intellectual and scientific capacities, and environmental resources, while benefiting from past experiences and present means in order to achieve a better social life.” Planning, in this sense, is an integrative system in which all efforts converge.

Management scholars, however, add another essential element to planning: goals and objectives. They define planning as “the determination of actions or activities, the estimation of resources, and the selection of the best means to utilize them in order to achieve specific and defined objectives.” Here, planning is directly linked to clearly articulated aims and purposes.

Educational theorists associate planning with the field of education and learning, considering it “a continuous process that incorporates methods of social research as well as principles and approaches from pedagogy, management sciences, and economics, with the ultimate aim of achieving learners’ cognitive attainment.”

Definitions of planning among linguists also vary. Western linguists generally agree that linguistic planning emerged as a response to linguistic problems, aiming at language development and the teaching and learning of languages. Within this framework, the linguist Weisten argues that linguistic planning refers to “long-term, continuous efforts undertaken

by the state to change the functions of a language within society, in order to provide solutions to problems related to communication and conceptual understanding among members of the community.” In other words, linguistic planning focuses on the communicative functions of language.

Teil shares Weisten’s perspective, defining linguistic planning as “an activity aimed at improving linguistic innovations.” Haugen, for his part, offers another definition, viewing linguistic planning as “the process of preparing, standardizing, and codifying writing, as well as compiling dictionaries to guide writers and individuals within a linguistically heterogeneous society.” This definition emphasizes linguistic rules, grammatical regulation, and the development of the communicative lexicon.

Fishman and Jean-Louis Calvet depart from these earlier definitions by introducing an additional dimension: politics. They argue that linguistic planning means “the implementation of a specific language policy through certain means in order to achieve defined objectives.” Thus, they explicitly link linguistic planning to political decision-making.

Arab linguists have also provided numerous definitions of linguistic planning, marked by considerable diversity. Khawla Taleb Al-Ibrahimi, for instance, links linguistic planning to the educational domain and to the policies adopted by a given country. She defines it as “an attempt to exercise various forms of influence with the aim of shaping languages in a more rapid, intensive, and systematic manner; it is a methodology for organizing and improving existing languages at regional, national, or international levels.” In this view, linguistic planning is closely connected to education.

Abdelkader Fassi Fehri, on the other hand, relates linguistic planning to the economic and political realities of society. He argues that “linguistic planning represents conscious human intervention in the process of language choice within a given environment. Although there is no single scientific theory of linguistic

planning, existing studies have largely relied on sociolinguistic frameworks. However, economic theory offers a new perspective and provides effective tools and methodologies that enable a scientific evaluation of a given language policy and allow judgments as to whether it is successful or deficient.” This view highlights the influence of economic, social, and cultural factors on linguistic planning.

The *Dictionary of Modern Linguistics* defines linguistic planning as “an activity that directs organized action at the official level, aiming to solve linguistic problems specific to a particular society, usually at the national level.” Accordingly, the objective of linguistic planning is to address both linguistic and non-linguistic problems.

From these definitions, several shared characteristics of planning can be identified:

- Planning represents a systematic, scientific method of action with defined mechanisms.
- It involves the optimal use of available resources and capacities, alongside forecasting a more prosperous future.
- It entails setting objectives to be achieved in the future.

Based on the above, linguistic planning may be defined as a political decision grounded in a set of scientific measures and procedures, undertaken by supervisory or responsible authorities, with the aim of anticipating a better future through the effective management and resolution of language-related problems.

Second: Objectives of Linguistic Planning

Eleven main objectives of linguistic planning have been identified:

1. **Language purification** – the description and regulation of usage norms in order to preserve the “linguistic purity” of a language, protect it from foreign influences, and guard against perceived internal linguistic deviation.

2. **Language revival** – an attempt to restore the widespread use of a language spoken by only a small number of speakers, or no longer spoken at all.
3. **Language reform** – a deliberate modification of specific linguistic or extralinguistic elements, such as grammar and orthography, with the aim of facilitating use.
4. **Language unification** – an effort to mobilize prestige for a particular language or regional variety and establish it as the standard language of a given region.
5. **Language spread** – an attempt to increase the number of speakers of a given language.
6. **Lexical modernization** – the creation or adaptation of lexical items to meet new communicative needs.
7. **Terminological standardization** – the development of unified terminology, particularly in technical and scientific fields.
8. **Stylistic simplification** – simplifying language use at the levels of vocabulary, grammar, and style; this includes modifying language use in both social and formal contexts.
9. **Interlinguistic communication** – facilitating linguistic communication among members of distinct speech communities.
10. **Language maintenance** – preserving a community's mother tongue as a first or second language when external pressures threaten its status or lead to its decline.
11. **Auxiliary symbolic standardization** – standardizing marginal or auxiliary aspects of language, such as sign language systems, place names, and rules of translation and transliteration.

Third: Types of Linguistic Planning

1. Corpus Planning (Language Structure Planning):

This type of planning focuses on the internal dimensions of the language itself. It addresses purely linguistic aspects related to grammar, stylistic norms, vocabulary, terminology, lexicography, and linguistic borrowing. Linguists and language specialists are best equipped to carry out this form of planning, as it involves exclusively linguistic dimensions.

2. Status Planning:

This type of planning concentrates on the cultural and social dimensions associated with the status, prestige, and societal position of a language. Linguists, psychologists, and sociologists can make significant contributions to this area of planning.

3. Language Acquisition Planning:

This form of planning centers on factors related to language acquisition, re-acquisition, maintenance, and preservation. It constitutes a domain shared by specialists in linguistics, language studies, education, and psychology.

From these perspectives, it can be concluded that linguistic planning seeks to provide practical solutions to linguistic problems faced by states whose linguistic and national identities have been undermined as a result of colonialism. It also aims to identify the necessary means for implementing language policy and to put these means into practice. Any decision adopted in this context represents a choice within language policy, as illustrated, for example, by the decision to implement Arabization.

Fourth: Language Policy

In Arabic lexicographical sources, *al-siyāsa* (policy) is derived from the verb *sāsa-yasūsu siyāsatan*. In *Lisān al-'Arab*, its root (*s-w-s*)

denotes governance and management. *Siyāsa* is defined as the act of the governor (*al-sā'is*); it is said *yasūsu al-dawābb* when one takes care of animals and trains them. Policy thus signifies managing and administering a matter in a way that ensures its proper functioning; a ruler governs his subjects, and to *sāsa lahu amran* means to regulate or manage an affair prudently.

The same source notes the verb *laghā-yalghū*, meaning to speak idly or incoherently. In the Prophetic tradition, “Whoever says ‘be quiet’ during the Friday sermon has engaged in idle speech (*laghā*),” that is, he has spoken improperly.

As a concept, *policy* has been defined by Ibn Sīnā as sound self-governance and collective management, as well as the reform of corruption, which he considers the path to happiness. Policy, therefore, is not the exclusive domain of rulers, although they are the most entitled to master it; rather, every individual within society practices policy in managing personal affairs, and people’s need for policy is no less than that of rulers. Ibn Bādīs defines policy as the management of societal affairs according to the principles of justice and benevolence. The *Philosophical Dictionary* defines it as a branch of civic science that examines the foundations of governance and the organization of state affairs. In Western thought, political definitions are numerous; many of them are compiled by Abdelwahab Al-Kayyali in his *Encyclopedia of Politics*. The diversity of these definitions reflects the plurality of intellectual trends and perspectives.

The term *language* has also been defined in countless ways by both Arab and Western scholars. However, modern linguistic studies have confirmed that these definitions essentially converge with that of Ibn Jinnī, who states in *Al-Khaṣā'is*: “Language consists of sounds by which each community expresses its purposes.”

Definition of Language Policy

The term *language policy* is a simple descriptive compound translated into Arabic from a corresponding foreign compound: *politique linguistique* in French and *language policy* in English. Jean-Louis Calvet defines language policy as “the totality of conscious choices made in the field of relationships between language and social life, and more specifically between language and life within the nation.”

Fifth: Terms Synonymous with Language Policy and Linguistic Planning

As these two concepts developed, they underwent several terminological shifts within linguistic studies. Numerous terms have been used synonymously, some older and others more recent. Among these are the following:

1. **Linguistic Problems** (*Problème linguistique / Linguistic problems*): This concept first emerged in Colombia in 1968. At that time, linguists employed the term *linguistic problems* to refer to what would later be conceptualized as language planning and language policy. As its features began to appear in the works of sociolinguists such as Fishman, Ferguson, and Gupta, the main objective was to highlight the role of language in rebuilding societies affected by colonialism. The term *linguistic problems* was thus used to describe language-related issues arising in post-colonial contexts and the need for systematic intervention to address them.
2. **2. Language Planning / Aménagement linguistique**
3. This term is one of the concepts used in linguistic literature as a synonym for the two preceding notions. It emerged in the 1970s in Canada through the work of the linguist Jean-Claude Corbeil during his participation in drafting the Charter of the French Language in the province of Quebec in 1977. The term refers to the organization of the social positions and

functions of language resulting from either internal (self-regulatory) or external regulation, with the aim of managing the use of languages within a specific social space.

4. Linguistic Purism

(Le purisme de la langue / Linguistic purism)

Purism (purisme) is a cultural doctrine that seeks to fix a particular stage in the development of a language or an art form as an ideal model to be emulated. In the French language and its literature, purism emerged in the seventeenth century, a designation first used by Jean Chapelain to refer to a group of linguists concerned with establishing the principles of linguistic purity in French.

The views of this group extended beyond grammatical rules to encompass society as a whole. They argued that language and literary genres required regulatory norms similar to those governing social relations. In 1635, linguistic purism achieved a major institutional victory with the establishment of the *Académie française*, which was entrusted with the responsibility of formulating correct rules for the French language so that it might become a refined, elegant language capable of expressing the entirety of the sciences and the arts.

Linguistic purism, in particular, refers to a metalinguistic practice that establishes a contrast between two opposing linguistic systems: the vernacular or popular variety, and the elite or prestigious variety.

4. Language Management (*Language management / Gestion des langues*)

Language management is a linguistic theory whose roots lie in the theory of “language correction” developed in 1978.

It was further elaborated during the 1970s and 1980s by linguists such as Jernudd and Neustupný as an extension and complement to traditional language planning theory. While earlier approaches focused primarily on classical notions of linguistic planning, contemporary language management theory has expanded its scope to encompass not only language as a whole and linguistic knowledge in the narrow, traditional sense, but also a wide range of additional issues. These include discourse, literature, intercultural communication, emerging concerns in literacy studies, speech therapy, literary criticism, and related fields.

5. Other Related Concepts: Linguistic Regulation, Linguistic Security, and Glottopolitics

(Régulation linguistique – Sécurité linguistique – Glottopolitique)

Beyond classical notions of linguistic planning and language policy, contemporary linguistic scholarship has introduced additional concepts that aim to capture more subtle, dynamic, and continuous forms of intervention in language use. Among the most significant of these are *linguistic regulation*, *linguistic security*, and *glottopolitics*.

Linguistic regulation (*régulation linguistique*) refers to an ongoing process of monitoring, guiding, and adjusting linguistic practices as they naturally evolve within society. Unlike traditional linguistic planning, which often relies on formal, institutionalized decisions, linguistic regulation emphasizes continuity rather than episodic intervention. It focuses on observing changes in language usage, identifying emerging deviations or shifts, and responding to them through flexible mechanisms rather than rigid norms. This concept is widely employed by French linguists, particularly in sociolinguistic

traditions that emphasize language as a living, socially embedded system.

Closely related to linguistic regulation is the notion of **linguistic security** (*sécurité linguistique*), which addresses the collective perception of confidence or insecurity speakers experience toward their language. Linguistic insecurity arises when speakers perceive their language or variety as inferior, illegitimate, or threatened—often as a result of domination by another language in education, administration, media, or the economy. Linguistic security, therefore, is not merely a linguistic issue but a deeply sociopolitical and psychological one. Ensuring linguistic security involves reinforcing the legitimacy, prestige, and functional adequacy of a language, thereby empowering speakers and strengthening social cohesion. This concept has proven particularly relevant in post-colonial contexts, where inherited linguistic hierarchies continue to shape language attitudes and practices.

The concept of **glottopolitics** (*glottopolitique*), introduced by Jean-Baptiste Marcellesi and Louis Guespin, represents a broader and more critical framework. Glottopolitics refers to all forms of social intervention in language, whether explicit or implicit, institutional or informal. It encompasses not only state-led language policies but also the linguistic actions of social groups, media, educational institutions, and even individuals. In this sense, glottopolitics extends beyond formal planning to include ideological struggles, symbolic power relations, and discursive practices that shape linguistic behavior.

What distinguishes glottopolitics from classical linguistic planning is its recognition that language governance is not confined to official decisions or legal frameworks. Instead, it operates across multiple levels of society and is embedded

in everyday interactions, cultural production, and symbolic representations. Glottopolitics thus provides a more comprehensive analytical tool for understanding how languages are regulated, contested, and transformed within social spaces.

Taken together, these concepts highlight a shift from a prescriptive, top-down understanding of language intervention toward a more dynamic, interactional, and socially grounded perspective. They acknowledge that language change cannot be fully controlled through formal planning alone and that effective language policy must account for social practices, power relations, and speaker agency.

Conclusion

Language policy and linguistic planning occupy a central position in shaping the life of language at all levels—structural, semantic, functional, and symbolic. Their significance extends beyond the mere organization of linguistic forms to encompass the regulation of language use, the management of multilingualism, and the construction of linguistic legitimacy within society.

At the structural and formal level, linguistic planning intervenes in grammar, orthography, terminology, and lexicon, ensuring the adaptability of language to scientific, technological, and cultural developments. At the semantic and communicative level, it seeks to preserve clarity, precision, and expressive capacity, enabling language to function effectively across diverse domains of modern life. At the dialectal level, it plays a decisive role in managing variation, either by promoting a standard variety, protecting regional forms, or negotiating coexistence between them.

More fundamentally, language policy and planning are crucial in organizing

relationships between languages in contexts of multilingualism. They determine whether linguistic diversity is perceived as a resource or as a problem, and whether coexistence is managed through inclusion, hierarchy, or exclusion. In educational systems, language policy governs the choice of languages of instruction, literacy development, and access to knowledge. In media and public communication, it shapes visibility, representation, and symbolic power.

In post-colonial societies in particular, linguistic planning assumes an additional historical and political dimension. It becomes a strategic instrument for restoring linguistic and cultural identity, correcting inherited imbalances, and resisting linguistic marginalization. Decisions such as Arabization, bilingual education, or the recognition of minority languages are not neutral technical measures; they are deeply political choices that reflect broader visions of nationhood, social justice, and cultural sovereignty.

Moreover, contemporary approaches—such as linguistic regulation, linguistic security, and glottopolitics—underscore that language policy cannot be reduced to legal texts or institutional declarations. Language lives through its speakers, and any sustainable policy must engage with their practices, attitudes, and perceptions. Effective language policy, therefore, requires coherence between planning objectives, social realities, and ideological orientations.

In sum, language policy and linguistic planning are not optional or marginal concerns. They are strategic tools that shape the future of languages, the balance of power between linguistic communities, and the very conditions of social communication. Ignoring them leads to linguistic erosion, social fragmentation, and cultural dependency, whereas informed, context-sensitive planning offers

the possibility of linguistic vitality, equity, and long-term sustainability.

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