

*Global Perspectives on Language Ideology & Policy*

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*“[...] Article 23*

- 1. Children belonging to the populations concerned shall be taught to read and write in their mother tongue or, where this is not practical, in the language most commonly used by the group to which they belong.*
- 2. Provision shall be made for a progressive transition from the mother tongue or the vernacular language to the national language or to one of the official languages of the country.*
- 3. Appropriate measures shall, as far as possible, be taken to preserve the mother tongue or the vernacular language. [...]*”

The language debate has been at the forefront of the United States’ social, economic, and political policies from its nascent escalation to independence in 1776 to present day struggle to embrace the culturally and linguistically diverse citizens that call America, home. According to the 2000 US Census, there are over 215 million people living in the United States. Of the total population, 82.1% speak English, 10.7% speak Spanish or Spanish Creole, and the rest of the 7.2 % of the population speak one of the 174 other languages that are present in the United States. Though the United States has not formally declared English as an official language, 23 States have implemented Official English Laws. As a result of the United States not having a clear language policy, language policies have been interpreted and mandated in schools and society as English only. The social, economic, and political implications, as a result of an undefined language policy, stifle the language development of more than 46 million people.

America is at a crossroad in how it chooses to deal with the myriad of languages that exists in our schools and greater communities. America can choose to recognize and embrace language diversity, valuing language as an asset, or suppress the more than 176

languages, and in doing so engage in what Hall and Eggington termed, “linguicism,” an act of language genocide. Crawford in his book, *At War with Diversity*, echoes the need for a clear language policy and states America’s language struggles when he says, “Whether one relishes or despises diversity-or could care less-is a personal value judgment. Like it or not, however, bilingualism is a reality. The United States needs a coherent policy for managing its costs and benefits (p.2)” In order to disseminate and better understand the current language policies and to propose the future outlook of language policies in the United States to meet the linguistic needs of America, I will look at the International Labour Organization’s language rights, as outlined in Article 23. In this paper, I will analyze the ideology of the language rights, as outlined by Article 23 and apply it in my discussion of what American language policy has looked like in the past and propose what linguistic outcomes might look like for the future, with thoughtful interventions supporting the ideology that informs the interpretation of the International Labour Organization’s Article 23 on language rights.

The language rights that are outlined in Article 23 were written with the intention that the interpretations of the rights can be flexible to meet the linguistic needs of national, state, and local institutions. The success measure of any language policy is not in what is written, but rather in how it is interpreted. Article 23’s outline of language rights is open-ended so as to not constrain or limit policy makers’ interpretations. Crawford recognizes the intricate and complicated connections of language policies when he writes,

“Language conflicts generally incorporate symbolic struggles over cultural, religious, ethnic, or national identity. Yet they represent more than contending philosophies of assimilation and pluralism, disagreements about the rights and responsibilities of citizens, or debates over the true meaning of ‘Americanism.’ Ultimately language politics are determined by material interests-struggles for social and economic supremacy-which normally lurk beneath the surface of public debate (p.10).”

Hall and Egginton in *The Sociopolitics of English Language Teaching* summarize Crawford’s language policy theory stating, “Attitudes towards these other languages fluctuate with the economic, social, and political realities of the moment (p.46).” The open-ended interpretations of Article 23 reside in words and phrases as: *the population concerned, where it is not practical, language commonly used, to which they belong, provisions, appropriate measures, preserve*. These words and phrases are laden with cultural and social values; thus, presenting the interpreters of language rights with an uncompromising paradox. At first glance, the Article appears to have been written with a progressive language ideology that values language pluralism and see language diversity as an asset. However, in analyzing the words that are used to articulate language rights, the underlying ideology of Article 23 is of assimilation, where economic, personal, and social interests are the foundation of “ideological hegemony.”

The United States’ past and present language policies have been dominated and driven by the economic and political interests of the dominant English language users. Some concrete examples of how the United States’ ideological hegemony has played out in historical linguicism include the disastrous attempts of “Americanization” through forced language assimilation of American Indians, Pennsylvanian Germans, Louisianan

French, Californios, Puerto Ricans, and Native Hawaiians. These historical language battles ended in the repression of minority languages based on the notion of language pluralism as subtractive and "...minor irritant, to be remedied when necessary on an ad hoc basis (Crawford, p.2)." Though the language battles of the past have shown us how oppressive and deleterious ideological hegemony has on language pluralism, language policy makers today remain indifferent to the need for a coherent language policy that should nurture and value language pluralism as an additive advantage to the economic and social prosperity of the United States' future. Today's language policy makers need to recognize that, "Language has seldom functioned as a symbolic identifier in the United States, as an emblem of national pride or a badge of exclusivity. America's founders generally espoused an ideological brand of nationalism that stressed agreement on democratic principles rather than bonds of ethnicity (Morris, 1987; Heath, 1992)." Too often, knowing English has been equated with being a patriotic American, when diversity and tolerance is the crux that set America apart from other nations.

The social and political implications as a result of language rights for the 176 plus languages that are spoken in the United States today as outlined by Article 23 challenge language policy makers with a paradox puzzle; how to tear down the ideological hegemony of English users through progressive means without resorting to an assimilation model that destroys the language diversity characteristic of American society that has the potential to give America the social, political, and economic advantage in a world that demands and values multilingualism. There is an urgency for a coherent language policy in the United States because as Crawford illustrates, "Increasingly, it is politics, not pedagogy, that determines how children are taught (p.3)." It seems, that in

order to establish a clear, equitable, and coherent language policy to meet the demanding needs of language communities that exist in the United States, it is necessary to reframe the struggle for language rights and recognize that it is the dominant ideology, informing language policies, that is the culprit underlying the struggle for a progressive and “opportunistic period” in language policy as Baker has outlined; where the focus is on “cultural pluralism and equal opportunities (p.39).” A national language policy needs to be rooted in an ideology of inclusion, not exclusion, as Schmid has pointed out, where there is a “clash between a dominant and minority culture.” However, policy makers and those who implement the policies need to be aware of the varying levels of “ideological hegemony” that has the potential to manifest itself even within different minority groups of varying sizes and agendas.

The current state of developing a coherent language policy in the United States is haphazard in neither maintaining or nurturing language pluralism, rather there is a shift to operating in a monolingual paradigm to maintain the status quo of English only dominance. Hall and Eggington advise that, “The system of squandered bilingualism must be replaced with a model of human resources that invests in linguistic and cultural diversity, sees home languages and cultures as an asset, and sees language minority students and their families as a precious resource (p. 127).” In making this statement, Hall and Eggington are imploring a sound language policy where dialogic pedagogy serve as a foundation for encouraging and maintaining linguistic pluralism. Furthermore, a language policy that engages all language speakers through dialogue, with a common goal for language pluralism, not a dialogue burdened by rhetoric that isolates rather than unify people and their beliefs and values. Essentially, only through constructive

conversations, can all stake holders of a coherent language policy benefit from a ‘quality education (Cadiero-Kaplan, p.20).’

If the United States were to adopt a language policy based on the language rights as outlined by Article 23 of the International Labour Organization, it would have to articulate a consistent policy that would be both progressive as well as balanced assimilation. In interpreting Article 23’s mandates on language rights, the United States would need to interpret it on the notion that, “Language learning is not the end in itself but rather a means for participants to shape their reality (Hall & Eggington, p.148).” In doing so, the United States would need to move from a monolingual language policy that has monolingual English outcome, to adapting a language policy with a global perspective where there would be an English monolingual language policy with a multilingual outcome. The resulting interpretation of Article 23 of a monolingual policy with a multilingual outcome is made based on two premises. One, this policy recognizes the social, political, economical, and ‘cultural capital’ that comes with knowing how to navigate in a society that is predominantly English speaking. Two, with the aim of a multilingual linguistic outcome, the policy acknowledges the true diversity that exists throughout America. Moreover, the focus of a multilingual outcome gives the individual States and local institutions the ability to tailor their language policy to meet the needs of their diverse population. If a State needs to modify their language policy for bilingual outcome, they can be given the right to do so. A language policy cannot be constrained by a narrow language policy that is unable to adapt to the variable demographic that fluctuates based on social, political, and economic factors. Furthermore, as Magnet points out,

“The right to utilize a language is absolutely empty of content unless it implies a linguistic community which understands the speaker and with whom that speaker can communicate...Language rights are collective rights. They are exercised by individuals only as part of a collectivity or a group. Legal protection of language rights, therefore means protection of that linguistic community, that community of speakers and hearers, *vis-à-vis* the larger community which would impinge upon it or restrict its right as a group to exist (p. 293).”

Magnet’s emphasis on language community as an essential factor in maintaining and nurturing language pluralism validates the need for a national language policy that values all 176 plus languages. Moreover, the establishment of language communities enables the responsibilities for creating and valuing language pluralism a shared responsibility among all members that are affected by the language policy while broadening language acquisition, maintenance, and growth beyond the walls of the classroom.

The educational intervention that would support the monolingual language policy with multilingual outcome interpretation of Article 23 language rights could be achieved through additive immersion of English with maintenance bilingualism/multilingualism of the native languages of the pertinent community. The role of the English dominant culture would be to provide structural and cultural support to promote social-political pluralism through language communities, which in turn would provide access and opportunities for economic integration (*Language Policy: Typology*). In addition to the dominant language cultural support and language support, the classrooms with language minority learners would need to adopt a communicative approach that encompasses progressive literacy, critical literacy, dual language and maintenance programs so that classrooms can promote and encourage students to be active participants in their language

development (Cadiero-Kaplan, Page 19). Hall and Eggington's proposal of "participatory pedagogy" as theorized by Paulo Freire, encapsulates the structural and cultural support that needs to take place at the national level, state level, community level, and classroom level in order for a monolingual policy with multilingual outcome to be achieved. Hall and Eggington expand on the essential elements of participatory pedagogy which include: valuing the experience of the language minority population that is concerned, teaching and learning are shared responsibilities for all those engaged in the process, interactions are dialogical and collaborative, an individual's experience is examined within a larger societal and global context, skills and information are pertinent tools for initiating change in order to transform the participants and their situations (p. 147-148).

In summary, the interpretation of the language rights as they concern the language diversity that exists in the United States needs to be coherent, equitable, and flexible in order to address the linguistic needs of the over 176 languages that are spoken by over 215 million people living in the this country. The International Labour Organization's Article 23 on language rights presents a paradox in its wording and at the same time challenges the United States to fight the "ideological hegemony" that has dominated past and current language battles. The analysis and proposed interventions to have a consistent language policy with multilingual outcome is based on fighting a dominant ideology and the rhetoric that weights down constructive dialogue among English only proponents and language minority speakers in order to allow a participatory pedagogy to dominate in the classroom, language communities, and the greater society; that depends on the success of a coherent, effective, fair language policy to meet linguistic needs of all Americans.

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