

Language Policy Forum 2023

SOAS, University of London (with hybrid options)

Conference theme: Decolonising Language Policy

Proposed dates: Thursday 15th and Friday June 16th, 2023.

Plenary speakers:

Professor Justyna Olko, Faculty of Artes Liberales, University of Warsaw (Poland)

Dr Hannah Gibson, University of Essex, UK

Language policy at the national macro level is generally based on 'One nation – one language' ideologies that were promulgated and reinforced in Europe during the periods of 'Enlightenment' (mainly 18th century) and Empires (19th century and onwards). Colonial languages were promoted as part of a 'civilisation narrative' (Tricoire 2017) and linguistic hegemonies became entrenched.

Colonial and newly independent nation-state boundaries were drawn along arbitrary lines, ignoring ethnolinguistic practices at grassroots level. Despite most countries of the globe being multi-ethnic and multilingual, colonial and monolingual models of language policy were reproduced, as well as ideologies such as the myth of 'multilingualism = divisiveness' (Bamgboṣe 2011). Inevitably in such a model, language issues become political issues, with implications for linguistic human rights, especially when minorities are repressed in the name of national unity.

The idea of language can be used by policy makers and everyday people to foster the identity of a state, nation or ethnic group, and may become (or be appropriated as) a symbol of nationhood / freedom/ independence / identity/ autonomy. When vernacular or Indigenous languages are promoted, it is often according to a colonialist model: standardisation, elevation of literate norms, devalorisation of variability (Schieffelin et al. 1998).

Moreover, in Linguistics, the notion of 'language' as a bounded system also developed during these periods, leading to the identification and description of 'languages' in colonised countries that reflected these ideologies. The classification and naming of 'languages' reflected arbitrary locations of colonial or missionary bases, more than existing multilingual practices (e.g. Mühlhäusler 1996; Makoni and Pennycook 2006). Linguistic descriptions were predicated on theoretical models extrapolated from Indo-European languages. More recently, documentary linguists have sought to identify 'pre-contact' 'ancestral codes' (Childs et al. 2014) that may again reflect received notions of bounded languages and 'authenticity', rather than linguistic ecosystems and multilingual or translinguaging practices.

The conference organisers take a broad interpretation of language policy, based on the latest directions within language policy research. Papers are invited that examine language policies, practices and ideologies at all levels: international, national, regional, societal, institutional, group, locality, family, individual. Examples might include, among others:

- The impact of colonial thinking on language policies at all levels of society

- Evaluating examples of language policy
- Alternative frameworks for language policies
- Language practices, management and beliefs
- Language ideologies and attitudes
- Practised language policy and language policing
- Issues with implementation of language policies
- The impact of colonial thinking on the field of Linguistics, language documentation, etc.
- Colonisation of research: methods, writing, ethics etc.

We also invite proposals for panel discussions on these and related topics.

Please send anonymised abstracts of 200 words to lpf2023@soas.ac.uk by 25th March 2023. You will be informed of the outcome by 15th April.

Any queries can also be sent to this email address.