

***Language Planning and Policy in Latin America: Ecuador, Mexico, and Paraguay***

Richard B. Baldauf, Jr. and Robert B. Kaplan, Eds. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters. 2007. Pp. v + 303.

The latest volume in the *Language Planning and Policy* series, co-edited by Baldauf and Kaplan, deals with three Latin American countries, Ecuador, Mexico, and Paraguay, which, while not geographically close, do share several key factors in relation to their language situation and corresponding governmental policy. Previous books in this series on Africa, Asia, and Europe have dealt with similar issues of linguistic diversity and political context, yet the study of these Latin American countries offers the unique and distinguishing characteristic of one official language impacting three separate countries. The objective of these studies, and in fact the series, is to address roughly two-dozen questions that bring to light the nature of language in these countries. The editors organize the questions into four sections: language profile, language spread, language policy and planning, and language maintenance and prospects. The first section, language profile, includes not only general information on the languages, but also tables with the number of speakers as well as speaker distribution maps. Language spread, the second section, includes information on education, the role of media, and the role of immigration. The next section, language policy and planning, focuses on the topic with special attention paid to the historical background. Finally, the language maintenance and prospects section is designed to summarize the transmission of these languages and their probable future direction.

The book is organized into an introductory chapter by the editors and then three separate monographs. The studies on Ecuador and Paraguay are both accompanied by short update sections. The introductory chapter deals with shared commonalities and presents a general overview of their language situations. It addresses several of the similarities in history and culture outlined by the editors. There is a broad spectrum of language policies regarding the adaptability and sustainability of indigenous languages shown through the selection and study of these three countries. Paraguay, with an indigenous language as one of the official languages, stands in stark contrast to Mexico, where language policy efforts are isolated and inadequate (p. 203). The editors use each monograph to show contrast and even a sense of progression within language policy.

The introduction, by Baldauf and Kaplan, discusses the overall language situation. The development of Spanish in these three countries was originally incidental and not solely reliant on policy or blatant attempts at organization. Rather, these changes occurred as a result of societal, political, and cultural changes and events. Historically one of the largest cultural impacts was the Catholic Church which brought about the use of Spanish as a lingua franca. Ecuador, Mexico, and Paraguay, aside from employing Spanish as their national official language, also have large indigenous language populations. As Spanish grew dominant over the indigenous languages, several issues arose in these polities: “they all have significant numbers of long ignored indigenous languages” and “have all made recent attempts to correct the situation regarding indigenous languages” (p. 6). It is only recently that official government policies have been enacted and the impact of this practice is now seen in the treatment of the indigenous languages. The editors frame these studies as a contribution toward helping the lay public understand research in this area. The comprehensiveness of these monographs does support this goal with a virtually overwhelming amount of data. Overall, the socioeconomic and cultural context in these countries suggests that

indigenous languages and Spanish language literacy are facing varying degrees of difficulty in implementation and sustainability.

The first monograph, King and Haboud's "Language Planning and Policy in Ecuador," aims to focus not only on Spanish, but also on the language planning and policy of the country's *minoritized* languages, of which there are nearly a dozen. This term denotes social status rather than actual number of speakers, as exemplified by the fact that white Ecuadorians, descended from Spanish settlers, hold sway over the remaining 90% of the population. Despite the establishment of Dirección Nacional de Educación Intercultural Bilingüe (DINEIB) and other organizations dedicated to bilingual and indigenous language education, there is still a "strong tendency for both indigenous and non-indigenous people to believe that minoritized languages cannot serve as educational channels" (p. 79). This feeling is supported by the tendency of indigenous languages to be referred to as unofficial, oppressed, or substandard. Identifying oneself as a speaker of one of these languages is a political statement representing one's social, educational, and cultural ideas. Ecuador represents the midpoint of the spectrum with a large majority of its indigenous speakers using Quichua, the most widely spoken indigenous language in South America, yet still facing challenges from the "dominant society" (p. 39). Having a unifying language, used in religion and politics, has helped empower the indigenous peoples in this country, yet the future of indigenous language preservation seems perilous.

King and Haboud also present a more recent update on the situation in Ecuador. The political atmosphere in Ecuador remains open to advances in language and education, yet there have not been great gains. Despite the establishment of projects and organizations, there still remains an issue of immigration both within the country and internationally. Increased migration to urban settings has led to "profound shifts in community values and a devaluing of local work practices" (p. 106). International immigration has impacted the labor pool by drawing away the most talented and able professionals to more affluent countries. These shifts are a recurring theme in these Latin American polities; the dichotomy between international opportunities and small-town employment becomes increasingly important.

Monograph 2 by Terborg, Landa, and Moore addresses the situation of language in Mexico, a state with the largest number of Spanish-speakers in the world, as well as 62 indigenous languages. Although Mexico suffers from the same rural-to-urban shift of its population as Ecuador, its role as a cultural leader in the Spanish-speaking world further impacts the promotion of indigenous languages. The limited opportunities presented by learning and working in an indigenous language versus a foreign language have become socioeconomic issues for families. Also, the presence of several, well-funded and well-organized foreign organizations offering bilingual education in English, French, or German stands in stark contrast to the local indigenous language revitalization programs and presents a difficult climate for indigenous language learning. The large immigrant population in the United States also furthers the subordination of indigenous languages to English.

Education and language programs aside, many children are able to function in Spanish despite doing poorly in school or not attending at all. Furthermore, public education can actually negatively affect the maintenance of indigenous languages where students who attend bilingual schools as monolingual speakers often drop out before finishing the primary grades. If the

proponents of indigenous language education are trying to affect lasting change, varied and copious forms of support with a well-focused objective are needed. This is also true for students learning foreign languages, such as English or French. A recent problem in urban locales concerns children who have spent time in the United States learning English, who are then viewed as slow learners when they return to rural Mexico. The same issues are salient when the learners return to the United States and their English skills are substandard. Aside from support, there is also demand for a coherent plan of action toward indigenous language education. In an assessment sponsored by the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI), it was stated that “nothing in the structure of any language precludes it from becoming a communicative tool for modern civilization” (p. 152). Structure of the language itself, however, is not the problem; rather, the dearth of materials, texts, teachers, and academic or professional opportunities in which to use indigenous languages is the true root of the issue. Language policies in Mexico, especially those concerning the indigenous languages, are neither as comprehensive nor all-encompassing as those in Ecuador and Paraguay. The largest indigenous language, Nahuatl, has roughly 1.4 million speakers in a country of 103 million people. They are also faced with problems in Spanish literacy and with language issues arising from substantial immigration to the United States.

The third monograph by Gynan addresses the same issues of language policy and planning in a slightly different context. Paraguay, unlike other Latin American countries, has two official languages, Spanish and Guaraní, and therefore a large majority is bilingual. The ability of the non-indigenous population to speak Guaraní conveys the large effort made to sustain this language. Despite Guaraní’s firm entrenchment in society and the national constitution, there are several sustainability issues that the authors address. The pertinent issues of declining numbers of Guaraní monolinguals has been linked to political issues, such as the dichotomy between rural and urban areas. As with other countries, “the close correlation between incidence of bilingualism and urban development is everywhere obvious” (p. 231). Also, despite the ubiquity of Guaraní, there is still the threat of its decline among monolinguals because of common factors such as few well-trained teachers, association with uneducated communities, and poor implementation in schools. A notable hindrance for Guaraní language education seems to be the view that there is a notable difference between the Guaraní used in school texts and the spoken variety. Paraguay’s recognition of both languages has also led to complex and specific issues within the government about how to implement the bilingual language policy with the division between the positivist and essentialist ideologies. Paraguay, with regard to language policy, has the most advanced policy, despite the philosophical demarcation between methods of implementation.

Gynan offers an update on Paraguay which focuses on the difficulties of collecting language data, a problem common in all three monographs. A recurring topic concerns how speakers and families as a whole identify themselves, especially with respect to the category of Spanish-Guaraní bilingualism. This is prevalent in studies where speaking a certain language carries with it a cultural value judgment. This issue, acknowledged by the authors, needs to be addressed, especially in the case of Quichua, where no figures exist. However, of the three countries, Paraguay has most successfully sustained the role of indigenous languages, and continues to do so.

These studies effectively show how history and politics continue to propel language policy. *Language Planning and Policy in Latin America: Ecuador, Mexico, and Paraguay*

comprehensively addresses the multiple factors affecting languages in these countries, which until recently have not had formal planning policies. However, the editors do admit that the tools and data used to implement language planning and policy are at times inadequate for the task. In fact, they argue that far more is involved in developing successful language policy than is commonly acknowledged.

While the comprehensiveness of this volume is vast, one topic that could be addressed more assiduously would be the role of English in these countries' planning and policy implementation. In the monograph by Terborg and Landa, the role of English is mentioned briefly in different aspects of the language profile; however, to the varying extents that these countries have been affected by emigration to English-speaking countries, there is a deficiency of reflection. The rise of English as a world language looms as a paramount threat to the survival of many indigenous languages. The editors note the impact of English as "influencing what languages are taught to whom in these polities" (p. 32), yet more in-depth discussion of this issue is needed if it is to be used for real change. This volume as a whole is a great contribution to sociolinguistics, especially as a guide for practical application in the classroom. Students who self-identify as speakers of minoritized languages herald new and imperative questions. It is also most appropriate for those who can affect change at the grassroots level. As Terborg and Landa note, "it is important never to underestimate changes at the micro level in the implementation of wider planning activities" (p. 141). Even though the colonial Mexican government supported Spanish through its policies, it would not have become the dominant language without the grass roots efforts via monastic support of literacy training. This collaboration now parallels the work done both within the government and by local groups in support of indigenous languages.

Overall, this latest addition to the *Language Planning and Policy* series represents a vital and increasingly relevant look at the state of language in an increasingly important part of the world. The current role of Spanish in the world, as the second most spoken language behind Chinese (p. 122), and its future as an increasingly influential language, makes this a timely and relevant piece. Hopefully, it will pave the way for more specific studies on these countries and their indigenous languages as well as raise awareness of the current state of affairs. The tone of these monographs favors more proactive exertion on promoting indigenous language education, but as Gynan eloquently states, "after all, language planners can only hope to harness and ride sociolinguistic forces of bilingualism, not change their direction" (p. 273).

**ELAINE ROBERTS**

*Queens Library, Family Literacy Program*