



Multiple approaches lead to better language policies

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Language policy is used to create and hopefully to reduce various kinds of social, economic and political inequalities. In many places in the world language policy is aimed at creating privilege for some at the expense of others. In essence, language policy is really about social justice.

Research into language policy has shifted in recent years, away from studying what governments do and towards what people do. There is increasing interest in looking at real people's lives, and seeing how their lives are affected by government actions in the arena of language. Research is focusing on resistance to government policies, how language policies change as they are passed through the education system, and what they mean by the time they reach the classroom.

In the case of English language policy, the tendency to implement it as a cure-all to diminish inequality has often failed. While speaking English can bring certain advantages, for some groups it makes no difference whatsoever. For some groups, the myth that learning English alone will improve their lives is sustained by the discourse about language policies. For example, educational policy in Hong Kong discourages code mixing (English and Cantonese) within the classroom. Yet, in reality, students and teachers do a great deal of code mixing — often for very good and practical reasons. Ethnographic approaches to research on language policy in schools as a lived experience brings a vivid picture of the daily realities of life in schools.

James Tollefson has collaborated extensively with colleagues across the world, including HKU's Professor Amy Tsui. They have done extensive work on access and medium of instruction issues, and their books include *Medium of Instruction: Which Agenda Whose Agenda?* He is currently working with colleagues at the University of Washington on discourse and policy,

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in particular discourse at times of national crisis, as well as on a parallel project in Japan on how mass media use language, in particular media coverage of the 2011 nuclear disaster. He and Miguel Perez-Milans are compiling a 900-page Oxford

Handbook of Language Policy and Planning. Their goal is to influence the direction of Language Policy research for the next few years. They want to layout a research agenda, specifically aimed at integrating traditional policy studies (that is, looking at the government institutions) and ethnography (that is, looking at real people's daily lives). They want to integrate the two strands through this book.

The University of Hong Kong is at the very top of the Language Policy research centres in the world. It is remarkable to James Tollefson how many people here are interested in it, especially Language Policy in schools, and it presents fertile research opportunities.