A sociocultural framework for language policy and planning

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Since the early 1990s, language policy and planning (LPP) has undergone significant theoretical shifts in how it understands policy, concurrent with corresponding shifts in understandings of language, and particularly language use, more broadly. This paper draws on recent developments within linguistics that understand language from the perspective of Vygotskian sociocultural theory, and the role of language and other sociocultural artefacts in the mediation of human activity and social practice. The purpose of this discussion is to consider the potential of sociocultural theory as the basis for a broader meta-theoretical framework to understand the interrelationship between macro and micro analyses of policy and practice within LPP. The paper concludes with a consideration of the issues this raises for methodology in the study of LPP, as well as the implications for the practice of LPP itself.

Keywords: language policy, language planning, policy analysis, sociocultural theory, cultural-historical activity theory, Vygotsky

The introduction of new conceptual tools for rethinking the nature and role of policy within language policy and planning (LPP) — including critical theory (Tollefson 1991), development theory (Phillipson 1992), economic theory (Grin 2002), and the gradual uptake of a post-modern perspective more generally (Pennycook 2006) — highlights a growing interest over the last two decades in developing a more theoretically robust framework for understanding policy in ways that better recognise the political and ideological dimensions of language and language use. These shifts have been concurrent with shifts in our broader understanding of the nature of language itself. Pennycook's (2001) critical orientation to applied linguistics, for example, as well the postmodern perspective he brings to bear on LPP more specifically (Pennycook 2006), parallels a conception of language that first emerged within linguistics in the early 1990s, namely the recognition of the relationship between power, ideology, and language (see, for example, Gee 1990).

Indeed, the relationship between LPP as a discipline in its own right, and our understanding of language and language use as theoretical constructs more generally, remains close and intertwined (Ricento 2006).

However, this paper recognises from the outset a necessary and important distinction between theories *of* LPP (or, perhaps more aptly, *theoretically informed critiques of* LPP) — of which much of the most recent wave of LPP literature consists — and theories *for* LPP: theories for the practice of language policy planning itself (Lo Bianco, personal communication, 4 March 2008). Despite the critiques of Pennycook, Phillipson, and others since the 1990s, LPP, as a practice in and of itself, has remained a largely "technocratic" (Lo Bianco 1999: 49) exercise underpinned by rationalist and positivist assumptions of how to conceive of, and subsequently deal with, language problems, planning, and change. Spolsky (2008: 37) concludes his most recent discussion on future directions in LPP, for example, by arguing that those practices based on the "rigorous analysis of statistical data rather than by appeals to rights" continue to present "examples of the best methods" — despite the fact that a notion of "rights" has been central to many theoretical critiques *of* LPP in recent years. Nonetheless, we should recognise that LPP must be more than simply a practice of "exposing … ideological formations … to justify enactment of particular polities" (Ricento 2006: 11). As Ricento goes on to argue, "LP is not *just* an exercise in philosophical inquiry; it is interested in addressing social problems which often involve language, to one degree or another, and in proposing realistic remedies" (11, my emphasis).

However, my argument is that it is also problematic to propose "realistic remedies" based on technocratic theories *for* LPP that have failed to engage with theoretical critiques *of* LPP which have exposed its limitations and weaknesses. Rather, as Lo Bianco (2005: 18) puts it, the field now requires a move towards a "*situated ethics of practice*" (emphasis in original): an approach to language policy planning acutely aware of, and thus necessarily sensitive to, the social, cultural, and political dimensions of the contexts within which LPP takes place. The warrant for this paper therefore lies in the concern I share with others who have begun to accentuate the need in recent years to better understand the broader social, cultural, and historical processes and contexts from which, and within which, language policies are produced and promulgated (May 2006, Pavlenko 2003).

Cognisant of these broader imperatives, this paper considers contemporary developments within the field of linguistics that understand language from the perspective of Vygotskian sociocultural theory, especially in relation to the role of language and other cultural artefacts in mediating human activity and social practice (Engeström 1987; Lantolf & Thorne 2006; Leontiev 1981; Vygotsky 1978, 1987). Of particular interest is the potential of Vygotsky's "genetic method" as the basis for a meta-theoretical framework to better understand the interrelationship

between macro and micro orientations to policy analysis, and the implications this then raises for language policy planning as practice.

A field moving forward: A recognition of problems and limitations

A more sociohistorically nuanced orientation to language policy analysis has emerged in recent years within the still somewhat nascent tradition of critical language policy analysis (CLP) (Tollefson 2006), and its focus on the relationship between macro sociohistorical processes and policy production (for example, migration patterns and global flows), and the (re)production of social inequalities and injustice in particular. Increasingly, though, CLP has also been the subject of a growing critique by those who argue that its tendency to emphasise the hegemonic power of policy diminishes the influence of agency within localised policy enactment (Hornberger & Johnson 2007). The result has been the recent emergence of a parallel orientation that attempts to re-orientate the lens of CLP towards analyses at the micro level of *enactment* (Ramanathan & Morgan 2007) and how relations of power are sustained by, and maintained through, the acts of individuals within localised groups (such as work drawing on Foucault's 1991 notion of "governmentality" [see, for example, Moore 2002]).

These and related developments are evidence of the significant "catch-ups" we have made within LPP in recent years, as they continue to complexify and add further substance to our developing understanding of the complicated nexus between policy and practice. What continues to remain absent, however, is a framework for theorising the interrelationship between the macro and micro: a broader conceptual framework that accounts for how macro political developments — "policy *entities*" (Ramanathan & Morgan 2007) — create, restrict, open up, and otherwise mediate the micro space for local agency within "policy *enactment*" (Ramanathan & Morgan 2007). As Rudby (2008: 220) puts it, what remains necessary is the need for "micro-level research on language choice … to be integrated with macro-level policy investigations." To invoke the metaphor advanced by Ricento and Hornberger (1996) — the need to "unpeel the onion," and the related charge that "LPP research has been unsuccessful in accounting for activity in all layers" (Hornberger & Johnson 2007: 527) — the case I essentially wish to make in this paper, then, is that we now attempt to move further still, and consider how to account for policy activity *across* all layers.

What follows is a discussion of how policy might be understood from the perspective of sociocultural theory as the basis for a broader "meta-theoretical" framework to understand the (inter-)relationship between the macro and micro. That is, a framework for conceptualising policy at the wider sociohistorical level

in a way that unifies it with the acts of, and between, individuals in their own local contexts for practice. Beginning with an overview of Vygotskian sociocultural theory and a focus on its concepts of "mediated activity" and "tools" in particular, I then move to consider the implications of a sociocultural theoretical perspective for rethinking policy as a "mediatory (sociocultural) tool" in relation to concrete forms of human activity (i.e., practice). The paper concludes by considering the issues this raises for methodology, and related implications for the application of the framework in practice.

Before proceeding, though, it is perhaps also necessary to note that the paper avoids any direct empirical focus. Rather, my aim is to outline a number of key theoretical contributions that I believe Vygotskian sociocultural theory stands to offer LPP as a field, to invite further discussion, contestation, and debate on what these points might mean for us as language policy analysts and planners more broadly. The transition from conceptual to empirical is rarely a simple or unproblematic shift to make — especially when ideas are being appropriated, refashioned, and applied beyond their "native" discipline (in this case, social psychology). Furthermore, while it might appear that some ideas are similar to theoretical tools already in use (to varying degrees) within LPP (for example Schiffman's 1996 notion of "linguistic culture" and Bourdieu's 1977 concept of "habitus"), to prematurely reappropriate concepts based on surface-level similarities without deliberating more fully on what they mean to our more specific concerns as language policy analysts leaves us at long-term risk of maligning key constructs at the heart of the theory, for example the current confusion over other Vygotskian concepts within education, such as the "zone of proximal development," now subject to extensive debate and revision (Chaiklin 2003).

Vygotskian sociocultural theory

In very general terms, Vygotsky (1978, 1987) understood human development as the product of interaction that humans (as "biological" beings) engage in with the external ("social" and "cultural") world around them. Central to this thesis is the concept of "mediated activity," since it is only through the use of mediatory tools and other cultural artefacts that humans have the capacity to act upon and regulate the environment within which they exist.

Although Vygotsky's focus was the role of mediatory tools in the development of higher psychological functions in children, Leontiev (1981) later expanded Vygotsky's primary unit of analysis (the tool) to the activity within which such tools were used. Leontiev's extension of Vygotsky's work is the basis for what is now understood as "activity theory," although I would concur with Thorne's (2004: 53)

observation that activity theory is perhaps better understood as being less that of a *theory* per se, than a conceptual *framework* for analysing human activity from a Vygotskian sociocultural perspective. Indeed, Engeström's (1987) later reconceptualisation of the theory (see Figure 1) positions Vygotsky's understanding of activity (the tool-mediated relationship between subject and object) at the core of an "activity system", in which the subject-tool-object relationship exists within a dynamic set of social and cultural relations (thus acknowledging the rules, rights and responsibilities, and the community of which the subject, tool, and object relationship is part).
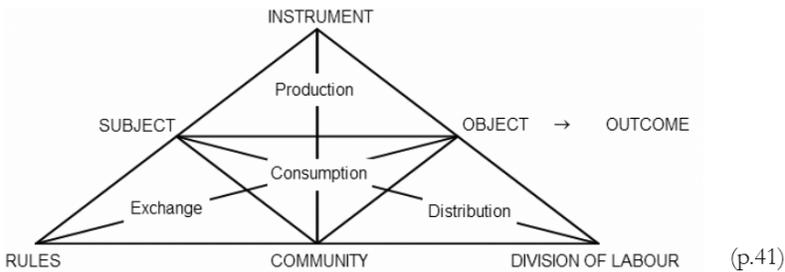
Figure 1. The structure of human activity (Engeström 1987: 41)

Sociocultural *activity* can therefore be understood as the resultant combination of various social and cultural elements (rules, tools, etc) that come together having pre-existing "histories" of their own. Since these histories continue to influence, shape, and alter the nature of activity as it unfolds in practice, any analysis of concrete, observable activity as it exists now, in the present, can only be understood in relation to its origins. To take even a simple example such as a child (the subject) learning new words (his/her object) using flashcards (a tool), this activity would have its genesis in, and continue to be bound by, cultural-historical influences that include, among other things, the societal expectations of schools to test students, the child's physical environment that allows him or her access to the materials to make and use flashcards, and even the child's own personal history and upbringing (as the subject of that system) which has instilled in him or her the self-discipline to sit down, focus, and commit those words to memory.

### The cultural-historical genesis of activity and mediatory tools

By emphasising historicity within his sociocultural theory of human development, Vygotsky (1978) rejected the descriptive-analytic approach that then dominated psychology by arguing, instead, that "mere description does not reveal the actual causal-dynamic relations that underlie phenomena" (62). In "The problem

of method" in *Mind and Society*, Vygotsky (1978) draws on Lewin's analysis of phenotypic (descriptive) and genotypic (explanatory) perspectives within biology to demonstrate that although the natural sciences had historically been based on descriptive accounts of an object's external phenomenal features (an approach which had led scientists to believe that whales, for example, were fish [van der Veer 2001]), the paradigmic shift following Darwin's *Origin of Species* had led to the genetic origins of an object becoming crucial for understanding how it now continues to exist, even in the present. It is this meaning of "genetic" that Vygotsky appropriates within his own theory of mind and behaviour — the idea that "behaviour can only be understood as the history of behaviour" (Blonsky cited in Vygotsky 1994: 70) — which encapsulates the essence of what we now understand as sociocultural theory.

Within his "genetic method," Vygotsky proposed four levels of analysis according to their relationship with physical time: the phylogenetic, cultural-historical, ontogenetic, and microgenetic. While *phylogenetic analysis* is concerned with human development across the course of natural evolution (humankind as a biological species), the *cultural-historical* domain is concerned with the development of the "external" (social and cultural) world within which human relations exist and unfold. Although Vygotsky's conceptualisation of "culture" is complex (Wertsch & Tulviste 1992), he includes at the most fundamental level the values and attitudes of any one generational group in time, *together with* the tools, signs, and artefacts through which they regulate and alter their world, and, by implication, share and construct common understandings. Heavily influenced since his youth by a long-held interest in Hegel, as well as the cultural-historical influence of Marx's historical-material dialecticism at that point in Russian history (van der Veer & Valsiner 1991), Vygotsky's understanding of mediated activity was clearly dialectical in nature, with tools not simply utilitarian in their purpose of transforming the object towards which they were used, but tools, themselves, also being understood as subject to further transformation through their use in activity.

In sum, the cultural-historical level of analysis is therefore concerned with how tools and other mediatory artefacts have come to "landscape" the broader sociocultural domain for human activity. It is the convergence of these two broader lines of development — humans as natural biological entities (phylogenesis), and the sociocultural context within which they exist (cultural-historical) — that creates the basis for *ontogenetic* development; that is, the development of the individual subject across a single lifespan. *Microgenesis* refers to the ongoing and moment-by-moment fragmentary instances of concrete, practical activity that take place as the ontogenetic human subject (as a biological entity with his or her own personal history) interacts with the broader cultural-historical domain around him or her. Cole and Engeström (1993) illustrate the interrelationship between each of these

genetic domains in Figure 2 below, with the ellipse highlighting the nestedness of the domains as one unified "whole" at any specific point in time.

Physical Time

Phylo Time

Cult-Hist Time

Ontogeny (C)

Microgenesis
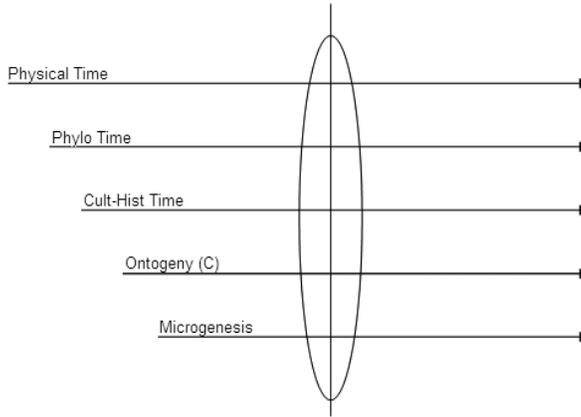
Figure 2. Sociocultural theoretical domains of genetic analysis (Cole & Engeström 1993: 20)

Approaching the study of human activity from a Vygotskian genetic perspective, then, gives us the basic foundation for a broader meta-theoretical framework through which to explicate the interrelationship between concrete, practical activity and the broader cultural-historical domain from which that activity has emerged. In short, sociocultural theory offers a way of unifying policy, as it exists at a broader cultural-historical level (the product of "sociohistorical" processes in CLP's terms: Tollefson 2006), with its role in the mediation of concrete instances of microgenetic activity (of and between individuals), which takes place within the structure and system of human sociocultural activity. In the next section of this paper, I turn to a consideration of the implications this raises for understanding the nature of policy itself within a framework of sociocultural theory, especially with respect to the function of policy as a mediatory sociocultural tool.

Sociocultural theory and policy: Policy-as-tool

Adopting a sociocultural approach to the analysis of policy from a Vygotskian perspective makes it necessary to conceptualise policy in terms of its function as a "mediatory tool" in relation to microgenetic instances of activity: that is, policy as a cultural-historical artefact that has, over time, come to shape a broader macrocontext for human activity that then unfolds within the microcontextual domain as actual, concrete practice. This is not to suggest that policy *dictates* practice (a point to which I will return later), but, in keeping with Vygotsky's dialectic

understanding of the nature of tools, policies can be understood to "carry with them both possibilities *and* constraints, contradictions *and* spaces. The reality of policy in practice depends upon the compromises and accommodations to these in particular settings" (Bowe, Ball & Gold 1992: 15, my emphasis).

If we adopt this position as a starting point, two other aspects of the policy literature become useful for further developing the concept of "policy as sociocultural tool" (henceforth policy-as-tool): (1) Ball's (1994) representation of policy as "text" and "discourse" — the encoded manifestation of decisions into language, and the way we then make sense of it in practice — and (2) Bridgman and Davis's (2004: 3) understanding of policy as an "instrument of governance." Understood in these terms, policies are essentially the tools or means by which governments manage (that is, mediate) issues of significance for society (Beresford 2000), thus making for what Ball (1994: 18) describes as "textual interventions into practice."

This view of policy is consistent with a Vygotskian understanding of "tools" on two counts. First, on the significance of policy in shaping a cultural-historic domain for microgenetic activity, Haynes (2002: 7) argues that policy within the domain of education, for example, influences teachers' classroom practice since it ultimately "influences their conditions of work." Ball (1990: 22) similarly argues that policies are "statements about practice":

> … the way things could or should be — which rest upon, derive from, statements about the world — about the way things are. They are intended to bring about idealised solutions to diagnosed problems. Policies embody claims to speak with authority, they legitimate and initiate practices in the world, and they privilege certain visions and interests.

Second, Ball's (1994) idea of "policy as text" refers to more than the static encoding of decisions alone. To the contrary, policy texts represent "cannibalised products of multiple (but circumscribed) influences and agendas" (Ball 1994: 16) — the final outcome of what is often an arduous and contested process of decision-making and conflict resolution. Indeed, Gale (1999) notes that although Ball does acknowledge that "policy texts … *represent* policy" (citing Bowe, Ball and Gold 1992: 20, emphasis in original), the decoding of such texts is equally important given that "for any text a plurality of readers must necessarily produce a plurality of readings" (Ball 1994: 16), thereby subjecting the text to "interpretations of interpretations" (17). In this sense, policy as text undergoes a process of "secondary adjustment" (Riseborough 1993: 172) through its realisation in practice (Gale 1999). The "reading" of policy (as text) is therefore contingent on the way the subject of any one activity makes sense of that text within their own particular social, cultural, and historical domain of practice (see, again, Gee's [1996] notion of discourse). Indeed, the suggestion that "policies do not normally tell you what

to do, they create circumstances in which the range of options available in decid-
ing what to do are narrowed or changed, or particular goals or outcomes are set"
(Ball 1994:19) is commensurate with Lewis and Simon's (1986) understanding of
"*discourse* as a mode of governance" (457, emphasis added), since both

> delimit the range of possible practices [and organise] the articulation of these
> practices within time and space although differently and often unequally for dif-
> ferent people. Such governance delimits fields of relevance and definitions of le-
> gitimate perspectives and fixes norms for concept elaboration and the expression
> of experience. (Lewis & Simon 1986:457–458; see also Gale 1999)

Gale's (1999:395) discussion of "policy as ideology" (elaborating on Ball's [1994]
understanding of policy as text and discourse) further clarifies the concept of
policy as a cultural artefact of wider social and cultural practices. Acknowledg-
ing that policies are represented in certain ways as text (the "what"), and inter-
preted in certain ways as practice (policy as discourse: the "how"), Gale (399)
goes on to argue that "policies are 'ideological and political artefacts which have
been constructed within a particular historical and political context' (Burton &
Weiner 1990:205)." Put simply, policy as text and policy as discourse are both
grounded within world-views that inform how they are produced and interpreted
(policy as ideology, the "why"). Policies, in this sense, are understood to be "mes-
sengers" of ideology, since they are manifestations — whether physical (policy
documents) or conceptual (the "hidden curriculum") — of the values, attitudes,
and understandings of those by whom, and for whom, they are produced within
a particular cultural-historic context. Through policy-as-tool, ideology therefore
comes into "material existence" (Althusser 1971/2006:101) — *not* simply through
its manifestation as text, but through its mediation of social and cultural rela-
tions within human activity: "*his* [sic] *ideas are his material actions inserted into
material practices governed by material rituals which are themselves defined by the
material ideological apparatus from which derive the ideas of that subject*" (103,
emphasis in original).

  Policy-as-tool therefore offers a basis for understanding the social and cul-
tural (and, by extension, historical, and political) domain for human activity that,
over time, has come to be. Education policies, for example, provide an account of
how governments have come to construe the role and purpose of schooling (and
how teachers have similarly come to understand the role and purpose of teaching,
and their work) within society. Simply stated, they are "bureaucratic instrument[s]
with which to administer the expectations that the public has of education" (Tay-
lor, Rizvi, Lingard & Henry 1997:3), thus echoing Ball's claim that education pol-
icies are essentially "definitions of what counts as education" (1990:3). Indeed,
Bridgman and Davis (2004:1) even go as far as to argue that "we shape our world

through … policy," while Kemmis (1990) asserts that policy has become a more authoritative source of teacher knowledge for classroom practice than education theory.

A sociocultural understanding of policy across domains is also therefore congruent with the emergent LPP notion of "(policy) space" (see, for example, Hornberger & Johnson 2007). As Kostogriz (2006: 177) explains, however, "to be in space is not just to be situated somewhere, but rather is to participate in distinct cultural-semiotic activities anchored to, and mediated by, particular material objects and textual representations of one's situationality." Although the space for microgenesis is not one that prescribes the nature of practice, it also recognises that neither is the subject within that space free to act beyond the affordances (and constraints) offered by the system of cultural and social relations within which the subject exists. This clearly raises concerns for the place of the agent within the mediated space, and how to acknowledge, and account for, the influence of agency within activity.

Policy, practice, and agency: The dialectic nature of policy-as-tool within activity

It would seem that agency has long been a thorn in the side of research on language education, whether in terms of the role of the learner in second language acquisition (see, for example, Lantolf & Pavlenko 2001), or what teachers bring to bear on the application of language-teaching methodologies in the classroom (e.g. Freeman 1994). As Ramanathan and Morgan (2007) similarly observe, with the exception of a small number of more recent studies, agency has remained a largely "underexamined" (450) and problematic issue within the field of language policy and planning.

Although I have attempted to avoid the suggestion that policy-as-tool is indicative of a top-down understanding of policy in relation to practice, the seemingly hierarchical nature of the framework does leave the principle of genetic analysis open to misinterpretation along such lines. However, to emphasise the point made earlier, tools and other mediatory artefacts within a sociocultural framework must always be understood as being dialectic in nature: while tools do play a significant role in relation to how microgenetic activity subsequently unfolds in actual practice, the meaning, value, and utility ascribed to any one tool is ultimately determined by the subject of the particular activity system in question.

In this sense, agency therefore exists in the dialectic between social structures created through cultural-historical tools (policy) *and* the subject (the ontogenetic "person", in terms of their background, values, and understandings), with "neither

subject (human agent) nor object ("society", or social institutions) … having primacy [since] *each is constituted in and through recurrent practices* [i.e., activity]" (Giddens 1982: 8, emphasis in original). If we take Apple's (2004: 32) assertion that "all texts are 'leaky' documents … subject to 'recontextualization' at every stage of the process," the usefulness of a sociocultural approach for analysing policy lies in its capacity to understand and account for the dialectic (inter-)relationship between macro-political processes (at the cultural-historical level) *in relation to* how individuals "cannibalise" (Ball 1994: 43) the text within the microgenetic domain through its realisation as practice.

Subjects bring to the microgenetic activity system ontogeneity: their own personal and individual histories, values, and ways of understanding and experiencing the world that, in turn, shape how they perceive and understand the space within which they exist, and the choices they go on to make about how to act within it. To return to the genetic framework outlined earlier, microgenesis does not have its origins purely in the cultural-historical context from which it emerges, but through the convergence of ontogenetic human subjects within the system of social and cultural relations (the activity system) in which they find themselves. As Stritikus (2003: 33) reminds us, it is not merely teachers' pedagogical beliefs and knowledge that are influential in informing practice: their own personal ideologies also remain "salient in the policy to practice connection."

At the same time, however, it is necessary to recognise, and also account for, the fact that the subject never remains a completely "free" agent. Significantly, when understanding policy from a sociocultural perspective, the "possibilities and constraints" and "contradictions and spaces" (Bowe, Ball & Gold 1992: 15) discussed earlier are not *only* those created by policy itself. Rather, the cultural-historical (policy) domain is complicated by the place of ontogeneity *within* the microgenetic — the limitations imposed (and affordances offered) by the subject's own previous experiences, knowledge, and values, as well as the immediate reckoning imposed by the realities of the direct social and cultural space (activity system): the nature of the community, its rules and expectations, one's rights and responsibilities, the other tools and materials available, and, of course, the object of attention itself in terms of how the subject works within that policy space.

To give one brief example, consider the intersection of the cultural-historical, ontogenetic and microgenetic in the case of one teacher, in one particular cultural-historical domain (policy context), but in two different schools — one school where the local community is of a high socio-economic demographic and another school where local unemployment rates are high and families are much less well-off. If there are differences in how policy is enacted in each of these cases, it *cannot* be attributed simply to the differences between each of these two immediate contexts for teachers' practice alone, but it is also necessary to consider how the

broader cultural-historical domain itself relates to, and makes (or does not make) allowances for, the needs of the two different school contexts to mediate those spaces for practice. It is also necessary to consider how that same teacher understands, relates to, and engages with those two different school contexts (Cross, in press).

In this sense, a perspective based on sociocultural theory offers an important counterpoint to the rationalist, neoclassic assumption that what takes place at the level of policy planning and production automatically translates into practice. Moreover, such a perspective offers a resolution to the problem identified earlier: the tendency to focus on production — or enactment — but very rarely both. However, rethinking the nature and relationship of policy and practice from the perspective of sociocultural theory, and the resultant need to then also account for the place of human agency within analyses of policy (in its abstract sense of a "cultural-historical" tool) in relation to practice (at the concrete level of microgenetic activity), raises further implications for methodology within LPP.

Making sense of policy: Policy-as-tool within sociocultural activity

In simplest terms, given the nature of the interrelationship between and across the cultural-historical, ontogenetic, and microgenetic domains, the focus within a sociocultural approach to the study of policy is neither policy (production) nor agency/practice (enactment) — but it becomes *both*, through their unity within *activity*. With activity as the unit of analysis, policy (if policy is understood as a mediatory tool landscaping the broader cultural-historical domain from which microgenetic activity then emerges), practice (how the subject then interprets, engages with, and appropriates that context at their microgenetic level of practice), and agency (the influence of ontogeneity within that nexus) become inseparable. Put another way, the focus is no longer the study of "policy" or "practice" but a study of "*how*" policy works within activity: in Bourdieuian terms, the focus is "the *locus of the dialectic* between opus operatum [ways of doing — practice] and modus operandi [ways of thinking — culture]" (Wacquant 1989: 42–43, emphasis altered).

In case it might be erroneously construed that this focus on activity therefore returns us to a de facto focus on enactment, it must be remembered that any activity which exists now, in its present form (in this case, the "policy enactment"), can only be fully understood from a Vygotskian perspective when analysed *in relation to* its cultural-historical genesis ("policy production"). In other words, a sociocultural approach to policy analysis is less a sense-making exercise concerned with understanding the activity as it exists now, in its own right, than it is a process

concerned with relating present forms of activity (as manifest through instances of concrete practices) to the broader social, cultural, historical domain from which that activity comes into being (and is mediated by policy-as-tool).

An approach by way of sociocultural theory therefore necessitates an understanding of how subjects within activity are mediated in ways that enable, restrict, or otherwise create opportunities or constraints for them to do what they *do* do (within their own microgenetic domain of actual practice) on the basis of the broader sociocultural context of which they, and that activity system within which they operate, are part of (that is, their related cultural-historical domain). As policy analysts, our aim therefore becomes that of understanding the association between that broader cultural-historical context — as created through the mediatory influence of policy-as-tool — and the ways that subjects then make sense of and engage within that field of activity to produce actual instances of concrete practice.

Clearly, this basic supposition is already apparent in a great deal of the critical work within LPP, and is evidenced, for example, by the earlier reference to Bourdieu on the significance of the dialectic, and Pennycook's (2001) assertion that the critical work of applied linguistics is driven by the relationship between macro and micro. However, despite this implied underlying assumption, it has been a focus on one *or* the other — in contrast to a focus on the "locus of the dialectic" *between* these two — that has continued to be the dominant conceptual and analytical frame of reference for most policy analysis to date (as argued, for example, by Bowe, Ball, & Gold 1992, May 2006, Ricento & Hornberger 1996, and Rudby 2008). By focusing on activity as the primary unit of analysis — in a way that unifies (a) the cultural-historical ideologically mediated domain, (b) immediate contextual and physical space for microgenetic enactment, and (c) a place for the agentive, ontogenetic subject — the lens offered by an orientation to policy through sociocultural theory transforms this implicit assumption on the significance of the macro/micro into an explicit focus, and provides a workable framework for conceptualising, analysing, and interpreting the dialectic between the two.

Methodologically, the implication of a sociocultural analytical framework for the study of LPP is that it necessitates a move towards more qualitative (or, at the very least, mixed-method) research designs that have the capacity to capture the lived experiences and perspectives of the subjects within the activity system in question, in contrast to the dominant positivist and technocratic orientations discussed earlier. Ethnography is one especially powerful means of achieving this (see, for example, Hornberger & Johnson 2007), as is case study method. Case studies are particularly useful for socioculturally sensitive research designs since they allow for a variety of different techniques to generate qualitative data (narratives, interviews, observations, and so on), and have the capacity to examine a

range of different foci (for example, activity systems representative of a "typical" case, through to those that might be considered "atypical" or "extreme"), depending on the aim of the study and policy domain in question. Case studies also offer a practical alternative when ethnography, which requires considerable time and resources, is not feasible.

"Microgenetic" data (including observations, field notes, or other concrete data on how policy mediates activity in instances of actual practice) by itself, however, is not enough. Ontogenetic data on the subjects' histories, backgrounds and beliefs is also necessary to gain a sense of the frame of reference that agents apply to the activity system to understand, interpret, and make decisions on how best to engage with it. Although this type of data can also be generated using a range of techniques, the aim should be to capture aspects of the subjects' ontogenesis as they relate to the immediate microgenetic domain in question. In other words, the focus is not on an analysis of the subjects' life histories more generally, but on accounts of how their personal histories and ontogenetic backgrounds relate to and now influence their engagement with the current mediated space in which they find themselves. Focussed introspective techniques, such as stimulated recall procedures for recounting actual instances of microgenetic practice (Gass & Mackey 2000), are especially useful in this regard.

Finally, there is the need for data on the cultural-historical domain itself: policies-as-tools which have been instrumental in landscaping the broader domain from which, and within which, the activity has emerged and takes place. As Moore (2007) argues, though, such policies "[are] rarely articulated in documents labelled *language policy*" (573, emphasis in original). This problematises the issue of what counts as "data," especially when the focus within a sociocultural analysis is not merely the ostensible (policy) text, but the relationship between "policy" (whether codified as text [verbal or print], or in some other form) and practice. (For example, the absence of any "official" policy on language in Australia before the mid-1950s meant, in effect, a de facto policy maintaining the status quo and privilege of English as *the* national language [Herriman 1996]).

The point of significance here, however, is that of *mediated* practice. To return to my earlier point, policy, within a framework of sociocultural theory for LPP, needs to be understood in terms of its function as a mediatory tool. At one level, then, a useful way to begin identifying policy as data is to think in terms of what Spolsky (2008: 28) describes as "policy as 'management plan'" — decisions, in whatever form they take (explicit policy documents, media releases, curriculum guides, and so on), which are instrumental in mediating (that is, managing) activity. Again, to reiterate Ball (1994: 18), policy is that which represents an "intervention into practice." However, it is also important to realise that, given the dialectic between domains, the ontogenetic subject of the activity might give cause to

consider other policies beyond the scope of the initial focus. For example, it might become apparent that the subject draws on policy from areas other than those that seem, ostensibly at least, relevant to the activity system in question. Certainly, language policy, because it so often does fall outside more explicit policy domains (for example, health, education, or economics), tends to be marginalised in terms of its "direct" influence upon practice, while other, more well-resourced and heavily promoted policy domains within which decisions are made (for instance, immigration) can have a more significant impact on language behaviour and use than language policy itself. Although this attention to areas other than the immediate or ostensible concerns of LPP researchers can be neglected or lost completely when the focus is predominantly a macro *or* micro aspect of "language" policy, the need to constantly relate how the broader cultural-historical and ongoing microgenetic domains constantly "mediate" or "are mediated by" one another maintains a dialectic dual focus.

Conclusion

Although I have intentionally avoided a discussion of the empirical implications arising from the theoretical framework outlined in this paper, beyond its direct relationship with methodology and research design, I would like to close by returning to an issue raised in the introductory sections of this paper, namely, a consideration of the potential of a sociocultural framework for the applied interests of LPP in practice, such as the usefulness of language policy within the field of education. Indeed, Ferguson (2006: 33) suggests that education represents "probably the most crucial" of all LPP interests, "sometimes bearing the entire burden of LP implementation." It is perhaps not surprising, then, that critiques of the problematic divide between policy and practice, and calls for a more holistic understanding of policy that attempts to integrate macro and micro perspectives, have been most pronounced by those working within the cross-sections of language, education, and policy.

Echoing claims made more broadly across the literature when language policy intersects with education, Hu (2007: 654) argues the need for future LPP research to "[recognise] the multifaceted interaction between the language classroom and the particular political, economic, social, cultural, historical, educational, and institutional context in which it is situated". Indeed, Barkhuizen's (2007) narrative frames of analysis for language teachers — the "story" of the teacher, the "Story" of the life of the school and community, the broader "STORY" at the national level — gives explicit acknowledgement to the place of policy within these different levels, at least at the level of "Story" (school policies) and "STORY" (national policies)

(5), as do Hruska's (2006) levels of analysis for examining varying constructions of bilingualism. These and similar studies (for example, Hogan-Brun 2006; Hornberger & Johnson 2007; Lin 2006; Stritikus 2003) have established the basis for a rich and far more politically nuanced understanding of language education, teaching, and learning than has often been the case in the past. However, as emphasised in earlier sections of this paper, what has continued to remain absent is a broader meta-theoretical framework for understanding how (macro) policy contexts work in relation to the (micro) educational contexts being observed to bring about various forms of practice in the ways that they do.

Although the orientation to policy through sociocultural theory outlined in this paper recognises the importance and influence of policy in relation to practice, more importantly, it offers a framework for analysing *how* policy "entities" play a role in mediating the social and culturally constructed space for activity within which practice is then "enacted" (Ramanathan & Morgan 2007). With a focus on policy-as-mediatory-tool within sociocultural activity, it becomes possible to understand and analyse the relationship *between* policy and practice, rather than having to abstract one *or* the other. As noted earlier, too often the tendency within LPP has been to focus upon either "policy" as an entity in its own right, but without sufficient regard to the broader practical and concrete realities concerning the policy instrument in question, or else upon "practice", but without a clear or explicit account of how broader policy initiatives have come to connect with the local to mediate the production of those concrete social and cultural activities as practice.

I would like to conclude, then, by considering the potential for a sociocultural theory perspective on LPP that might afford opportunities to effect "real" educational change in the area of languages. As Fullan's (2001:7) research on educational change has demonstrated over the past twenty years, effective and long-lasting reform requires more than "just putting into place the latest policy." Instead, what are required are policies with the capacity to lead to "[change in] the *cultures* of the classrooms, the schools, the districts, the universities, and so on" (7, my emphasis).

For Fullan (2001:8), it has been a lack of understanding of "how people actually experience change as distinct from how it might have been intended" that has been the fundamental cause for the demise of most educational innovations that were hoped would achieve lasting reform. An inherent problem with technocratic approaches to language policy and planning is the assumption that a carefully and rationally informed approach to decision-making at the level of policy production will translate unproblematically into planned and intended patterns of policy enactment. As we have come to realise with LPP's coming of age, this is very rarely the case (Shohamy 2006). This inability to comprehend the nexus between policy

and practice (and, as Fullan points out even more specifically, the relationship between both in terms of culture and cultural practices) has been the greatest impediment in past efforts to manage reform through policy in ways that ultimately make a real difference to practice (Lo Bianco 2001).

In contrast, a sociocultural perspective on LPP offers a dynamic yet systematic and theoretically rigorous framework for understanding language policy's relationship with culture more broadly, as well as the social and cultural practices we enact in our everyday lives more specifically, by foregrounding the social, cultural, and historical role of tools within cultural-historically mediated systems of ongoing microgenetic activity as they unfold as everyday cultural practices. Moreover, a sociocultural perspective provides a unit of analysis, in the concept of human activity (the activity system), that unifies these macro cultural-historical influences with an immediate and concrete microgenetic domain for practice, while also simultaneously acknowledging the restricted (but nonetheless always present) agency of the subject within that space for activity, and their ontogeneity as a basis from which they make sense of that space and how to engage with it. As Snyder (2008: 34–35) reminds us, "teachers tend to take from, absorb and accommodate changes into their own existing frameworks and practices. This point is fundamental to how teachers think and how they do it, but is barely understood by policy-makers or the general public." In sum, a sociocultural perspective on language policy and planning offers a response to the need, as Fullan (2001: 8–9) describes it in relation to the applied domain of education,

> to comprehend the dynamics of educational change as a sociopolitical process involving all kinds of individual, classroom, school, local, regional, and national factors at work in interactive ways. The problem of meaning is one of how those involved in change can come to understand what is it that should change, and how it can be best accomplished, while realizing that the what and how constantly interact and reshape each other … The interface between individual and collective meaning and action in everyday situations is where change stands or falls.

Clearly, where to go from here is something for a much larger, long-term program — beyond the scope of this immediate paper, or indeed any single piece of work. The ideas will, and should, continue to evolve and develop as sociocultural theory itself is further appropriated and reappropriated to meet the changing needs and nature of LPP, as well as those of the other disciplines within which it is used, such as education. What this paper has at least set out to achieve, however, is a consideration of what sociocultural theory stands to offer our field in the face of the critical and difficult issues we currently need to address, in a way that both complements and further enhances our emergent and ever increasingly complex understandings of language policy and planning.

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Résumé

Un cadre socioculturel pour la politique et la planification langagières

Depuis le début des années 1990, la politique et la planification langagières (LPP) ont connu d'importantes mutations théoriques en ce qui concerne la conception de la politique, parallèlement aux mutations correspondantes dans notre conception de la langue et, d'une manière plus générale, l'usage de la langue. Le présent article trouve sa source dans l'évolution récente de la linguistique qui conçoit la

langue du point de vue de la théorie socioculturelle de Vygotski, et le rôle de la langue et d'autres artefacts socioculturels dans la médiation de l'activité humaine et de l'usage social en particulier. Cette discussion a pour objet d'étudier le potentiel de la théorie socioculturelle comme fondement d'un cadre métathéorique plus large pour comprendre l'interpénétration des microanalyses et des macroanalyses de la politique et de l'usage au niveau de la politique et la planification langagières. L'article se termine par un examen des problèmes de méthodologie que cela suscite pour l'étude de la politique et de la planification langagières, ainsi que des implications pour la mise en pratique de la politique et de la planification langagières proprement dites.

Resumo

Socikultura kadro por lingvaj politiko kaj planado

Depost la fruaj 1990aj jaroj, lingvaj politiko kaj planado (LPP) trairis signifajn teoriajn ŝanĝojn rilate la manieron kompreni politikon, samtempe kun rilataj ŝanĝoj rilate la komprenon de lingvo, kaj precipe lingvouzo, pli vaste. Tiu ĉi studo ĉerpas el lastatempaj evoluoj ene de lingvistiko, kiuj konceptas lingvon el la perspektivo de la socikultura teorio de Vigotski, kaj la rolon de lingvo kaj aliaj socikulturaj kreaĵoj en la perado de homa aktiveco kaj socia praktiko. La celo de tiu ĉi diskuto estas konsideri la potencialon de socikultura teorio kiel bazo por pli vasta metateoria kadro por kompreni la rilaton inter mikro- kaj makroanalizoj de politiko kaj praktiko ene de LPP. La studo finiĝas per konsidero de la levitaj problemoj rilate al metodologio en studado de LPP, kaj de iliaj implicoj en la praktiko de LPP mem.

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