Title of Project:

A Narrative Ethnography of Teachers' Language Perceptions, Preferences, and Practices in a Multilingual Context, and its Implications for Language-in-Education Policy and Planning

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Project Summary

The 2005 Human Development Report of the UN Development Programme gave Pakistan the lowest education index score of any country outside Africa (Hathaway, 2005). The situation eleven years down the line does not seem to have substantially improved. Among various reasons for Pakistan's low educational status, the highly fragmented, segregated and anomalous nature of its education system (Rahman, 2005) features most prominently. The reasons can be thought of in terms of both the media of instruction and type of schooling (Sathar, 2011; Yusuf, 2011). The currently enforced constitution of Pakistan (Government of Pakistan [GoP], 1973) and the National Education Policy (NEP) (GoP, 2009) give some indication of the language-ineducation (LiE) policy to be followed in schools. However, a distinct, explicitly written and articulated LiE policy in Pakistan does not currently exist at the macro level. Both the constitution and NEP are heavily tilted towards English and Urdu as the media of instruction (MoIs) in schools, with regional languages largely ignored. Political expediencies, economic injustices, and class prejudices have traditionally remained the determining factors in LiE policy. The impression that English is the language of power, prestige and opportunity, that Urdu is necessary for national integration, and that local languages have no instrumental value, has gathered roots in the thinking of the plicy-makers and populace alike. It is therefore of vital significance to see how Pakistani LiE policy translates into the perceptions and practices of teachers. Teachers, being classroom practitioners, are at the heart of language policy (Jones & Barkhuizen, 2010), as classrooms are the actual sites where language policies take place (Martin, 2005; Menken & Garcia, 2010). It is teachers who decide inside a classroom whether to religiously put the government/school LiE policies into practice, or to use the language(s) that they themselves deem appropriate for ensuring optimum learning on the part of students. Their language perceptions and practices can give a clear indication of the problems with LiE policy formulated at the macro-level.

This study, therefore, focuses on teachers to explore how they view and put into practice LiE policy in rural primary schools in the northwest of Pakistan. The narrative ethnographic research was carried out in three schools, all located in the same area but each following a different language as medium of instruction (MoI): English – the official and the most sought after language; Urdu – the national language and the local lingua franca; and Pashto – the indigenous language of the area where the study is based. The central aim of the study was to investigate what language perceptions teachers have, which languages they prefer as subjects and MoI at primary level education, which ones they actually use for teaching in the three schools with different MoI, why they make these choices, and what implications their practices hold for macro-level LiE policy. In order to find answers to these and related questions, the study was carried out using a narrative ethnographic framework.

Ethnography of language policy (Hornberger & Johnson, 2007) – a 21st century approach to researching Language Policy and Planning (LPP) (Johnson & Ricento, 2013) – emphasizes the centrality of teachers' language perceptions and practices (Valdiviezo, 2013) in understanding the role of their agency (García & Menken, 2010) in bottom-up transformation of language policy (Canagarajah, 2006) through its micro-level appropriation (Ricento, 2006). Teachers make pedagogical decisions (e.g., incorporating the local languages to use multilingualism as a resource) that indicate their power and control over language policy (Ricento & Hornberger, 1996). It is, therefore, necessary to look at teachers' language perceptions, preferences, and practices at the micro level and to investigate how these perceptions, preferences, and practices reflect on LiE policies formulated at the meso (school) and macro (national) levels. The rationale for this study also comes from the fact that there is a considerable dearth of quality research at the micro level in the education sector in Pakistan, particularly so in the rural areas of the whole country in general and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in particular. The little research that has been carried out is mostly deficient in giving a clear picture of how language policies are played out at the classroom level and how the main players, that is the teachers, play them out. Therefore, the need for research that looks into the role of teachers when it comes to LiE practices at the micro level was warranted in Pakistan.

This study was based in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province (the erstwhile Northwest Frontier Province) of Pakistan. The province is home to 27 million people, an overwhelming majority of whom are Pashto-speaking Pashtuns. It is pertinent to mention here that Pashtuns also constitute more than 50% of the population of neighbouring Afghanistan. For the purpose of data collection, I selected three boys' primary schools that were located in the same rural area in the province, but each school followed a different language (English, Urdu, and Pashto) as the MoI. Because it is against cultural norms for men in the area to regularly visit girls' schools or meet female teachers, I purposefully selected two male teachers at each of the three schools (a total of six teachers). Each of the male teachers had at least 10 years teaching experience. All these teachers spoke Pashto as their first language, as did the students whom they taught. I interviewed each participant eight times during a period of 12 weeks, each interview lasting one hour on average. I also observed and audio-recorded at least eight lessons for each teacher during the data collection period to be able to obtain the best understanding of the teacher-participants' language practices. Journal entries of the participants, extensive field-notes, and policy documents were also used as research instruments. I used computer software program NVivo for data organization, including assigning labels to the data, coding and categorizing the related codes into sequential themes to get a complete picture of the teachers' language-related experiences.

The research participants' language perceptions reveal a love-hate relationship with all the three languages, albeit with differing dimensions. Their perceptions indicate a paradoxical blend of aversion and yearning for English. A salient aspect of their negative view of English is its association with colonialism, western culture, American hegemony, power, and elitism. At the same time, they express an instrumental motivation (Baker, 2011) for English and deem it an unavoidable necessity. They refer time and again to the high pragmatic value that English retains because of its association with opportunity, success, power, and prosperity, thereby evoking Bourdieu's (1991) concept of linguistic capital. The teachers, therefore, have a strong inclination for keeping English an integral part of the education system. They view Urdu as a symbol of national integration and identity, as an instrument for keeping communities with different languages united, and as a tool for communication among them. They also associate Urdu with the Islamic religion and consider it necessary for obtaining an Islamic education. However, they point out that Urdu has not been given the status it deserves and that Urdu is for the poor only, whereas the rich continue to receive an education in English. I also found overwhelming support among the participants for keeping Urdu an integral part of the education system right from the start of schooling. The love-hate dimension of the participants' language perceptions equally applies to Pashto. All the participants express a deep love for Pashto as their mother tongue and take pride in the fact that they are Pashto speakers. However, they do not see any instrumental utility of the language in the job market and the domains of power; therefore, they do not see any place for it in the educational system.

The language practices (use of language as MoI) of all the six teachers at the three schools with different MoI were characterized by a teaching-in-translation approach (Bhattacharya, 2013). In other words, the teachers read (and the students chorally repeated) the content from the textbooks and provided a literal translation to the students without actually explaining the content. Although considered ineffective for actual learning (Butzkamm, 1998; Wong-Fillmore, 1985), this teaching-in-translation approach remained the norm across the schools for teaching subject content. Translation from English into Urdu posed a twofold difficulty for the students because they did not have command over either of the languages. The English-medium school students, therefore, appeared to be at a greater disadvantage. Urdu to Pashto translation was also rather mechanical since there were minimal instances where lesson content was actually *explained* in Pashto. In the case of the Pashto-medium school, text was merely read with little translation/explanation provided, although the language variety and vocabulary were quite dissimilar to the colloquial version of Pashto used in the area. The students, therefore, had very little engagement with the content taught or with the language in which it was taught.

The teachers' language teaching practices (teaching of language as the subject) were not any different. They predominantly applied the grammar-translation method (Richards & Rodgers, 2014) to the teaching of all three of the languages. Translation, choral responses, repetition, drills, memorisation, and explicit teaching of grammar points epitomised English and Urdu language teaching. The languages were, therefore, treated as objects rather than tools (Ellis, 2012). Pashto was used to facilitate the talk across the three schools rather than for explaining the language points. The teachers controlled the initiation, direction, and pace of interaction and teaching (Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Nunan, 1991). Because the pedagogy was heavily teacher-centred, not a single effective question was asked by any student in any of the schools I observed during the entire period of data collection (see also Wang & Kirkpatrick, 2013). While the teachers did

demonstrate agency in their classroom decisions, it appeared detrimental rather than beneficial to the teaching and learning process.

The findings pertaining to the teachers' language practices indicate that their language (in) teaching practices were in large part inconsistent with or different from the MoI followed at each school. A distinct policy within the teachers' practices was quite evident (Spolsky, 2004, 2009); this de facto language policy (Shohamy, 2006) was observed to be largely analogous across the three schools, regardless of the official MoI policy followed there. Specifically, the findings revealed that macro-level policy decisions regarding different languages as MoI had little relevance to how the teachers actually employed these languages for teaching and learning at the micro level in their rural primary schools.

The findings of the study indicate the complexity of LiE policy as practised in rural northwest Pakistan and raise a number of implications for Pakistani LiE policy and planning, particularly in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. The findings show that the varying MoIs used in the schools (English, Urdu, and Pashto) are clear indicators of a widening gap between the various strata of society. More importantly, as evident from the teachers' stories, these parallel systems amplify stratification between urban and rural communities along social, economic and linguistic lines. Students educated in urban schools may have a clear advantage over rural students in terms of better content knowledge and more advanced proficiency in the languages that matter. It is evident that languages, as well as the contexts in which they are learned and used, play a vital role in determining the social status of students in Pakistan. Serious measures need to be instituted to reduce the chasm perpetuated by the education system through striking a balance in the LiE policy followed in various streams of education. The state needs to shift its ideological positioning and adopt a linguistically equitable education system through providing equal opportunities to students from different linguistic backgrounds in both urban and rural areas. Considering the multilingual, multi-ethnic, and multicultural nature of Pakistan, only a recognition of diversity and hybridity can sustain its integration.

As indicated earlier, an explicitly written LiE policy in Pakistan is non-existent. This is not to say that such a policy might have had much effect on the micro-level practices in the rural areas, if the findings of this study are taken into consideration. While a compatible relationship between macro policy and local practices would be an ideal scenario, the findings clearly show that macro-level policy in this case has fallen short of achieving the desired aims at the local level. Therefore, considering the multilingual makeup of Pakistan and the crucial role of the various languages in education, there is a need to develop localised LiE policies, especially in the rural areas. Nobody knows a context better than the local stakeholders, and nothing determines the extent of success of policy implementation better than the teachers and parents as stakeholders (Ali et al., 2011; Garcia, 2009; Kirkpatrick, 2011; Walter & Benson, 2012). These local policymaking bodies therefore must include teachers and parents among the decisionmaking representatives at both policy and planning level. This collective wisdom of the policyplanners and stakeholders would ensure that localised policies are congruent with the local conditions and represent the future aspirations of the communities. A sense of responsibility in the stakeholders would also make them feel accountable and responsible to implement the policies they collectively develop for the good of their community. Only such grounded policies can enable the rural teachers to teach effectively and encourage parents to get involved in their children's education. Such an involvement will ensure that the rural students gain access to the

linguistic and informational resources they need to break the shackles of poverty in both an economic and educational sense.

Lastly, the findings show that the teachers were not entirely proficient in any of the languages. They were also deficient in the appropriate teaching methodologies that could ensure optimal learning. Therefore, while an all-embracing pre-service training is necessary for newly employed teachers, it is more important that the currently employed teachers receive extensive and sustained in-service training. It is clear that the rural primary teachers "walk a tightrope" (Jones & Barkhuizen, 2011, p. 526) as they balance their language practices and proficiency against the effects of local, national and global influences. Unless they are equipped with the requisite wherewithal to sustain the pressures they have to contend with, the state of education in the rural areas will remain abysmal.



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