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Springboard for Talent: Language Learning and Integration in a Globalized World

Session materials now available online

We have been updating our website with summaries from the panels and interviews with our Fellows, all of which you can find on the session page:

www.SalzburgGlobal.org/go/586

There is also an online bibliography on the same page that you can add to if you wish.

Please encourage your colleagues and contacts to follow and join in the conversation on Twitter with the hashtag #SGSedu. A full list of all this session's Fellows and their organizations who are on Twitter is also available online:

www.twitter.com/salzburgglobal/lists/SGS-586

We're updating our Facebook page www.facebook.com/SalzburgGlobal and our Flickr stream www.flickr.com/SalzburgGlobal with photos from the session during this week and also after the session.

We will also be posting photos to Instagram www.instagram.com/SalzburgGlobal. Use the hashtag #SGSedu and we might feature your photos in the newsletter!



From @sparvell on Twitter: Dinner with colleagues @SalzburgGlobal in Austria.... Schnitzel of course! Great dialogue about language learning, policy and implications today.



“Monolingualism does not guarantee peace or cohesion”

Speaking a dominant language either in a local, national or global context can open up a world of opportunities. Conversely, not speaking a dominant language can hinder one's prospects, leaving people feeling marginalized. But monolingualism should not be the goal.

Panelists on the second day of *Springboard for Talent: Language Learning and Integration in a Globalized World*, examined the role of language acquisition in increasing social cohesion, sharing examples of where language policy had helped and hindered.

Australia formerly imposed a policy demanding new migrants speak English on arrival or be denied entry. This has since changed: today, the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) provides free language tuition to all who need it, better ensuring that new migrants can participate socially and economically. “The state has the responsibility to provide the linguistic means to integrate,” remarked on Fellow, urging Europe and the US to emulate the program.

While encouraging the learning of one dominant language can help build a sense of integration and shared cultural identity, mother tongue suppression can also give rise to greater conflicts. International Mother Language Day is held on

February 21 in recognition of that date in 1952 when students in Bangladesh were killed for protesting for the right to use their mother tongue of Bengali instead of Urdu, the official language.

In Abkhazia, the roots of its conflict with Georgia can be found in the suppression of its language and identity. However, when it finally broke away from Georgia, the local language lacked some vocabulary and constructs needed to be fully used in all official capacities.

Children who lack instruction in their mother tongue often fall behind academically. 230 million children worldwide are unable to read by Grade 4; many of these students are from linguistically marginalized communities.

In communities where there are many languages, imposing one language may not be necessary. A school in Australia serving refugee children from across South Asia found the students would blend Farsi, Dari, Urdu, Hindu and Tamil to communicate rather than using the basic English they were learning.

“Academics are not usually activists,” admitted one panelist, but this is often where language policy experts find themselves as their research can help secure social justice for marginalized communities. “We need more activism!”



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Hywel Coleman: Every language encapsulates knowledge; if a language dies, we lose knowledge

Honorary senior research fellow reflects on multiplicity of languages in Indonesia, its impact on education, and his own linguistic heritage

Mirva Villa

When Hywel Coleman first came to Indonesia, he arrived straight out of university, having signed up as a volunteer English teacher. This spell led to lecturing in several institutions before he “stayed, stayed and stayed” in the country for more than 12 years. He returned to the UK for 14 years to teach at the University of Leeds, before moving back to Indonesia in 2001, working as a consultant and involving himself in projects with Indonesia’s Ministry of Education.

“In total, I’ve lived in Indonesia for 29 years – it’s my home,” Coleman says, speaking at the Salzburg Global session, *Springboard for Talent: Language Learning and Integration in a Globalized World*.

His interests now are in language policy in education and the role of the English language in Indonesia.

There are approximately 700 languages spoken in Indonesia. These languages range from local languages only spoken by 200 people to more prominent languages such as Bahasa Indonesia, Javanese, and Balinese. Bahasa Indonesia is the country’s sole official language and is used for all government purposes, including in parliament, law courts and education.

“There are several laws which say Indonesian is the only language of education, so the government schools must use Indonesian as the medium of instruction,” says Coleman. “This means that local languages have no official role at all in government or education.

“This is a very sensitive issue because some people feel that if local languages are given a role, this will lead ultimately to the disintegration of the nation.”

While there is no historical evidence of that occurring, the fear of allowing local languages to be used in education remains prevalent. This belief remains despite Indonesian children performing poorly in comparison with other countries in international tests like the OECD Program for International Student Assessment.

Coleman believes children not learning in the language they’re most comfortable with is a contributing factor. He says, “The evidence is that if you don’t use the child’s

first language, or the language the child is most comfortable with, their learning is going to be negatively affected, but the debate about this is hardly happening in Indonesia.”

In Coleman’s opinion, Indonesia’s language policy threatens the survival of several local languages, which he feels would represent a significant loss.

“It’s a problem because every language encapsulates knowledge of the environment and the community in which it is used. If a language dies, then we lose knowledge. We lose knowledge about the environment, about the plants and the trees and the animals, which can be described in the local language, but which cannot be described in other languages.

“We lose a way of looking at the world: every community, every ethnic group, every language group has a way of interpreting the world, making sense of the world, and we lose that. And if the world becomes more and more homogeneous, what a boring world it would be.”

Despite this concern about the language policy, Coleman believes there are lessons other countries can learn from people living in Indonesia. He says, “Putting aside language policy in school, a lot of Indonesians are naturally multilingual, because ethnic groups mix and overlap, and people are very open to languages. People talk about languages a lot, they joke about languages, and they learn each other’s languages very readily. I think that’s something that in Britain is completely absent.”

Coleman is currently investigating the language repertoires and attitudes of scholars in the *pesantren*, which are residential, Islamic educational institutions. These madrasas, as they are also known, are not part of the state education system, meaning they are not beholden to the official language legislation. Some schools use Bahasa Indonesia but many use Arabic, English or local languages. Some schools use the national language in the classroom but encourage the use of local languages outside the classroom.

“What really struck me was how all the children I interviewed were nonchalantly multilingual: ‘Yeah, I speak four or five



languages, so what? Doesn’t everybody?’ That impressed me,” Coleman says.

Coleman was brought up in a Welsh family living in England. His mother was Welsh speaking, but would only use Welsh when her sisters came to visit. He says, “I always felt excluded, because I couldn’t understand what they were saying. I asked my mother to teach me Welsh and she wouldn’t, because she felt that her Welsh was inadequate... I think that left a hole in me somewhere – a gap.”

While in school, Coleman tried, unsuccessfully, to learn French, German and Latin, which left him convinced that he wasn’t able to learn other languages. This belief changed when he moved to Indonesia.

“Being in the context where I needed to learn the language to survive and to make friends, I discovered that I could learn languages, and enjoy it, and find it fulfilling. And this was a revelation to me.”

Since then, he’s become more critical toward the role that the English language plays in the rest of the world. He also thinks the language policy in Indonesia needs to be rethought. His key message is: “The world is bigger than Europe, and language issues and language contexts are very, very varied... We shouldn’t assume that what’s appropriate for Europe and North America is relevant at all to other parts of the world.”

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“I’ve always been interested in languages and policymaking, either at the national, supranational and at the political level – but also at the level of education... I feel that the questions about language are so ideologically loaded, and so politically loaded, but very often we do not see that kind of political underpinning and ideological loading. So my work a lot of the times has been in terms of researching to critique policy documents and curricular documents for the ideological underpinnings that exist within... [My work is also] involved in the actual questions about language and what it means, how we use it, and how we dominate people. Or how we are able to create relationships through language, or languages, or the various semiotic systems that we may have available.”

Bessie Dendinos

President of the European Civil Society Platform for Multilingualism

Tackling the inherent politics of language policy

In a world of 7000 languages, how does policy affect which are used?

In English, the words *policy* and *politics* are distinct – this is not the case in all languages. “All language policy is rooted in politics,” remarked one panelist wryly, opening a discussion on “What makes good language policy?”

As another panelist further lamented, “If you want to build a house, you hire an architect... But language teachers are not seen as specialists,” further underlining the role that politicians – rather than linguists and educators – have in deciding national language policies.

Often, for better or worse, these policies are driven by national elites for some greater cause, from the enhancement of social cohesion and trade and diplomatic relations to the suppression of minorities.

In Uganda, for example, English is the official language and used as the primary language of instruction in schools. This is much to the consternation of the king of Buganda, who wants to see Luganda used as the language of instruction in schools in the region. Imposed by colonial rule, English is still highly valued by politicians as a means to access global trade and dialogue. Regional trade is conducted in Kiswahili, the second official language of the country, and the official language of many neighboring countries. However, “if you want to campaign and win elections,” politicians need to also speak Luganda, (the most widely spoken of the 40 local

languages in the country) as this is the language most of their electorate speak and understand.

In China’s interior, language policy is more inclusive, allowing bilingualism with local languages – something that is not encouraged in the more restive borderlands.

Many post-colonial countries and other secessionist states have adopted local languages as their official languages, helping to affirm their national identity (see overleaf and front page). For example, Tunisia adopted Arabic after the end of French colonial rule. However, Tunisian language policy has not been consistent, with the language of instruction changing to French in some subjects at different stages of education leading to confusion and accusations of elitism. A similar accusation was leveled at a university in Milan that offered degree programs in English rather than Italian – a move that the ultimately deemed unconstitutional.

Language learning – both as official national languages and foreign language acquisition – is often rooted in power. “The idea that English is a neutral lingua franca is a myth,” said one Fellow. While there are over 7000 languages in the world, 96% of which are outside of Europe, English is still the most common official and studied language in the world, followed by French and Spanish. But in

a increasingly multi-polar and rapidly globalizing world, will this continue to be the norm? Or will Chinese and Arabic surpass them?

English teaching has long been advocated by institutions such the British Council, but some countries have already begun to shift their foreign language policies; Chinese is increasingly supplanting English as the foreign language of choice for students in Korea, for example. Private foundations and businesses are now trying to drive interest towards other foreign languages, such as the Qatar Foundation and now Qatar Foundation International and their promotion of Arabic learning and cultural understanding.

So what makes a good language policy? Following inputs from the panelists, one key recommendation repeated around the room was that language policy needs to be flexible; a top-down approach needs to be met with a bottom-up approach, recognizing minority speakers and their rights. Good language policy needs to reflect the reality of the languages used in a country and its various regions; engage and include a variety of linguistic communities; discourage ethnolinguistic conflicts (see front page); consult and adhere to the advice of language experts; and be well funded, implemented, promoted and understood.



HOT TOPIC: What do we mean by “good” language policy?

Tomas De La Rosa & Mirva Villa

“Language policy is supposed to do good, and not to do harm, and that means you have to be very clear about your goals and be sure that you have a way to assess the extent to which you are approaching those goals. Not much language policy actually fulfills all the goals that it sets [out] to reach, but much of language policy can at least get us closer to where we want to be, but for this you really need to know where you want to get to and for what reason.”

François Grin

Professor of Economics, Faculty of Translation and Interpreting, University of Geneva, Switzerland

“The word good is relative... A good language policy is a policy we should not be seeing to cause problems, but rather to have solutions and resources to language issues in a community. A good language policy is also the one which involves all stakeholders as it is being designed. It is one which embraces the environment of what the communities need, rather than having one which does not consider the community needs. Good policy is where we have teachers trained to be able to implement the policy, especially if it has to do with education. A good policy should be relevant to the needs of a community, like trade, administration, political needs, and the like.”

Prosperous Nankindu

Minister of State for Education, Kingdom of Buganda, Uganda

“I wouldn’t use the word ‘good’. I would use the word ‘feasible’. I would use the word ‘successful’, but maybe necessarily not even that because most language policies fail, actually, like language programs in education. The majority of language programs fail – no matter how well-planned they are, no matter how much financing you put in them, no matter how dedicated the people are – because there are a lot of other stakeholders that play a role in how successful a policy is when it comes to implementation and actual adoption of the policy.

There’s much more reason for it to fail than to succeed, and that’s why we need this consensus: to develop that sense of ownership among the various stakeholders that this is a good policy. I like the discussion of the top-down and the bottom-up processes meeting somewhere in the middle, and manage all these conflicting interests of any particular language or languages. So ‘good’ is not the right term.”

Mohamed Daoud

Professor of Applied Linguistics at the Higher Institute of Languages of Tunis (ISLT), Tunisia

“Good language policy depends on good for who and for what purpose; it really depends on who wants to implement what in order to make somebody’s life easier. We assume language policy to help people, but if language policy ignores the micro-level – the people who actually implement the policy – it will not be successful.

Good language policy depends on good for who, but successful language policy is

actually to really pay attention to people who implement language practice and make the lives of people who use the language easier.”

Kayako Hashimoto

Lecturer, School of Languages and Cultures, University of Queensland, Australia

“When we say good language policy there are three dimensions to this. Firstly, “Is the policy designed in a technically effective way?” This is one measure of being good or not so good.

A second dimension to this is “Is it good in its purposes?” In other words, are these humanistic purposes – purposes that will assist minorities and minoritized populations, [and] enrich society and culture.

These measures of good are about quality of the content, and then the third aspect of good would be “Is it able to be implemented?” This is an aspect of the design (the first one) but it goes beyond it; implemented, evaluated, and revised properly to be effective in the long term. Many policies are actually quite short term – they succeed, are adopted by political authorities, but they don’t last very long and they’re not sustained very far – so I think [long-term implementation] is a dimension of good.”

Joseph Lo Bianco

Professor of Language and Literacy Education at the University of Melbourne, Australia

Have an opinion on our HOT TOPIC?
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