1 Language Policy

Taking Stock in a Changing Context

Li Wei and Helen Kelly-Holmes

Introduction

In this chapter, we apply our different but complementary foci to examining how the key concepts of language policy have evolved over the last two decades in response to socio-political disruptions and how they might continue to change in the future. We also want to raise new, further questions that need to be explored and debated, given the ever-changing context, particularly in relation to the emergence and integration of smart technology into our everyday lives. The chapter is constructed as a dialogue in which we discuss and evaluate these key disruptions from our particular perspectives on language policy: Helen Kelly-Holmes works on the economic dimensions of multilingualism, focussing for example on advertising and the concept of linguistic fetish, and language policy with a particular interest in minority languages. Her focus has always been on mediated language, and for that reason she is particularly interested in the role of technology. Li Wei's work is around everyday multilingual practices in families and communities. In particular, he has studied community language schools for immigrant and ethnic minority children in the UK as well as Family Language Policy in transnational families. He has contributed to the development of the concept of translanguaging. The chapter is structured as a reciprocal interview between us. We believe these questions have wider implications for language policy research and practice and enable us to take stock as we move forward in this rapidly changing context. We are aware that we are offering more questions than answers, for example in relation to whether changing concepts of language and language policy are driven by social, economic, and technological changes or whether such changing conceptions are themselves driving change. In other words, the fascinating question of whether language policy is evolutionary or revolutionary remains deliberately open.

Li Wei: How fit is language policy for twenty-first-century challenges?

Helen: When I read articles framed within language policy, I often question whether the concept, the term, and the key tenets are in fact useful and relevant in today's world and whether studying language policy forces complex problems into simple frameworks. For example, the nineteenth-century narrative of one language = one people = one territory still underpins, no matter how it might be resisted, for better or worse, most minority language revitalisation movements and policies as well as studies of national policy. Twentieth-century concepts and assumptions also underpin much contemporary research in language policy, most notably the idea that language policy can fix both language problems and/or social problems. So, language policies at macro or state levels or at meso levels within schools and other institutions can be implemented to redress inequalities – individual and societal – and address injustice. This conceptualisation of language policy seems to me to rest on the same assumptions, namely that we know what language is and how to do it (and we all agree on this), we can do things to it, we can control and direct it, and we can manage people's behaviours around it and attitudes to it (see, e.g., Nekvapil and Sherman 2015).

It goes without saying that these understandings have been and are being continuously challenged. For example, Kathryn Woolard's (2016) work on linguistic authority in relation to Catalan has challenged a perhaps often too easy assumption about where power and agency lie in language policy. Deborah Cameron's (2005) concept of verbal hygiene showed how language management does not just happen in relation to different languages and that the need to manage and control what, how, and where others speak is a widespread, deep-seated tendency that often has very little to do with language. With language policing, Jan Blommaert et al. (2009) attempted to identify that there can be multiple, competing centres of normativity and policymaking, and to show that these can be powerful and impactful, and that there is more going on than just the top-down and meso levels. We have moved away from the idea that only governments and institutions make language policy and towards the idea that we are all constantly making language policies – sometimes contradictory ones – throughout the course of our lives, perhaps even of our day, and attempting to monitor and control our own and others' language behaviours (Shohamy 2006). The "new speaker" concept (O'Rourke and Ramallo 2013) also introduced a new dimension to language policy by attempting to address the difficulties that learners experience when they attempt to acquire a minoritised language and in the process challenge the language = people = territory tenet. As Alexandra Jaffe (2007) pointed out, revitalisation efforts actually need these fluid and flexible constructions of speakerhood. To succeed, such efforts need not only new speakers, who are to be created and encouraged through acquisition policies, but also those new speakers need to be able to have a

relationship with the language and to stake a claim and not be excluded from ownership, not least if they are to continue to support language policy and planning efforts by their respective governments and regional authorities. Language policy's assumptions have also been challenged by the evolution of "translanguaging" (Garcia and Li 2014) as a way to describe a phenomenon that is very real in all of the domains that are of interest to language policy but that evades capture and understanding by many traditional frameworks and methodologies of language policy.

Tom Ricento's (2000) three eras model of language policy is a framework that can be applied more generally to the field, in my experience. The first era is that of the postcolonial nation-building, where a unifying language is needed (one language = one people = one territory); the second is the era in which the cracks and fissures upon which that policy is built begin to appear, and language is used to fix those problems; and finally the current era, or what he terms the postmodern one, which is characterised by hybridity and the loss of certainty about what language is, how it can possibly "fix" problems and indeed the critiquing of why and how these "problems" have been framed as such, since such a problematising, however well-intended, was based on the same tenets of one country = one nation = one language. In our work trying to chart the development of minority language media policy in Sámi and Irish, Sari Pietikäinen and I used Ricento's framework to try to put a shape on our findings. We dubbed the first era that of gifting – whereby the central government gifts media resources to the minority language community, which presents itself as internally homogenous for this purpose and is subsequently addressed as an internally unified and homogenous group. In the second era, the attempt is to fix the language problems that are occurring, as inevitably the complexity that is covered up by this homogenous unity starts to appear. The aim is for full normalisation of the language situation, a modernist goal of having the trimmings of a modern language. In the contemporary era, which we termed the "performance" era, these certainties are gone – or rather the easy assumptions that we had about these certainties are gone and are replaced by fluid concepts and changing tenets. Where previously languages were seen to belong to (particular) speakers, now they are up for grabs and available as part of anyone's repertoire, albeit in different ways and with different limitations. A few interesting conclusions emerged from our study (Pietikäinen and Kelly-Holmes 2011), and they are worth thinking about in a wider context of understanding language policy and allowing it to grow and develop as a concept or perhaps be cast aside, its time being done now that the era of mega-policies is apparently done. First of all, an appreciation of the economic and technological dimensions, not just political, to these different eras is crucial. Older conceptions of language policy force us to include the macro and meso into our analyses as we increasingly focus on micro-level management. Secondly, it is important to recognise that while models allow for a neatly ordered chronology, the reality is much messier,

and instead what we have are parallel and overlapping stages. Our conclusion was that to understand this complexity, we needed all of these concepts from all of these eras. While twenty-first-century concepts are inclusive, if we abandon the nineteenth- and twentieth-century ones, then it becomes very hard to talk to governments, for example, who may be more than happy to curtail funding for heritage language maintenance when languages with a capital L, linked to recognisable and delineable groups, disappear from the vocabulary and studies. So, what is needed, perhaps today more than ever, is a delicate balancing act that involves constantly and vigilantly checking, acknowledging, and living with both complexity and simplicity.

Helen: In your work with immigrant and ethnic minority communities, what are the key language policy concerns, and how does the concept of translanguaging relate to language policy?

Li Wei: The recent surge of interest in multilingualism amongst the international academic research community may have come as something of a surprise to the very many communities across the globe where multilingualism has always been an integral part of people's everyday life. The new curiosity may be partly due to the presence of large numbers of 'misplaced' populations who speak languages other than the assumed 'indigenous' ones, especially in Western Europe and North America, where people seem to be more used to imposing their own languages onto the local populations as they go to other parts of the world than having others coming to their land. These 'misplaced' speakers are usually labelled as 'immigrants', "migrants," "refugees", or "ethnic minorities." Over time, their languages become called "community" or "heritage" languages. A key policy concern regarding immigrant and minoritised communities is the labelling of the various languages in their linguistic repertoire. The designation of a language and its speakers with one of the above-mentioned labels is a policy decision and has serious consequences for the status of the language and the community in society. Policies that are designed to support the minoritised languages and social groups usually assume that their status is a real one rather than one constructed and imposed by society. For instance, in many English-dominant countries, such as Britain and the USA, people who have roots in another country are often designated as English-as-an-additional-language (EAL) speakers. EAL children are expected to struggle in the mainstream educational system. They need help with English. And if they do achieve well in schools, they will be celebrated as examples of success. In the USA, the label "bilingual learners" is often used to refer to school-aged children from immigrant families, who may or may not themselves be immigrants. Just because their parents and the ethnic community they have been categorised into have a language, or languages, in addition to English, they are deemed as having incomplete knowledge of English and being in need

of remedial support in English. García and Alvis (2019), following Mignolo (2015), have pointed out that the epistemology from which the minoritised speakers are observed and described and taught in the standard educational system is, of course, not their own epistemology. In the refugee population in Western Europe, there are numerous cases of people who are highly educated and skilled, with knowledge of several languages, but had to flee their home countries because of war, political and religious persecution, or natural disasters. Their social status does not render them linguistically or professionally less competent. Yet they are often treated by the system as inferior and in need of charity. Amongst the so-called economic migrants, the motivation for learning the society's dominant languages is usually very high as they want to get jobs, earn a good living, and support the family. Where we do find cases of migrants lagging behind in acquiring the dominant language of their newly found homes, it is usually because they have been discriminated against and stigmatised (Dabach 2014). In Britain, lack of English is often used as an excuse for the under-employment of certain immigrant and ethnic minority communities, especially women of these communities. Yet, when one looks at the opportunities for these people to learn English, they are hardly there. Public funding for free English language classes for adult learners of minority ethnic backgrounds has been withdrawn. As a result, some of the eager ethnic minority learners are put into adult literacy classes, which were meant for those who have had interrupted education and are in need of developing their reading and writing skills. There are reports that competitions for the limited places on adult literacy classes between white working-class learners and ethnic minority learners have led to tensions between the communities (Hamilton and Merrifield 2000). Yet the official discourse has always been "English is the language of social integration and community cohesion" for the immigrants and members of ethnic minority communities. Del Percio and Wong (2019) have critiqued some of the current policies and practices regarding English language for employment for refugees, migrant workers, and ethnic minorities in England.

Internal differences amongst the immigrant and ethnic minority communities themselves tend to be ignored in the macro social policies of governmental institutions, which treat individuals within the communities as if they are all the same. "Diversity from within" is one of the toughest policy challenges regarding minoritised communities. There are significant differences in tribal membership, religious affiliation, and, of course, language in many immigrant and ethnic minority communities. Terms such as the Asian community, Chinese community, Italian community, Black community, or Hispanic community neglect many of these very important differences – differences that are particularly meaningful from within the communities concerned. Over time, communities change and develop, and intergenerational differences occur. One of the persistent questions that ethnic minority communities of all kinds have to address is how to manage language maintenance and language shift across generations. Whilst some communities

seem to have managed to maintain their ethnic languages better than others, few have been able to resist the intergenerational language shift altogether. Linguistic ideologies play a crucial role here. Some believe that language maintenance is important primarily for identity reasons. To be a member of a community, one needs to be able to speak the language of that community. Yet, in recent decades we have seen a new kind of ethnic and racial awakening – a complex combination of increased awareness about the social position that the ethnic minority community is assigned in society and a desire to have a more powerful voice in social life. It is a much deeper understanding of what it means to be an ethnic minority or descendent of an immigrant, which involves their personal experiences and/or observations, education, and sociopolitical activism. This is best seen in the claim amongst minoritised communities in the USA and Britain that English is also their language. Many of the Somali youths we interviewed in our recent study of their multilingual practices in London explicitly argued that English is their language too. And they are very proud of the fact that they use English as a primary language of communication in their everyday life (see Abdullahi and Li, 2021). This is not about not wanting to be bilingual or multilingual; these youths know Somali too. But to them, the different named languages – Somali, English, etc. – carry very different socio-historical sensitivities and significance. Therefore, maintaining the boundaries between these languages carries a special meaning. What is particularly interesting is that most of the Somali youths who expressed a desire to claim English as their language also reported experiences of racism. In fact, experiences of discrimination and injustice seem to be a key factor in triggering their ethnic consciousness. The following quote from one of the youth leaders from our interviews is very telling:

English is the language of the Britain. Fine. I'm British. We are British too. Just because I'm Black doesn't mean that I can't speak English. I speak English just as good. English is my language too.

Such claims of language ownership and language rights present new challenges to language policy making. Policies that are aimed purely at maintaining, protecting, and supporting the ethnic community languages seem no longer sufficient to meet the needs of all members of the minority communities.

In the last few years, I have been involved in developing the concept of translanguaging along with other researchers in education, linguistics, and psychology (e.g., Garcia and Li 2014; Li 2018). Translanguaging wants to remind people that named languages are political constructs, and human communication is a fluid, dynamic, and multi-scalar process that involves the use of a diversity of semiotic means. The so-called multilinguals are people who have developed an awareness of the social existence of the named languages through socialisation in context as well as the structural differences

and similarities between the named languages, and know how to manipulate these differences and similarities for meaning-making. Translanguaging has been explored in the context of language education, including the education of ethnic minority children, and of cognition. The relevance of translanguaging for language policy has been touched upon in the context of revitalisation of minority and endangered languages – indeed, the concept has its origin in minority language revitalisation and bilingual programmes as a pedagogical approach against monolingual language policies in schools. Translanguaging clearly advocates a breaking of the boundaries between named languages. It argues from a position that all human languages are contact languages, and human languages evolve through contacts with each other. Mixing and borrowing are key mechanisms of linguistic change over time for all human languages. Language attrition, loss, and endangerment are very unfortunate linguistic consequences of social change. We have seen tremendous, admirable efforts and investment in minority language revitalisation and endangered language conservation. Some of the efforts, however, take a monolingual approach, such as trying to write a dictionary and a grammar of a named language when there is no monolingual speaker of that language any more, or imposing monolingual policies in order to promote the teaching and learning of a minority language to a new generation of speakers who naturally know other languages. We need to ask ourselves very tough questions: In whose interests are these efforts being made? Who are the real beneficiaries of these efforts? Can any language survive without mixing with and borrowing from other languages? Fundamentally, we need to re-evaluate the dichotomies between majority versus minority languages, indigenous versus immigrant languages, or native versus foreign languages, and do away with the one-nation-state/community/person = one-language ideology. The re-evaluation and re-assessment should lead to a rethinking of language policies, including language-in-education policies, and move towards inclusion and equity across communities and social groups.

Li Wei: In terms of the work you have done, do you see commodification as harbinger of growth or decline in relation to minority languages?

Helen: Commodification is a concept that I've grappled with for a long time in my own work, and that struggle is still going on (for a critique of the concept of language commodification in applied linguistics, see Block 2018). The concept of commodification, of course, refers to the introduction of exchange values and relations into domains that were previously considered to be outside of such exchange values and relations. While commodification has become (not always accurately) synonymous with use in commercial settings and exploitation for commercial purposes, as Jackie Urla (2012) has pointed out, as soon as we "thingify" languages (Silverstein 1996), i.e., start to think about them, produce meta discourses about them, name them,

count them (Moore, Pietikäinen and Blommaert 2010), plan them, and crucially try to engineer people's behaviour in relation to language(s), we are already commodifying them. They take on a life of their own; they move from verbs to nouns (see Pennycook and Makoni 2007). While we can see this as a type of reification or thingification, language policy and planning (LPLP) for minority languages can be seen as a type of commodification of languages, particularly when we understand commodities in terms of their usefulness, and LPLP as a restoration of usefulness, even though it is in fact often seen as a response to or a defence against commodification processes understood as marketisation.

Arjun Appadurai's (1986) understanding of commodities and commodification (the process of becoming a commodity) has proven very helpful for me in terms of understanding the position of minority languages. He reminds us that commodities are best seen in terms of usefulness or utility – so a commodity is something that is useful and, therefore by extension, valuable. With his insight, we can see how the minoritisation of languages involves a process of the loss of utility – sometimes deliberate and direct, sometimes as a consequence of other policies and events – thus rendering them useless for communicative functions beyond immediate – and generally undervalued – family, community, and intimate domains. This was certainly the case for Irish, which was the object (i.e., thingified) of a policy of marginalisation by the occupying British Crown. Economic policies and their disastrous consequences also rendered the language “useless,” and as parents prepared their children for emigration to the USA, primarily in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, English rapidly assumed “useful” and thus valuable status. The cultural-nationalist movement at the end of the nineteenth century targeted the revival of Irish, particularly for symbolic purposes; however, it was only with the establishment of the independent state that an attempt was made to reinstate Irish as a language of utility with wide communicative functions. Creating utility value for Irish while simultaneously increasing the symbolic value of the language resulted in an era that Muiris Ó Laoire has described as that of the “mega-policy” (2005) involving corpus, status, and acquisition planning.

One reason for the introduction of such “mega-policies” is to mitigate the effects of market economics and logics on minoritised languages and effectively to protect them either by sheltering them from the unfettered interplay of demand and supply which would have condemned most minoritised languages to die out – as has been the case across the globe – and/or to create a kind of protected market for them. So, for instance, language policies which require that a minority language be used for certain official and public functions and in domains such as education are automatically creating a demand for speakers of those languages, which in turn stimulates (or should stimulate) a supply – i.e., encourage people to maintain their language and/or promote language learning as attractive for those who do not already know the language. Appadurai (1986) terms this kind of protection from the market

“enclaving,” and enclaved commodities are deemed out of bounds for the rough and tumble of market economics. However, interestingly, the enclaving process itself can result in further commodification possibilities. For example, because of its protected, minoritised status, the language is not mainstream, and thus becomes something rare and valuable in an era of globalisation and increasing homogenisation. “Small languages” can thus achieve a kind of “exclusivity” in relation to the big, ubiquitous languages of the world (Pietikäinen et al. 2016). For example, a previously stigmatised and devalued Danish dialect, Bornholmian, has been used to enhance the value of what was previously considered mundane food from the eponymous island in Demark, in an exclusive restaurant in Copenhagen (Maegaard and Karrebæk 2019). In this way, minoritised languages can offer a “luxury register” in Appadurai’s words precisely because they are not widely spoken or known.

This “commercialisation” has been an interesting side-effect of language revitalisation policies, whereby private companies start to use the minoritised language because of its symbolic value. However, this symbolic value is dependent on the utility value of the language not really increasing substantially – if we think of utility as the range of communicative functions across which the language can be used. If the language situation became “normalised,” which is generally the goal of status, corpus, and acquisition planning as part of revitalisation, the language would ironically lose this “luxury register” and would become ultimately a practice, rather than a thing. On the other hand, use of the respective language in these commercial ways, particularly where they are linked to a kind of “peripheral cool,” as Mireille McLaughlin (2013) has described, can have a substantial, positive effect on attitudes towards the minoritised language. Traditionally, we may have thought that a language had to have utility in order to have symbolic value, but we can see here how having symbolic value can make a language seem more appealing and attractive to learn and, crucially, to use.

So, commodification is not a new or straightforward process in relation to minority languages, and it is also not simply carried out by one “side” or the other with predictable consequences. It is helpful to think of the commodification (the thingification) that is carried out by language policy and language planning agents and agencies and that carried out by commercial actors as inextricably linked and interdependent rather than as two separate or even competing and incompatible forces – the former being always to the betterment of and the latter being always to the detriment of the revitalization of minority languages, as the traditional dichotomy has been framed.

Helen: You have researched multilingual practices in heritage language schools. Do any of the models of language management work in this context?

Li Wei: Heritage language schools, or complementary schools as they are called in the UK, for immigrant and ethnic minority children have been an

important socio-political, educational movement in many different countries, especially in Europe and North America, for well over half a century. They have made a major impact on the lives of thousands of children and their families of different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. I see them as a site of contestation of competing ideologies and policies – socio-political, educational, as well as language ideologies and policies. First of all, we need to understand the socio-political history of such schools. In Britain, the first group of complementary schools emerged in the late 1960s for children of Afro-Caribbean families. It was a direct response by Afro-Caribbean parents, who were very dissatisfied with what their children received from mainstream education at the time. In particular, they felt that the mainstream school curriculum often failed to reflect the interests, experiences, and culture of the Afro-Caribbean community. As Chevannes and Reeves (1987, 159) put it:

The existence of the black voluntary school is predicated on the black population's unsatisfactory experience and appraisal of British education – an experience composed of all the classical ingredients of social alienation: powerlessness, meaninglessness, social isolation and self-estrangement.

Although bilingualism was never a main concern of the Afro-Caribbean schools, language was still a key issue. There was a widespread perception in the British society at the time that at least part of Afro-Caribbean children's under-achievement in mainstream schools could be attributed to their "poor" English language proficiency. The children were deemed to be speaking a variety of English that was different from Standard British English. Little recognition was given to the well-formedness of what was later known as the Black English Vernacular, nor to its importance in developing new identities for its speakers and communities. Instead, public debate centred around the so-called "restricted" versus "elaborated" codes (Bernstein 1974) and their perceived effects on Afro-Caribbean children's school achievements (see Edwards 1983, for a critique).

A second wave of the complementary schools movement in Britain came in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and the main advocates were the Muslim communities of South Asian and African origins. Muslim parents wanted separate, religious schools for their children because they believed that their children's religious traditions were more likely to flourish if taught by committed adherents in an environment free from what they regard as the antagonistic influences of either the Christian-dominated or secular ethos of mainstream schools. They asked for equal rights to the Anglican, Catholic, or Jewish communities, who were able to have their own schools. Language was clearly a major concern for the Muslim schools, and it was closely intertwined with religion. Arabic was widely taught alongside a range of community languages in order for the children to be able to read the Koran.

After a series of unsuccessful attempts to secure government funding, the first two Muslim schools received official recognition and support in 1998, one year after the New Labour government came to power.

At around the same time as the Muslim communities in the UK were urging for separate education for their children, a number of other immigrant communities began to set up their own complementary schools with an aim to maintain their linguistic and cultural heritage. For example, the Chinese, the Turkish, and the Greek communities set up a significant number of schools in England and Scotland for their British-born generations. These schools were really weekend classes, and they were truly complementary in the sense that their organisers never asked for a separate education for their children. Instead, classes were run at weekends or outside normal school hours to provide additional teaching of the community languages and cultures. There are now more of this type of community language school and classes than separate schools for Muslims and Afro-Caribbeans combined.

Although the specific social context in which these three broad types of complementary schools in the UK were set up differed, there was one common feature – they were set up in response to the failure of the mainstream education system to meet the needs of the ethnic minority children and their communities. Despite the public debates over pluralistic, multicultural education over the decades, UK governments have made no real attempt to address the criticisms that the mainstream education system was disabling and disempowering ethnic minority children and their communities. Instead, various governments have tried to make use of the complementary schools for their own political and economic agendas. The apparent success of the Chinese community schools has been used by politicians and other policymakers to argue that ethnic minorities were better off with “self-reliance” and to cut back already limited funding in the local education authorities’ budgets for bilingual classroom assistants. Complementary schools and classes were further marginalised as a result. They were seen as a minority concern and were left with ethnic minority communities to deal with themselves.

While challenging the policies and practices of mainstream education in the UK, which has remained largely monolingual in English only, complementary schools raise a number of important questions about themselves. For instance, one of the principal objectives the complementary schools in the country have set themselves is the maintenance of linguistic knowledge and cultural identity amongst the British-born generations. How successful have the complementary schools been in achieving this objective? More importantly perhaps, what is this “cultural identity” that the schools and communities wish to maintain? Do parents and children share the same idea and vision about their identities? It is often said that identity is a dynamic rather than a static concept; it is negotiable and changeable; it is conditioned by context but can be manipulated by individuals, groups, and institutions for different purposes. Complementary schools are an important social

context for developing identities for the immigrant and ethnic minority children attending them. What impact this specific context has on the children's identity development is an issue worth further investigation.

Complementary schools also raise questions regarding pedagogy and classroom management. It is obvious and understandable that the schools want to insist on using specific community languages in this particular domain. Nevertheless, the long-term consequence of such compartmentalisation of community languages is an issue of concern, apart from the practical difficulty of maintaining a strict non-English-speaking policy in the schools. It has been observed that teachers in complementary schools and classes often resort to English when they have failed to explain new terms and concepts in the community languages that they are teaching. Such practices, however, would reinforce the status of English as the dominant language of society.

Community language schools have evolved and continue to evolve with the societal changes that are taking place around them. They raise a wide range of questions way beyond management of languages. Language management models can benefit from examining the issues that emerge from this major, worldwide socio-educational movement. These schools have proven to be a key institution that makes conscious and explicit efforts to control language choices for specific communities. They produce and reproduce certain cultural and linguistic ideologies through community-specific discourses and in response to wider societal policies and pressures. They are socio-historical products. Language management models need to examine the role of such institutions in society, the way they construct their discourses, and factors that impact on the effectiveness of achieving their own stated objectives. Crucially, language management models need to pay more attention to the interfaces of the linguistic, communicative, historical, socio-cultural, and economic-political dimensions of decision-making of such institutions.

Li Wei: What is happening in relation to language policy online?

Helen: The challenges of the emerging smart web, or what is called Web 4.0, not only affect languages and speakers profoundly but all aspects of our society, as technology begins to mainstream and integrates into everyday life. So, it is less and less meaningful to think of language policy as either online or offline, and it is a key moment to examine the readiness and relevance of language policy to deal with the challenges of integrating technologies and to ask how we got to this point. In the early days of online media, there was a justified concern that this new technology would simply be another means by which more languages would become endangered and ultimately disappear. I say justified because we can see the early days as a good example of a *de facto* policy of English monolingualism. The early Internet and later World Wide Web pioneers were operating in their

own linguistic milieu and were developing the medium for their own limited purposes and their thoughts rarely, if ever, turned to the language needs of users beyond this group. The “pioneering” nature of the early developers also meant that there would have been resistance to attempts to control and manage behaviours through mechanisms like language policy. The World Wide Web, which delivered content for the Internet, was founded on a particular conception of equality that implicitly promoted monolingualism. It was established on the principle that it should be the same everywhere for all users. This, by inference and by assumption at the time, particularly given the context outlined above, meant that it should be monolingual, i.e., in English. In this particular conceptualisation of equality and homogeneity, multilingualism would have been divisive and damaging. We have seen many such examples in language policy, whereby equality and fairness are used as arguments for promoting monolingualism and excluding multilingualism. For instance, France where monolingualism and linguistic unity was considered pivotal in fostering solidarity and fraternity and ensuring equality (Wright 2004, 31–32).

Crucially, as technology changed, as the purposes for which the Internet and later the WWW had been designed for expanded and its political-economic base changed, as a more diverse group of developers and users became involved, multilingualism began to happen, albeit in a partial and incoherent way. Again, there was no overall authority that could impose a top-down language policy, although as the WWW began to be carved up into specific top-level domains for particular countries, respective governments attempted to extend territorially and nationally based language policies to these top-level domains. At first, and perhaps inevitably, it was “big” languages that started to appear more online. However, this was limited to languages based on the Roman alphabet, until the technology enabling non-ASCII-based scripts was developed and improved, to allow the development of other “big” languages such as Chinese, Japanese, Arabic, and Russian. Still here at this point in time, we are dealing with top-down decisions about which languages should be provided and to whom, and the work that is being done here is by language professionals largely.

With the emergence of a number of interactive features that are summed up by the term “Web 2.0,” this dynamic changed and multilingualism in fact exploded. The participatory web has completely changed and challenged the model of top-down provision and online language policy, with users creating and “gifting” a lot of localised language content. A particularly well-known and early example was the Facebook translations app (see Lenihan 2013, for an extensive study). Social network Facebook was originally available only in English; however, when the company decided to become multilingual to expand its market, instead of going down the multilingual provision route, it implemented a crowdsourcing solution, developing an app that users could download. The availability of languages on the app for localisation by users was determined by user demand. The

translation community consisted of users who participated in the app, and this community voted individual users' translations up and down. While there was a final moderation step by Facebook, the process overall bypassed language professionals. There was no need to "prove" any kind of language ownership or expertise in order to participate in the translation of Facebook into that particular language. Now, with users doing all the work, the number of languages that can be provided becomes potentially limitless.

Currently, it would seem that we are in a period of intensified but isolated tailoring and personalising of online language provision. We no longer have to "choose" our language options because they are already chosen for us based on our previous online behaviour, location data, etc. Multilingual provision is still taking place (see, for example, Berezhkina 2018), and will continue to take place alongside this. And, despite the technological advances, monolingual mindsets do still underpin a lot of technological development, although this is changing as the players in these industries become somewhat more linguistically diversified. And still, for many in the world, accessing digital technology, where that access is even physically or economically possible, involves language shift to a "bigger" language. So, a key question for us today is who makes online language policy for us? On the one hand, we can think of this as being done by technology – the technology learns our language behaviour and gives us more of what we like linguistically; on the other hand, we are feeding the technology through our language behaviour, so in a sense it could also be argued that we are making and deciding our own language policies without the intervention of a macro or meso level.

Helen: Given everything that is happening in relation to online multilingualism, how does technology impact on intergenerational communication and Family Language Policy?

Li Wei: First of all, let me say something about the term "Family Language Policy," as many people feel that much of the work in this expanding field is on practice rather than policy in the conventional sense. It is absolutely true that in Family Language Policy research, the focus is on everyday practices, which may be classified as covert, unintentional policies. But a key concern in Family Language Policy research is how members of the family, of different generations, collectively make decisions regarding their language practices within and beyond the home domain, why, and whether the decisions change over time for what reasons (see also King and Curdt-Christensen, volume 1). In some sense, it is not about policy as a static entity but the process of policymaking.

Inter-generational communication is key to family dynamics and well-being, and it is an issue that all families have to face. When it comes to families where different generations have different language learning experiences, different proficiencies in different languages, and, more importantly, different understandings of the values of the languages and, therefore, different

attitudes towards them, inter-generational communication becomes a key site for language policy and management considerations. It is often assumed that in immigrant and ethnic minority families, the older generations naturally want to hold on to their ethnic languages and do not want language shift towards the majority languages to happen within the family. But we have ample evidence from our research, as well as in other people's work (Pauwels 2016), that processes of language maintenance and language shift are complex and dynamic, and it is rarely a one-directional phenomenon (see also Lane and Wigglesworth, volume 1; Anthonissen and Stroud, volume 1). In fact, many immigrant parents are very keen for their children to acquire and develop competence in the majority languages. And in many cases, they themselves also want to develop competence in those languages in order to improve their socio-economic standing. But in most cases, such families do not want to lose the languages they already have either. So, what they want is not replacing the ethnic languages with the majority languages, but developing bilingual and multilingual competence. We also have evidence that youths of immigrant and ethnic minority backgrounds want to develop a good level of knowledge of the ethnic languages in their post-teenage years as they develop better understanding of their identities and the benefits of being bilingual and multilingual (Lanza 2020; Lanza and Lexander 2019; Golden and Lanza 2019).

Recently we have undertaken a survey of language and literacy practices in transnational families in Britain as part of a project on family language policy. One of the interesting findings is the significance of mobile devices and digital social media in family. All the 783 families who responded to our survey reported that they used mobile devices and digital social media for communication. A significant proportion (64%) of the families reported that they gave children digital readers instead of bed-time stories. And all the multilingual families used English as well as other languages in their social media communication. New communication technologies have had a huge impact on our daily lives, and when they are used appropriately, they can be an important facilitator in acquiring, maintaining, and developing multilingual competence.

It is true that some elderly people might find the digital mobile devices a challenge, especially if one comes from a linguistic background that does not use the Roman alphabet, which is used for the input systems on most devices. But some are able to make it an opportunity to learn a new language via digital devices. In the Chinese families that we have studied, for example, we see many British-born Chinese children and adolescents using the alphabetic input to learn Chinese characters. Some sound-to-text conversion software also enables them to write messages to their parents and grandparents in their ethnic languages.

One of the most interesting features of the digital communications between different generations in the immigrant and ethnic minority families is that the messages exchanged between them are multilingual and

multimodal but rarely fall into a monolingual norm or standard. In the Polish families in London that we studied, we see parents and children communicating by social media with English, Polish (although not using standard spelling and rarely with diacritics), emoji, and other signs (Zhu, Li and Lyons 2015). From a monolingual or a linguistic purism perspective, such writings would not be acceptable. But they are what dynamic multilingual inter-generational communication is about in the era of social media. And they may well have a long-lasting effect on the named language systems. They certainly impact on family dynamics, which we need to understand much more through further research.

Concluding remarks

When we penned the outline for our joint contribution to this volume, we used the phrase “changing context” with a good degree of certainty and confidence about what those changes might entail. Now, as we deliver our chapter and conclusion, we are in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, writing from “lock-down” situations. We are fortunate to be comfortable, safe, and able to work, but entirely at a loss as to how to “move forward” with life across the globe on hold and with very little understanding of what the “changing context” we are actually going to be facing might look like. While technology was already essential to everyday life, its integration and mainstreaming are now becoming complete: It mediates our work, our friendships, our intergenerational family networks, our healthcare, our consumption. As we have seen in China, South Korea, and other countries, technology is part of the way in which we can get back to some kind of normality while living with COVID-19. Ironically, by being online through tracking and contact-tracing apps, we may actually be permitted to live offline a bit more. And what will the linguistic dimensions and consequences of this be? Where are multilingualism and heritage languages in this conversation or might they be consigned to the non-essential category? We note that in the UK government’s listing of “key workers” – frontline workers fighting against COVID-19, including National Health Service (NHS) staff and social care workers, school and nursery staff, the police, firefighters and the army, supermarket staff and transport workers, etc. – interpreters for community languages, including British Sign Language, are not included. In fact, the standard practices in the NHS to provide translation and interpreting for ethnic minority patients are not followed in this crisis. Some communities have managed to translate public health information into their languages. But there is no specific support for languages other than English. In China, where the virus first occurred, there have been reports of communication failures due to the mutually unintelligible regional languages people spoke. There are also numerous examples of people trying to get information across to each other through social media in the absence of an adequate response by

formal governmental agencies or, indeed, under surveillance and censorship. In Britain, many bilingual and multilingual families are concerned that the space for home languages, which they have carefully nurtured over the years, has been taken over by English because of homeschooling and working from home (see also Hardach 2020, which mentions Lanza's work on this issue).

During this crisis, many parts of the world have witnessed the rehabilitation of experts and big government both of which had been marginalised in the intensive globalisation we have been living through. What elements of that era will remain post-COVID-19? And how has the language of the crisis framed what the post-COVID-19 world will look like? What will become of travel and intercultural experiences, a mainstay of university education which is severely under threat for the current and possibly also future academic years? What will be seen as essential to education and to social and cultural life in a worldwide depression that is being forecast as the worst in almost a century? Overall, the response has been a communal one, and people have been prepared to forego civil liberties for the greater good and for their fellow human beings. Will the individualisation and personalisation that are features of contemporary digital experiences be challenged by a rediscovery of "community"? What will become of our familiar landscapes – our towns and cities? Which businesses, practices, and traditions will survive this crushing pause? Will it be a victory for the homogenising chains, or will small, local and ethnic businesses have the flexibility to adapt to this new existence? All of these questions and more about the current global crisis are crucial for us to think about as we attempt to understand, navigate, and shape what language policy might look like in the post-COVID-19 world.

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