

Toward a More Flexible Language Policy: An Attempt to Apply Giddens' Structuration Theory on Analysis of Language Policy Efficiency^{*}

Maarja Siiner

University of Tartu, Tartu, Estonia

Inspired by Giddens' structuration theory and its mutually constitutive character of structure and agency, the present paper offers a different and interdisciplinary approach to the analysis of the language policy efficiency in terms of analysis of the flexibility of language policy design. Flexibility in a language policy design can be measured by how different agents on interstate, state, local municipality, and institutional level are left with possibility of agency, i.e., possibility to be involved in identification and solving of local and contextual language problems. Inspired furthermore by Foucault's governmentality, legal regulations in the area of language use, status and acquisition are seen as crucial, as they explicitly frame the possibility for agency for the mentioned agents. The possibility for success of a language political intervention furthermore depends on whether the agent involved in finding local solutions for a language problem also has access to the necessary allocative resources for the successful fulfillment of the task. Key points of the paper are highlighted through contrasting examples of Estonia's overt (or thick) and Denmark's covert (or thin) language policy design. Using an analytical paradigm of Giddens' allocatively and authoritatively distributed resources, and moving from the macro level in legislation to the meso and micro levels of language activity, the paper demonstrates how "free spaces" can open up, revealing potential for bottom-up agency to solve language problems in the allocative model, whereas the authoritative model (as in Estonia) can lead to "holes" through its insufficient distribution of resources to support successful linguistic integration, since the majority of resources are used on control on the state level.

Keywords: language policy, Giddens' structuration theory, agency, Denmark, Estonia

Introduction—The Multilayered and Interdisciplinary Nature of Language Policy

Reasons for developing a certain type of language policy design are not always connected with language situation, as it does not take as a point of departure the ways language is used and acquired as outlined within sociolinguistics, anthropology, or ethnography (Jørgensen, 2010; McCarty, 2011). The analysis of language policy developments in macro sociolinguistics reveals its relation to larger and more important political or

^{*} **Acknowledgements:** The paper was prepared in the framework of research grant "Collective Identities in Estonia in the Changed Political and Economic Context" financed by Estonian Science Foundation (Grant No. 8347).

Maarja Siiner, Ph.D., Institute of Journalism and Communication, University of Tartu.

ideological discourses, concerning, for example, the security or economic situation of the state (Rubin & Jernudd, 1971; Ricento & Hornberger, 1996; Ricento, 2005; Siiner, 2012).

The view of the essence of language present in many language policies, then, tends to emerge from the political and economic agendas that lie behind policies and seldom vice versa (Shohamy, 2006). Or, as Jernudd and Nekvapil (2012) stressed, concerning both policy formulation and implementation, language policy is clearly socio-political, as it often deals with consequences of changes in demographic, economic, or socio-cultural or socio-political changes in a society. Active language planning on a state level is therefore not different from planning of societies (Spolsky, 2009). Language policy as a field extends thus beyond the margin of linguistics and is calling for a combination of tools and approaches from a wide range of disciplines besides sociolinguistics, including economics, sociology, law, and political science (Jernudd & Nekvapil, 2012, p. 17). Finding an answer to the question of the efficiency of language political interventions, calls furthermore for a broader view on language policy.

While macro-sociolinguistics increases the understanding of how the relationship between language ideology and language practice has an influence on developing language policy (Spolsky, 2012), the ethnographic approach to language policy conceptualizes language policy as a dynamic process stretching over time and involving agents in different layers of society (Levinson, Everitt, & Jones, 2007; Ricento & Hornberger, 1996). Seeking an extended understanding of language policy from an interdisciplinary angle, the present paper is embedded in a theoretical framework that goes beyond sociolinguistics or the ethnography of language in reaching out into social science, with a focus on structure and agency and a concern for the distribution of resources to offer possible solutions for language users' changing needs in the area of globalization.

While the ethnography of language policy criticizes traditional language policy research for dichotomizing language policy creation and implementation, and for ignoring the agentive role of "implementers" and language users (Johnson, 2009, p. 156), and Pennycook (2002) furthermore argued that power does not solely rest with the state, or within the policy text, arguing that there is a need for a method which takes the focus off the state. As the author will demonstrate below, a choice on the state level to regulate or not in the area of language use, status, or acquisition (traditionally seen as the main language policy areas (Spolsky, 2004)), however, still may have a crucial effect on language policy development and possible effect.

The author has done so by adopting Giddens' structuration theory in her analysis of language policy design in Denmark and Estonia. The author found Giddens useful since his theory can be used to explain how a law works. Although such "visualized" rules as laws or grammars are only "codified interpretations of rules" and not rule themselves, their overt formulation gives them special qualities of endurance (Giddens, 1984, p. 21). Laws are, furthermore, some of the most strongly sanctioned types of social rule, which give them strong influence on structuring social activity. Giddens' theory of how social practices are ordered over time and space is furthermore an attempt to overcome the macro-micro-level leap present in ethnographic and sociolinguistic research on language policy (Hornberger & Johnson, 2011). Giddens does not give primacy to either structure or agency, seeing their mutual constitutive nature as a cycle. This understanding is also relevant in the context of the present article, since it explains how such social institutions as national languages are a

result of a need for stability in the midst of change, and how laws are used to constitute and “freeze” an understanding or signification of language—giving this understanding a sense of durability over time and the value of a truth rather than just a convention.

The Mutually Constitutive Character of Social Structures and Agency

What makes Giddens’ structuration theory relevant as a set of “thinking tools” (Bourdieu, as cited in Thomas, 2007, p. 83) in the analysis of language policy is its illumination of the constitutive, although amenable to change, character of social structures. Giddens’ “structure” refers to a set of rules and resources which individual or collective agents draw on to enact social practices. The concept of “system” may be understood as a process of social practices being chronically reproduced and gaining permanence, with “actors repeating routines and rituals (reproduced practices) across time and space over and over so that the pattern itself becomes a taken for granted feature of social life” (Cohen, 1998, p. 282). One of the central ideas in the structuration theory is that “the rules and resources drawn upon in the production and reproduction of social practices are at the same time the means of system reproduction” (Giddens, 1984, p. 19). Giddens’ reproductive nature of social practices and the institutionalization of rules is reminiscent of Foucault’s (1991) concept of “governmentality”, where the state’s hierarchical, top-down power is seen to include forms of social control in such disciplinary institutions as schools, which help to compound certain discourses that get internalized by individuals and guide their behavior. In the author’s analysis of language policy design, there is a particular focus on the institutional level of schools and other institutions of education, such as universities and training centers for the unemployed run by local municipalities. Rules are, however, in Giddens’ view—contrary to the laws of nature—generalizable (sets of) procedures or rituals, which enable individuals to take part in an “indeterminate range of social circumstances” (Giddens, 1984, p. 22).

Laws are attempts to institutionalize and make some rules or rituals more durable than others, but are, in Giddens’ view, only codified interpretations of rules, i.e., they suggest only one understanding of how the society should work. Laws are also important tools for distributing resources, i.e., “the power of getting things done” (Giddens, 1984, p. 283). Giddens’ resources are of two types: authoritative and allocative. Authoritative resources are the non-material resources drawn on in controlling and influencing the circumstances of other agents’ actions or coordinating the activity of others; and allocative resources are connected with the harnessing of material resources, in terms of goods, technology, and the environment.

Laws as interpretations of rules are contextual and conditional, depending on which agents are involved (which parties, experts, institutions, etc.) and the resources available (the popularity of the political parties involved, their political agendas, knowledge, and experience, material resources, other laws/constitutions that have to be taken into account, etc.). Allocative resources (material, such as land or means of production) and authoritative resources (non-material, such as social status or life chances) reflect the power and domination relations in society and, as such, determine the individual’s potential for action (Giddens, 1984, p. 258). The concept of resources is important as it allows one to distinguish between different types of actors in terms of their capabilities or potential for action (see Figure 1). While resources constitute the conditions, which influence actors’ potential for action and thus their participation in the reproduction of or change in social practices, rules are said to “generate” social practices.



Figure 1. Resources and possibility for taking agency to solve language problems. Source: Adapted from Giddens (1984).

There are, however, actions that are routinized or institutionalized; they are habits, traditions or routines that are more resistant to change, becoming institutionalized features that the society seems to be based on. Giddens sees language as one of these social institutions, being by definition a more enduring feature of social life and social structures, since its institutionalized features give it solidity across time and space, marked by an “absence of the subject”. This is typical of a state language, whose status, use and form/corpus are fixed (by law). Language is thus usually conceived of as enduring, something that can and should remain unchanged—with a reference to a language standard or “a norm”. Certain standardization-justification processes are, however, intrinsic to all language uses, since the majority of language users strive for mutual understanding (Jernudd & Nekvapil, 2012). Or, as Spolsky (2004, p. 8) had stated, language policies exist even where they have not been made explicit or established by authority or law. The survival of institutions is supported by individuals’ general desire to preserve ontological security, i.e., to maintain a sense of trust that the social world and its parameters are trustworthy and that, while everything seems to change, some things remain the same (Deumert, 2003). Also, such collective agents as politicians (members of a political party or a government) also strive for the preservation of social institutions and attempt to legitimize the interpretation of rules that the institution stands for through legal regulation.

As competent members of society, we know countless social rules, which allow us to participate in a wide range of social interactions. Actors cannot, however, know everything, and the consequences of their actions constantly and chronically escape their initiators (Giddens, 1984, p. 297), indicating the fragility of the power of actors and the limits of their knowledge of the rules. This is a very important point in terms of the issue of the possible success of a legislative intervention, in this case the success of a language policy, and for two reasons. Since the duality of structure and agency makes change and stability two sides of the same “social life” coin, Giddens explains conditions for both change (the availability of resources determines the capability of agency and thus transformation, while actions may have unintended consequences) and for durability (structure is reproduced through social action). Giddens’ structuration theory is thus applicable as an explanation of how laws are born.

Outlining the Method for Studying Different Agents' Access to Allocative and Authoritative Resources in a Language Policy Model

While laws present a codified interpretation of rules, they also more explicitly frame implementation by distributing authoritative and allocative resources, i.e., which agents on what levels have the power to control or decide about action, and by allocating the necessary resources (which can be economic, intellectual, material, discursive, etc.) for the fulfillment of the task. Laws as interpretations of rules also frame the possibility of agency, either by leaving the possibility of legislative intervention to other agents at “lower” levels of society or by leaving certain areas unregulated. Central to implementation is thus the distribution of allocative resources. Do those who are given, or are capable of taking on, the task of fulfilling the goals of policy also have the necessary means and capacity to do so? It is also important to consider at what level the allocative and authoritative resources are to be found. As stated in Foucault’s concept of governmentality, if allocative and authoritative resources are found at the same level, this can give some (usually state) institutions an incontestable monopoly on truth (a rule becomes subject-less and outside of time and space), in contrast to private institutions and companies, which might possess considerable allocative resources. When the state is both the legislating and implementing agent (possessing both the authoritative and allocative resources), this can make language policies less flexible concerning the possibility of solving “local” language problems contextually, while distributing authoritative and allocative resources at lower levels (to institutions and corporations, or international organizations) may create a greater sense of temporality and contextuality, and thus increase the possibility of finding a local and contextual solution.

Apart from language policy as a process taking place on different levels, language policy dynamics also involve interventions in the different stages of human life, according to what psychological and social needs language use and acquisition have to meet for language users. Choudhry (2009, p. 605) stated, with reference to Patten and Kymlicka (2003), that the value of disaggregating the question of official language policy is that this highlights how the range of choice is quite different in different institutional contexts. His idea is based on debates over the language of instruction in public education, where the primary and secondary education levels are seen as being largely about cultural survival/integration and language socialization, while the language of instruction at the post-secondary level is intimately connected with the availability of higher education in a certain language, and the language of the public sector and the economy. Although Choudhry’s focus is slightly narrower (language of instruction), the author sees it as applicable in a broader sense, because it emphasizes the different needs of language users at different levels of their lives, and how the different phases contribute to reaching the declared ultimate goal: self-supporting and active participation in the labor market and in the democratic processes in society.

With reference to Choudhry, the different stages of human life are, with some modifications, divided according to the institutional settings that designate speakers’ needs and opportunities. Regulations on language use and acquisition at the pre-school and primary education levels deal with cultural survival, while regulations of language use and acquisition at the upper secondary and vocational training levels are more about how well-equipped youngsters are for the needs of the labor market and higher education (and thus economic and social mobility), and adult education is for those who are not well-equipped or need better equipment for the

changing needs of the labor market. This part also stresses the interconnectedness of language legislation and legislation in other related areas, such as education, the labor market and social policy, and whether those areas are regulated centrally in a separate language act (overt language policy) or in legislation covering the mentioned areas (covert language policy).

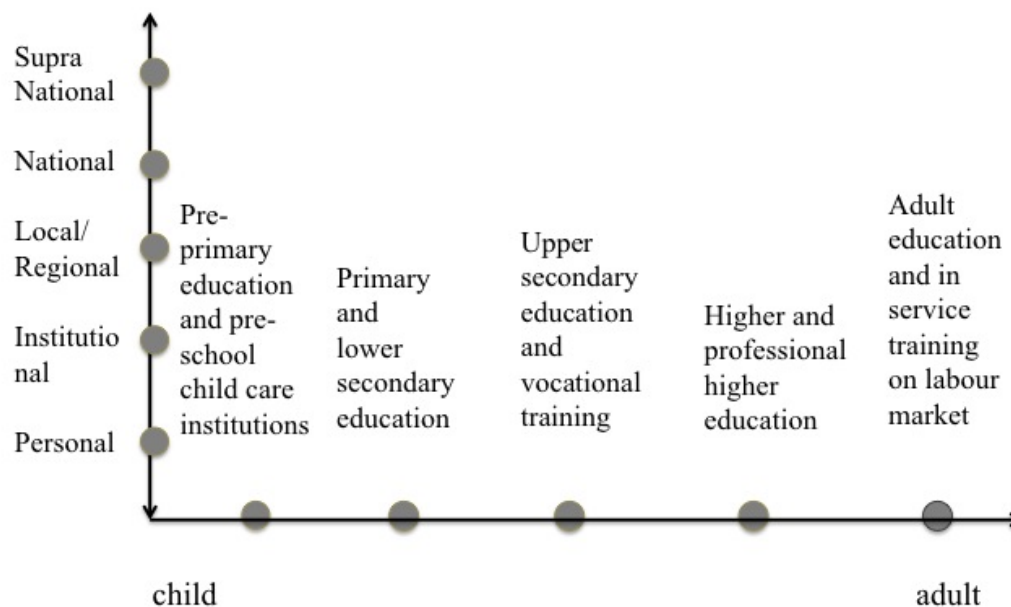


Figure 2. Model for analyzing language acquisition regulations on different educational stages.
Source: Adapted from Siiner (2012).

For this purpose, the author has adopted a method, where the language policy design is analyzed as it emerges from the policy texts as to how it frames the possibility of solving the stated problem or meeting the defined goal (Siiner, 2012). The author will do so by analyzing how authoritative and allocative resources are distributed among different agents at different levels of society and at what stages of human life. With reference to Choudhry's division of the institutional settings surrounding certain stages of human life, the author will, for the purpose of the present introductory cover article and as presented on Figure 2, divide the phases into five main parts: (1) pre-primary education and child care institutions; (2) primary and lower secondary education; (3) upper secondary education and vocational training; (4) higher education and professional higher education; and (5) adult education and in-service-training in the labor market.

In the author's critical textual analysis of policy texts, she will—inspired by the ethnographic “language political onion” (Hornberger & Johnson, 2007)—look at the level at which the different agents, explicitly, or implicitly involved in the implementation of the policy, are placed: (1) the personal level; (2) the institutional level; (3) the level of local government/municipality; (4) the state level; and (5) the international/global level, as presented on Figure 2. The arrow points both ways in order to emphasize that policy is not merely a one-way, top-down process (Hornberger & Johnson, 2007).

In order to understand the different agents' capacities and opportunities for action/agency, the author further examined the division of allocative and authoritative resources among agents involved in implementation. Resources can be distributed explicitly by a law or a policy, by giving certain institutions, the responsibility for deciding how the task is to be completed or the responsibility for controlling how the task has been completed

(authoritative resources), also supplying the necessary means for the fulfillment of the task (allocative resources), which might however not turn out to be sufficient. The distribution of resources can also be implicit: Where the existing rules (i.e., laws passed at the state level) or lack of rules leave the possibility of agency to other agents who might, or might not, have the necessary means to fulfill the task.

Legal regulations (or the lack of them) as interpretations of rules are thus seen as creating a framework for the possibility of agency.

“Free Spaces” vs. “Holes” in Language Legislation

“Free space” has been defined by the ethnographic approach to language policy as not top-down implementation, leaving space for local interpretations and appropriations in policy implementation, and thus the possibility of finding local solutions (Hornberger & Johnson, 2007). Language legislation and regulations can open up space for necessary local initiatives, interpretations, and adjustments, by stating them explicitly in policy texts, by leaving agency to actors at lower levels, or by choosing not to regulate in a specific area, as was the case with post-apartheid multilingual policies in South Africa, creating “democratic space for legal and peaceful promotion of multilingualism” (Bloch & Alexander, 2003). Politicians or administrators can also make choices that close those potential spaces by “overregulating” or giving only the state the authoritative resources to solve language problems (Siiner, 2012).

By comparing the language policy design in Estonia and Denmark, the author came to the conclusion, that one of the main differences between overt, active, and restrictive language policy in Estonia and covert, laissez-faire and “liberal” language policy in Denmark seems to be the possibility for agency at other than the state level, i.e., the possibility of finding contextual solutions to local problems. The more top-down and symbolic the language policy—like is the case with Estonia—the less free space there is left for solving language problems locally, or for meeting the contextual needs of language users. The author’s analysis revealed that, besides “free spaces”, there can also be unintended “spaces” or “holes”, i.e., holes in the distribution of authoritative (control) and allocative (means) resources. Those can exist even in the case of a seemingly thick and centrally administrated language policy, as is the case with interventions in pre-schoolchild institutions and basic schools in Estonia. “Holes” (see Figure 3) are a result of structural and economic constraints and politicians’ lack of willingness to make decisions that can cost them in public opinion polls. It is important to highlight, in the context of the article, the possible consequences of the lack of regulations (and thus also what politicians think is worth paying attention to) and consequently the insufficient distribution of needed resources to solve language problems at these stages of human life.

The “free spaces” can thus be both intentional and unintended. It is, however, important to stress that intentional “free spaces”, which exist in the language policies at the level in Denmark, can also have unexpected consequences (e.g., the growing status and use of English in certain subject areas) as a result of structure-agency dualism. The same is true of unintended “holes”, where agents at lower levels try to solve problems “locally”, solutions leading to further problems due to their lack of necessary know how and other allocative resources to solve the problem. The author’s analysis has indicated that the division of authoritative and allocative resources (i.e., whether the agent who has taken agency to solve the problem also has the necessary allocative resources to do so) is of crucial importance in trying to solve language problems.

In Estonia, where there still exist parallel schools, Russian and Estonian medium instruction, socioeconomically advantaged Russian-speaking parents have exercised agency in securing their children's successful linguistic integration by sending their children to Estonian-medium kindergartens and basic schools. This local "solution" at the individual level can create additional problems, since individual parents are not in possession of sufficient allocative resources to solve language problems, because Estonian-medium schools lack the appropriate teaching resources and necessary training for teachers in how to teach Russian-speaking children in classes designed only for Estonian students (Siiner & Vihalemm, 2013). Attempts at agency on the individual level are also a clear sign of the existence of a language problem that has not been solved properly. In the current situation, the state exercises control over children's language competence once they are adults (as Russian-speakers have to pass Estonian language exams in order to gain Estonian citizenship), but does not distribute the necessary means to support their successful acquisition process starting at an early age. "Holes" rather than "free paces" can lead to a situation where individual language users are left with the responsibility of solving their own problems without having access to the necessary resources. The state, institutions and individuals have different levels of access to allocative resources, which can be discursive, political, intellectual, and material.

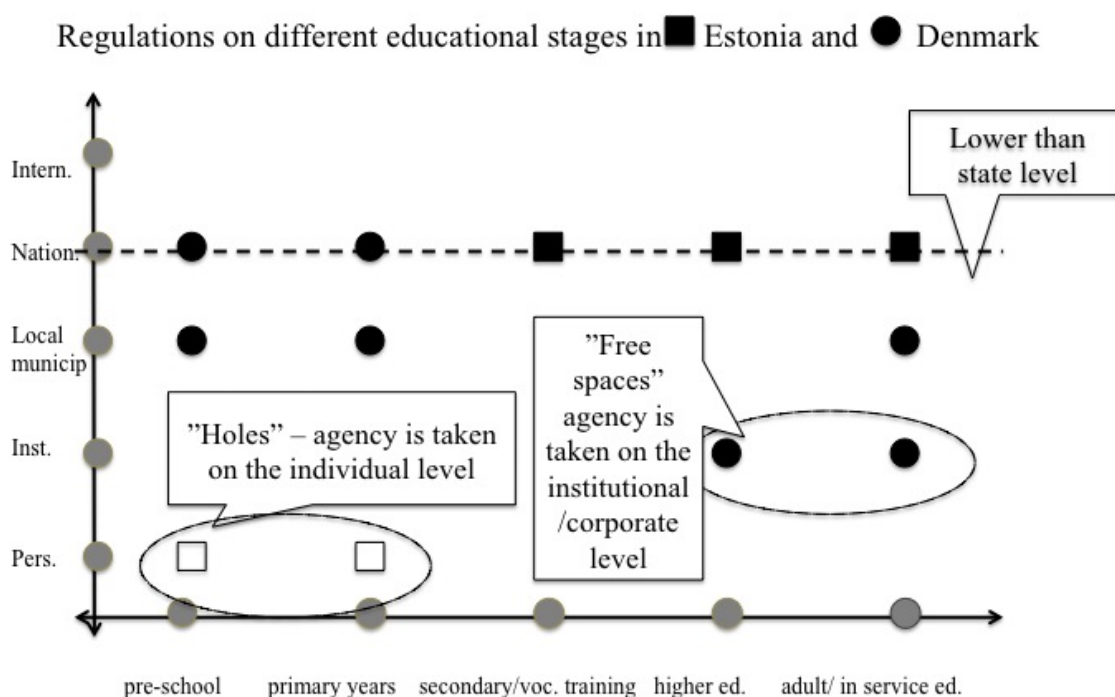


Figure 3. Comparison of language acquisition regulations on different educational stages in Denmark and Estonia.
Source: Adapted from Siiner (2012).

Conclusions

Considering the complexity of language policy as an object of study, the author calls for a more interdisciplinary approach to language political issues, with an involvement of insights from political studies and social sciences, besides sociolinguistics. Inspired by Giddens' structuration theory and based on insights

from macro sociolinguistics and ethnolinguistics, the author proposes an understanding of language policy making as a designing tool of the language environment, which is based on the rationale of the language users' everyday practices, including their options for social mobility, economic well-being, political participation, access to education and for becoming self-supportive. In an ethnographic approach to language policy, the possibilities for local appropriations in policy implementation and for solving local problems through local initiatives are seen as "free spaces". Comparing the language political tools used for integrating the ethno-linguistic minority population in the labor markets of Denmark and Estonia, the author concludes that Estonia's language political design is relatively top-down and symbolic, as in Estonia, less free space is left for solving language problems locally, or for meeting the contextual needs of language users than in Denmark. The Danish language political design is more flexible (despite being even more restrictive in regard to Danish language acquisition) as there the policy-making is left to the actors on lower administrative level (like local municipalities) and thereby the local contextual solutions are not perceived as socially unjust. If, however, the role of state is central in both defining language problems and finding solutions, it is difficult to find ad hoc solutions to local or contextual language problems, as the state is mostly capable of offering solutions, applicable everywhere in the state.

References

- Bloch, C., & Alexander, N. (2003). Aluta continua: The relevance of the continua of biliteracy to South African multilingual schools (pp. 91-121). In N. Hornberger (Ed.), *Continuation of biliteracy: An ecological framework for educational policy, research, and practice in multilingual settings*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd..
- Choudhry, S. (2009). Managing linguistic nationalism through constitutional design: Lessons from South-Asia. *I-CON*, 7(4), 577-618.
- Cohen, I. J. (1998). Anthony Giddens. In R. Stones (Ed.), *Key sociological thinkers* (pp. 279-290). Basingstoke: Macmillan Press.
- Deumert, A. (2003). Bringing speakers back in? Epistemological reflections on speaker oriented explanations of language change. *Language Sciences*, 25, 15-76.
- Foucault, M. (1991). Governmentality. (R. Braidotti Trans.). In G. Burchell, C. Gordon, & P. Miller (Eds.), *The Foucault effect: Studies in governmentality* (pp. 87-104). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Giddens, A. (1984). *The constitution of society: Outline of the theory of structuration*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Hornberger, N. H., & Johnson, D. C. (2007). Slicing the onion ethnographically: Layers and spaces in multilingual language education policy and practice. *TESOL Quarterly*, 41(3), 509-532.
- Hornberger, N. H., & Johnson, D. C. (2011). The ethnography of language policy. In T. McCarty (Ed.), *Ethnography and language policy* (pp. 273-289). New York and London: Routledge.
- Jernudd, B., & Nekvapil, J. (2012). History of the field. In Spolsky (Ed.), *The Cambridge handbook of language policy* (pp. 16-36). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Johnson, D. C. (2009). Ethnography of language policy. *Language Policy*, 8, 139-159.
- Jørgensen, J. N. (2010). Languageing: Nine years of poly-lingual development of young Turkish-Danish grade school students (Vols. 1-2). *Copenhagen studies in bilingualism: The Køge series* (Vols. k15-k16). Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen.
- Landman, T. (2008). *Issues and methods in comparative politics*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Levinson, B. A. U., Everitt, J., & Jones, L. C. (2007). Integrating Indiana's Latino newcomers: A study of state and community responses to the new immigration (Working paper #1, Center for Education and Society, Indiana University).
- McCarty, T. (2011). Introducing ethnography and language policy. *Ethnography and language policy* (pp. 1-28). New York and London: Routledge.
- Patten, A., & Kymlicka, W. (2003). Introduction: Language rights and political theory: Context, issues, and approaches. In A. Patten, & W. Kymlicka (Eds.), *Language rights and political theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pennycook, A. (2002). Mother tongues, governmentality, and protectionism. *Inter-national Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 154, 11-28.

- Ricento, T. (2005). Theoretical perspectives in language policy: An overview. In T. Ricento (Ed.), *An introduction to language policy: Theory and method* (pp. 3-9). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Ricento, T., & Hornberger, N. (1996). Unpeeling the onion: Language planning and policy and the ELT professional. *TESOL Quarterly*, 30(3), 401-427.
- Rubin, J., & Jernudd, B. (Eds.). (1971). *Can language be planned? Sociolinguistic theory and practice for developing nations*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Shohamy, E. (2006). *Language policy: Hidden agendas and new approaches*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Siiner, M. (2012). Towards a more flexible language policy: A comparative analysis of language policy in Denmark and Estonia. *Dissertationes De Mediis et Communicationibus Universitatis Tartuensis* (Vol. 17). Tartu: Tartu University Press.
- Siiner, M., & Vihalemm, T. (2013). Jätkusuutlik keelepoliitika: kas ja kuidas? (Sustainable language policy: Why and how?). *Keel ja Kirjandus*, 2, 81-94.
- Spolsky, B. (2004). *Language policy*. London: Routledge.
- Spolsky, B. (2009). *Language management*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Spolsky, B. (2012). What is language policy?. In Spolsky (Ed.), *The Cambridge handbook of language policy* (pp. 3-15). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Thomas, G. (2007). *Education and theory: Strangers in paradigms*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.