Language Planning and Planned Languages: How can planned languages inform language planning?

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The field of language planning (LP) has largely ignored planned languages. Of classic descriptions of LP processes (e.g. Haugen 1983, Taulli 1984, Cooper 1989, Haarmann 1990, Kaplan & Baldauf 1997), only Taulli (preceded by Wüster) suggests that planned languages (what Wüster calls Plansprache) might bear on LP theory and practice. If LP aims “to modify the linguistic behaviour of some community for some reason” (Kaplan & Baldauf 3), creating a language de novo is little different.

Language policy and planning are increasingly seen as more local and less official (Spolsky 2004), and occasionally more international and cosmopolitan (European language policy; ELF).

Zamenhof’s work on Esperanto provides extensive material, little studied, documenting the formation of the language and linking it particularly to issues of supranational LP.

Defining LP decision-making, Kaplan & Baldauf begin with context and target population. Zamenhof’s Esperanto came shortly before Ben-Yehuda’s revived Hebrew. His target community was (mostly) the world’s educated elite; Ben-Yehuda’s worldwide Jewry, particularly Palestine. Both planners were driven not by linguistic interest but by sociopolitical ideology rooted in reaction to anti-Semitism and imbued with the idea of progress. Their territories had no boundaries, but were not imaginary. Function mattered as much as form (Haugen’s terms), status as much as corpus.

For Zamenhof, status planning involved emphasis on Esperanto’s ownership by its community – a collective planning process embracing all speakers (cf. Hebrew). Corpus planning included a standardized European semantics, lexical selectivity based not simply on standardization but on representation, and the development of written, and literary, style.

Esperanto was successful as linguistic system and community language, less as generally accepted lingua franca (Blanke). Its terminology development and language cultivation offers a model for language revival (Kimura 2012), but Zamenhof’s unsophisticated analysis of language economy left him unprepared to deal with language as power.

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