Negotiating language policies in the city: The case of schools in Tel Aviv-Jaffa multilingual neighborhoods

Ofra Inbar, Elana Shohamy
Tel Aviv University, Israel

The multilingual city is a common reality worldwide; the extent to which language policies of cities incorporate this reality is the main topic of this paper in relation to the multilingual and mixed populations in the city of Tel Aviv-Jaffa. Specifically, we examine the inter-relationship and complexities as well as conflicts with regards to ideology and practice among agents participating in formulating and enacting various dimensions of language policies on municipal and local levels. The research is contextualized within current approaches to language policies which call for greater interaction of top down and bottom up policies so that language policies better reflect the needs and practices of multilingual communities, rather than implement one homogenous language policy for all.

This paper builds on earlier work on the topic which examined issues relating to multilingual policies in schools in Jaffa, where the main language of instruction in Arab schools is Arabic. In this study we focus on two unique schools in Tel Aviv, one is a school consisting of refugees, asylum seekers and foreign workers from a variety of African, South Americans and Asian countries residing in an area of ‘central station. The second is a bilingual Hebrew-Arabic kindergarten and school in the Jaffa area. The data includes descriptions of de facto policies as well as the different voices within and outside these institutions of teachers, administrators and community activists. The data is collected via interviews and official documents relating to language policy analyzed using critical discourse analysis methods. Implications for the development of specific language policies that match the levels of multilingualism of these institutions in a negotiated manner are drawn.

Keywords: multilingual schools, local language policy.