

Christopher HOUTKAMP

Sonntag, S. & Cardinal, L. (eds.):
State Traditions and Language Regimes. Montreal:
Mc-Gill Queen's University Press, 2015

The field of language policies is widely studied by scholars from different disciplines. Researchers have in particular focused on the normative aspects of language policies (i.e. 'what is the most desirable policy-framework?') and their effects on society. However, less work has been done on the pure political aspect of language policy making. Cardinal and Sonntag's edited volume 'State Traditions and Language Regimes' aims to fill this gap. The book's articles are very diverse but fall under one methodological umbrella, namely historical institutionalism. Cardinal and Sonntag argue that this methodology, which has its roots in Political Science research, can shed light into the decision making process surrounding language policies. Using the key concepts 'state tradition' (i.e. the historical, institutional and normative dynamics that guide a state's public policies) and 'language regime' ("language practices as well as conceptions of language and language use as projected through state policies and as acted upon by language users"), the volume's contributors research 'how' and 'why' certain language policy choices are made.

The book is divided into three parts. Part one, which is called 'contours', consists of articles that analyse the general language policy choices of four states (Canada, the United States, Ireland and Poland) and features one article on the connection between language policies, globalization and Global English. The case study articles offer an overview of the critical moments in the different states' history regarding language policy and use this as a basis to understand current politics of language policy. For example, Cardinal's article on Canada shows how important court rulings have been in forcing language policy choices. Sonntag's article on the United States outlines how a 'laissez-faire' language policy would in practice lead to linguistic assimilation, since the most dominant language benefits the most from little state intervention. Peter Ives' article on Global English looks at the relation between state traditions and language regime at a global level, using a Gramscian framework.

The second part of the book, entitled 'coalitions', features articles that emphasise the importance of competition, both in institutional and societal settings, when analysing language policy choices. Coalition building proves to be important for linguistic minorities to bolster their linguistic position. For example, as Harguindéguy and Itçaina show in their article regarding the linguistic position of Basques in France, the transnational coalition between the Basques in Spain and France strengthens the position of the latter in their struggle for linguistic recognition.

The third and last part of the volume, bearing the title 'components', focusses on specific aspects of language policies. Nuria Garcia discusses the education policy in France and its connection to language policy and state tradition. France recently made the shift from a strong monolingual state tradition towards one that seems to favour multilingualism. However, as

argued by Garcia, the motivations behind this policy-change are not of a cultural but of a political/economic nature. Languages that have practical use in managing foreign relations and/or in the international business world receive the most support in the French education system. In contrast, immigrant languages, still receive relatively little support. Catherine Baker's article analyses another aspect of language policy, namely its importance during peace-building missions. She shows how well-intended language policies, which mostly revolve around English as a working language, could potentially have a negative impact on the transition towards peace and well-functioning democracies of previously war-torn states.

Naturally it is not possible in the scope of this review to do justice to the rich diversity of articles published in Sonntag and Cardinal's book. The articles that are briefly discussed here do give a decent image of the book's overall content: it contains contributions on a wide array of topics and cases, ranging from Western-Europe, to North-America, to South-East Asia, that are still neatly bound together by the methodological framework of historical institutionalism. This topical and context diversity is a main strength of the volume, even though, as the authors also admit themselves, the analysis could have benefited if some contributions on Latin-America and/or Africa would have been included as well. Furthermore the volume sufficiently makes clear how much the field of language policy can benefit from a historical-institutionalist perspective. The authors succeed in showing the way towards a new research agenda.

An interesting addition to the volume might have been some more contributions discussing the role of migrant languages, and the impact of migration on the politics of language policy in general. Most articles deal with language policy towards autochthonous minorities. Given the sizeable migrant population in many countries, and the expectation that migrant flows will increase in the near-future, it is likely that the importance of migrant languages in the overall language policy framework will increase in the coming decades. It could be interesting to devote more attention to the interaction between migrant languages and different state traditions in future research.

In conclusion, the series of essays gathered in this volume present solid analyses as well as an innovative way to study language policy. The emphasis on the role of power and state traditions is a welcome contribution to the field. The book can be warmly recommended to anyone who has any academic or personal interest in the intricacies of language policy decision making.