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**A Contribution to the History of the Discipline: the case of Political Linguistics**

Jean Laponce, UBC
jlaponce@interchange.ubc.ca
www.politics.ubc.ca/laponce

Graphic models of academic disciplines linking their core to their subfields can be made to look like stylized renditions of a flower with its petals attached to a center that may vary in size and change its colour over time. In the late 1970 (Laponce, 1980) I studied the footnotes of leading social science journals to measure the reciprocal intellectual trade pattern among disciplines. Political Science, represented by the *APSR* and *Political Studies,* was found to import heavily from Sociology, half as much from Economics and Psychology but not enough from elsewhere to appear in our sample of 40 articles per discipline (Figure 1)
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**Figure 1. Imports form other disciplines in the late 1970s as judged by the fields of the articles quoted in the APSR and Political Studies (20 articles from each journal.)***


|  |  |  |  |
|---|---|---|---|
|  |  | ← **10% Economics** |  |
| **Sociology 22%→** | **Political Science** | Geography (none) |  |
|  |  |  |  |
| History (none) | ↑ **12% Psychology** | Anthropology (none) |  |
|  |  |  |  |

*Source Laponce (1980)
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In the present very preliminary study, I rely on recollections more than on hard data to report on one of the petals of the Political Science model, that of 'Language and Politics' sometimes called 'Political Linguistics'. I shall trace the evolution of that subfield from the 1950s to the present.

The word *Language* has, in English, an ambiguous meaning for its referring to two entirely different concepts that other languages describe by two different words (for example *langue et langage* in French), as does Saussure, the founding father of modern linguistics, when he separates what in English is best expressed by '*tongue*' (as in 'mother tongue') and '*language style*' (abstract, poetic, political, in need of

deconstruction, for example). I do not trace, here, the research done on the language styles of politics – the kind studied by Harold Lasswell (1949) and Murray Edelman (1977) - but trace solely the political study of contact among natural languages at the individual and social levels.

Languages in contact need to be linked since their speakers cannot completely ignore one another. Bi- and multilingualism (henceforth 'bilingualism' to simplify) are thus worldwide phenomena. But this contact is often the source of conflicts for dominance or at least prominence if not exclusion, hence the base of cleavages that affect political systems. All the more so since languages, like states, are territorial animals (Weinreich, 1968, Laponce, 1984).

Yet, it is not until the mid-1950s that political scientists started giving particular attention to the politics of language. Until then, language was the domain of linguists and philosophers, the latter being divided in their estimations of the effects of multilingualism on a given polity (not so good for the French 18$^{th}$ century philosophers, to be avoided for Herder, enriching for Goethe). I shall not review these contributions to philosophy and literature. Until the 1950s, reference to language by political scientists was part and parcel of the description of individual polities or put under the umbrella of larger concepts such as nationalism and minorities. Lacking, until after the second World War, was the type of comparative research needed to move from the descriptive to the theoretical as done by Karl Deutsch (1954) in his pioneering and influential *Nationalism and Social Communication* where, taking his examples from Finland, Bohemia, India, and Scotland he traces past and likely future changes in the language hierarchy of those states by relating the rates of social mobilization (active participation in the socio-political system) and the rates of the assimilation capacity of either Swedish over Finnish, German over Czech, or English over Hindi or Gaelic.

Deutsch's social communication approach led to language contact being given more systematic attention, and so did the following effects that I group into three categories 1) the normal evolution of a field of study 2) the impact of nearby disciplines and 3) political events.

*1) A normal evolution*

The normal evolution of a discipline is simply rendered by the DEPP acronym (Figure 2) which tells us that the process of evolution of research, whether it be in biology or in the social sciences, goes from the descriptive (D), a period dominated by case studies, to the period of explanation (E) which involves necessarily refining typologies and engaging in comparative analysis since there is no good explanation not based on comparison. That phase (E) produces theories reached either through the low road of correlation or the more risky road of causality. This ability to explain offers the possibility of predicting (P1) with greater or lesser assurance (laws or simple regularities). And finally, the ability to predict leads to prescriptions (P2)[1].

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Figure 2.  DEPP model of the normal evolution of research

**(Ca)**

**(D)**  →                 **(E)**   →    **(P1)**   →    **(P2)**

**(Co)**

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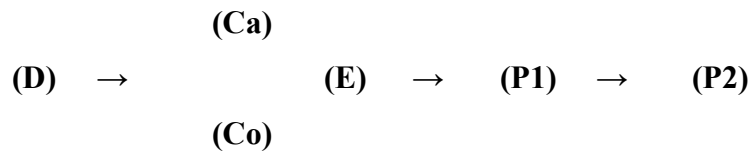
We started our narrative at the point where political scientists interested in language where turning from the type D case study to explanation (E) through comparisons. The rest of the story shows a steady growth and the recent rush to the prescriptive (P2), that more than occasionally bypasses the P1 and the E phase. That type of impatience is particularly marked among political ethicists who proceed deductively from moral imperatives.

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The key transition from the case study to comparative analysis that I date from Karl Deutsch's *Nationalism and Social Communication* should be put in the context of reinforcing academic initiatives taken by or with the support of political scientists, notably the following three:

a) the spread of the *functional approach* recommended by Talcott Parsons and Edward Shils (1951), an approach which led to the greater attention given to language as a transmitter of values and as a political integrator, for example by Clifford Geertz (1963) and Myron Weiner (1959).

b)  the partial shift from studies of individual governments to comparative analyses that included *multilingual societies*, notably in Africa and Asia (Almond and Coleman; 1960; Rustow, 1968); a shift supported by the Committee for the Comparative Study of New Nations established in 1959 under the auspices of the Carnegie Foundation, and supported as well by the International Social Science Council and the Committee on Comparative Politics of the American Social Science Council who organized at UNESCO  the influential conference on Comparative Research of 1965 where political science was represented by Gabriel Almond, Lucien Pye, and Richard Rose;

c) another partial shift of attention from the major European powers to *smaller European democracies* advocated by Stein Rokkan, Val Lorwin and Hans Daalder  (1964); a shift that drew attention to segmented democracies to which Lijphart gave the name of *consociational;* democracies that included Switzerland and Belgium, two states structured politically along language lines (McRae, 1964, 1975; Lijphart, 1969; Lorwin, 1971; Lehmbruch, 1974).

Starting in the late 1960s the study of language by political scientists[2] took its present variety of approaches that include:

• Case studies and comparisons of multilingual states. For example those of Switzerland, Belgium, and Finland by McRae (1983,1986, 1997), who shows that the weaker languages are better protected in Switzerland and the Aaland compared to mainland Finland and Belgium, for their having guaranteed zones of exclusive concentration.

• studies of the whole range of language policies of a given state as done by Macmillan for Canada (1998), or limited to a specific policy, such as that concerning adds and billboards in over 70 countries done by Leclerc (1989).

• studies of language identities (for example Pool, 1979) measuring the reciprocal influence of ethnic and language loyalties.

• public opinion surveys of attitudes, including reciprocal attitudes of different language groups within a given polity, such as that of Switzerland done by Kerr, Sidjanski and Schmidtchen (1972) or surveys comparing the degree of use and proficiency in the dominant language by minorities, such as that done by Laitin (1998) in his comparison of Russians in Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Estonia, and Latvia.

• tests of the Whorf-Sapir hypothesis that different languages have different impacts on thought and perception, an hypothesis partly verified by Laitin among Somali-English bilinguals (Laitin, 1979).

• models and theories explaining the rise or decline of competing languages at the individual and at the social level (Laitin, 1988; Laponce, 1984, 2006 for example).

• implications for democratic liberal theory of the fact that the absence of Regulation favors the dominant language but that the state cannot afford to treat all languages equally (Kymlicka, 1995).

*2. The impact of nearby disciplines and notably of Sociolinguistics*

As a result of its own evolution, the political science of language has become increasingly dependent on the work done in other disciplines. It is now informed by:

• historical analysis such as that done by Wambaugh (1920, 1933) in her meticulous description of the cleavages, often linguistic, at the roots of the sovereignty referendums held between 1791 and the early 1930s; or historical studies of the origins of ethnies and nations whether done by historians such as Shafer (1972) or sociologists such as Anthony Smith (1988);

• legal studies of language provisions and rules in constitutions, laws and jurisprudence (Héraud, 1963; 1976; Falch, 1973; Gauthier, 1993; see also the papers presented at the congresses of the *International Academy of Language Law,* for example);

• studies of language contact done by linguists and sociolinguists such as Le Page (1964), Mackey (1966), Calvet (1979).

• surveys of the language shifts of bilinguals made by sociolinguists such as Rubin (1968), Fishman and his colleagues (1960s to the present) and all those who work in the Rubin-Fishman tradition by plotting the speech of bilinguals in relation to social roles and circumstances. (See for example the very detailed questionnaire used by *Euromosaic* in a study prepared for the European Commission of the EU on the knowledge and use of minority languages; see also the 2002 and 2004 Pew National Surveys of Latinos in the USA);

• sociological analysis of public opinion surveys by domain of language use such as that of the workplace done by Raymond Breton and G. Grant (1981);

• models and findings of economists such as Rossi-Landi (1975), Vaillancourt (1984), and Grin (1999) concerning the individual and collective monetary costs and benefits of bilingualism;

• measures, by language, of population trends and predictions done by demographers and statisticians such as Lachapelle and Henripin (1980);

• rational choice analysis of communication studies that measure the emergence and progress of linguafrancas (Van Parijs, 2000);

• work of sociologists such as Allardt (1979) whose comparison of language minorities in Western Europe indicates that the ethnic revival of the time is positively related to the availability of resources rather than to the lack of them; or the work of de Swaan (2001) who measures the power of a language in a multilingual system by the strategic location resulting from all the partial overlaps of knowledge of the languages in the system (see also Calvet, 1999);

• observations of psychologists such as Leopold (1949), observations confirmed by many subsequent laboratory experiments (see review in Laponce, 1984): the bilingual is better able than the unilingual to distinguish the significant from the signified; or the observations made in experiments such as those of Dornic (1975) who measured the increasingly longer time needed by 'perfect' bilinguals to encode messages presented in their second language, compared to their first, as the message becomes more complex;

• studies and cartographic work of geographers such as Cartwright (1981), Williams (1994), and Roland Breton (2003) to relate critically the boundaries of political systems to those of languages.

• findings of psychologists and educators such as Lambert and his colleagues (1973), findings confirmed by subsequent studies reversing those of the 1920s and 1930s which had wrongly concluded, in the absence of the proper control of family conditions, that teaching a second language to young children was detrimental to their studies.

• findings of anthropologists and linguists such as Nettle, Romaine (2000) and Wurm (2002) concerning the disappearance of endangered tongues.

• proposals made by ethicists who recommend some form of compensation from dominant to minority languages since the speakers of the latter are typically those compelled to be more proficient bilinguals (See a review in Van Parijs, 2004).

As one would expect the imports from other disciplines as given by Figure 3 are more numerous and more varied than those given by Figure 1 for the discipline as a whole but there is, unavoidably, a bias reflecting my own vantage point.

Figure 3 Imports from other disciplines on Political Science in the field of language studies judged by the authors entered in the references to this paper. **1950-1970**

| | | Sociolinguistics 23% ↓ | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ∗ | Sociology 23%→ | | ← 3 % Economics | |
| | Law 3 %→ | Political Science 38% | ← 3 % Geography | |
| | Demography 3%→ | | ← 0 % Philosophy | |
| | | ↑ 3% Psychology | | |
| | Includes Anthropology | | | |

**1971-2008**

| | | Sociolinguistics 12% ↓ | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ∗ | Sociology 14% → | | ← 5% Economics | |
| | Law 2% → | Political Science 40% | ← 5% Geography | |
| | Demography 2%→ | | ← 5% Philosophy | |
| | | ↑ 16% Psychology | | |
| ∗ | Includes Anthropology | | | |

Note that the major imports are from Sociology and Sociolinguistics while the contribution of Political Science increases only marginally[3]. The major change is in the

far greater contribution of Psychology, as the rise of identity studies would lead one to expect and in the appearance of Philosophy, which reflects the recent impact of the studies of ethics of language policy, done also under other disciplinary labels.

*3. The impact of political events*

The impact of politics is of course likely to be felt by those who study it. The political scientist has a potential arm's length problem that the laboratory psychologist, the geographer and the historian do not have, at least not to the same extent. That proximity of and to the States we study has however been beneficial, at least in free countries.

Language conflicts occurring in old as well as new democracies, notably in India and in Canada; challenged, especially in the latter case, the dominant paradigm of the time (see Lipset's *Political Man* of 1959 as an example of that dominance), a paradigm that restricted the importance of ethnic, hence language, conflicts to traditional societies while modern democratic states were assumed to be predominantly structured along economic issues and class lines. The rise of a language based nationalism in Quebec in the 1960s, the growth of a separatist movement, and the desire of the Canadian government to prevent separation by better accommodating French and Francophones within the Canadian polity, led to the creation of the federal *Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism* whose research branch funded studies by social scientists and notably by political scientists, for example the study by Meisel and Lemieux (1972) of the governance of professional associations in a bilingual society. The commissioning of these studies drew the attention of the participating political scientists to what was done by linguists and sociolinguists such as Lieberson (1961); Kloss (1965, 1967), Mackey (1966); Fishman (1966); and by geographers such as Roland Breton (1964), who all either joined the *International Center for Research on Bilingualism* founded in 1967 at Laval University or contributed to its publications.

Notable also are the subsequent contributions to research and publications of government bodies such as  Quebec's *Conseil de la langue française* and  Canada's *Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages,* and *Heritage Canada.*

Two other major non-academic supporters or instigators of research are now the UNESCO and the European Union. The first is concerned with studying vanishing languages and, if possible, preventing their extinction. The European Union (if not all its members) has also an interest in protecting minority languages and, more generally, it supports the mapping of the knowledge, teaching, and use of the 23 official languages of its member states as well as their so called 'lesser used languages'. Those concerns lead to the funding of expensive enterprises such as the *Euromosaic* surveys (1996-) and the recently launched Dylan project (2007-) on *Language Dynamic and the Management of Cultural Diversity*, and lead also to the support given to NGOs such as the *European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages* (*:www.rblul.org*)

Another major shift in politics, this one at the global level, may have had an indirect but profound impact on language research: the decline and fall of Soviet marxism from the 1956 invasion of Hungary to the disintegration of the USSR in 1991. This downfall appears to have contributed to the shift of interest from social class to individual and collective identity. It is striking, rereading Lipset's *Political Man* or Michael Hechter's *Internal Colonialism*, how much attention they gave to economic issues and conflicts and how little to culture[4]. Whether attributable to the fall of communism, the rise of identity studies [5] has greatly benefited political linguistics since so much of the identities studied are wholly or partially linguistic.

The interest of governments in language contact is unlikely to fade because of the flow of linguafrancas down the language hierarchy and the opposite flow of the weaker languages of migrants from poorer countries. This second flow is the subject of vigorous academic and political debates not only in Europe and Canada (note the 2006-2007 series of conferences on language and migrations organized jointly by the universities of McGill and Paris 3), but also in the United States notwithstanding the country's remarkable power of linguistic integration and assimilation (Sonntag and Pool, 1987; Huntington, 2004; Citrin, 2007). To maintain the public peace, to integrate newcomers, to insure good communication and citizenship, governments may increasingly want to be informed by language research.

*Summary.*

In summary of this brief diachronic analysis of the subfield of Political science relating language to politics, a study that would have been better done by a historian than a practitioner (but I do not know of any historian interested in the subject), I note, subject to correction by other practitioners, an evolution affected by three major factors 1) the normal evolution of an academic discipline from the descriptive to the prescriptive 2) the impact of other disciplines in the social sciences  3) the impact of political events. Of these three factors the last two may well be the more important.

**Notes**.

1.  For a discussion of the DEPP model and the role of typologies see Laponce (2008)

2. Most political scientists working on language do not make political linguistics their sole field of study. In that respect they differ from linguists and sociolinguists but resemble sociologists and move from the study of language to that of ethnicity and nations or other facets of the discipline. In any case, the originality of their contribution rests in their focus on asymmetrical relationships and in the attention given to the role played by states and governments through policy intervention or through passivity.

3. The few authors listed in my references for the period 1951-1960 show the dominance of Sociolinguistics (4) and Socio-Anthropology (5) over Political Science (3) and Law (1)

4. A reaction against the dominance of economic issues led Stein Rokkan to select the theme "Political Science Between Economics and Culture" for the 1973 congress of the *International Political Science Association*.

5. The works recorded by the *Worldwide Political Science Abstracts* under the entries [ehni*] and [social AND class] show the following progression of the first compared to the second:

|  | [ethni*] | [social class] | N |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1960-80 | 22% | 77% | (70) |
| 1970-90 | 61% | 38% | (7359) |
| 1990-08 | 69% | 30% | (23590) |

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# References

The works listed here were not selected on the basis of any preset quota other than severely limiting the entries of any given author mentioned in the text. The language balance of the titles is a consequence of my own language limitations: 80% of the titles are English, 20% French. For works in other languages in the field of Sociolinguistics, see the multi-authored encyclopedias edited by Ulrich Ammon. A diachronic analysis precludes limiting oneself to the more recent works, hence the length of this bibliography although it is very and unfairly selective. By time periods, the coverage turns out to be as follows: pre-1960: 10 items; 1960s: 21; 1970s: 23; 1980s: 11; 1990s: 17; 2000-07: 14. The dip in the 1980s may be due to a mental artifact, to a tendency to polarize the illustrations toward beginning and end of the period 1960 to the present.

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    .Murdoch University <<endangered-languages-l@cleo-murdoch.edu>>,
    .Department of Linguistics at Yale University <<http://www.terralingua.org>>