

Course Topic: Language, Society and Culture**Course Instructor**

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Course Synopsis

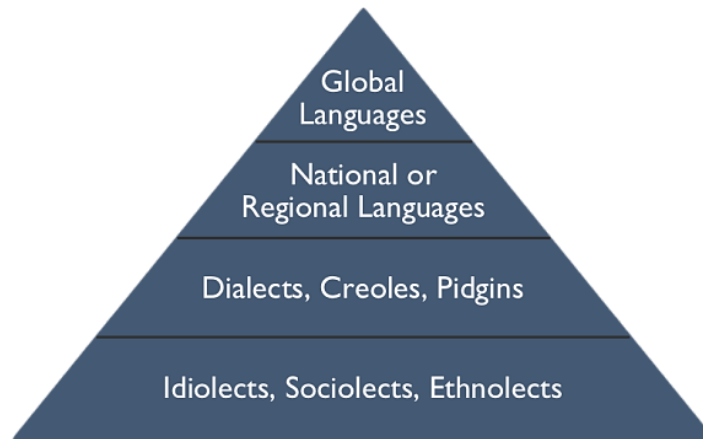
Every society has a number of choices to make in terms of which language will be used in that society and when. When it comes to multilingual societies, decisions also need to be made concerning how many languages the society will support, how many languages members of the society are expected to learn, and so on. In this session, we'll take a brief look at the layers of language use in multilingual and bilingual societies. We'll then consider some of the language policy choices that governments must make. Finally, we'll explore how individuals in a multilingual society use language.

Course Agenda

1. Multilingual and Bilingual Societies
2. Language Policy Choices
3. Individual Choices in a Multilingual Society

1. Multilingual and Bilingual Societies

One of the first things that societies have to consider when they're developing their language policies is which layers of language they're going to support the learning and use of. As you can see, there are a number of choices from the far-reaching global languages all the way down to highly individualized languages.



At the top tier of language, the Global Languages layer, we see instances of societies encouraging the use and learning of English because of its usefulness on a global scale for economic and trade purposes. At the third tier of language, we see intriguing debates happening in some countries about the place that a creole should be given. In the Caribbean, for example, there are many rich and interesting creoles in use. Some countries do not support the use of creole languages, while other countries acknowledge these languages as part of their heritage and fully encourage their use.

2. Language Policy Choices

If we dig into this more deeply, we can see that countries or societies have some choices when it comes to language policy. We can break these down into three layers:

- National language – one language is used across the entire country
- Regional languages – different languages are used in different regions
- Local languages – different languages are used for smaller population groups

Countries may choose to support only one language or a combination of languages at various levels. For example, a country might decide to have a national language that everyone in the country learns but also allow the teaching and learning of regional languages that are relevant to a particular region's heritage.

There are more decisions that societies or countries need to make when it comes to language use. These decisions all focus around which language(s) will be used for various aspects of that society's functioning.

These include:

- Legislation
- Parliamentary proceedings
- Judiciary proceedings
- Government services
- Bank notes and coins
- Financial and banking systems
- Media (TV, radio, print)
- Transportation
- Military
- Healthcare services

Societies must also decide which language(s) will be used for education:

- Monolingual education
- Bilingual education/immersion
- Trilingual education
- Languages as core subjects
- Heritage/international languages

And finally, societies must decide which language(s) will be used in the consumer market:

- Store fronts, restaurants, signage
- Consumer products and labels
- Instructions and operating manuals for consumer goods

Overriding all of these practical decisions in terms of which language is going to be used on a day-to-day basis in a society is the idea of a society or country having an official language policy. This is a set of legislation that states how language will be used within a society. An official language policy will cover education, government services, healthcare services, transportation, and so on. Once again, there are several options that countries can choose from:

1. **No Official Language Policy** – there is no set of legislation regarding which languages will be spoken in a society and when.
2. **National Language** – a recognized language that the majority of the people in a society speak.
3. **Official Language** – a language that is formally supported by the government and is used to provide government services.

The next decision a society must make is the number of languages that the government will officially support. A society might choose to have only one official language or it might choose to have two or more official languages. Another option is to have one official language that covers the whole country and then also officially endorse different languages regionally. This means that government services would be offered in the official regional language in that region only.

In countries where there are many different languages in use, the government might choose to endorse a lingua franca as an official language. A **lingua franca** is a neutral additional language that people within a society have learned for the purpose of communicating with one another.

Finally, a country might decide to use a **global language** as their official language. This is a good choice for countries that rely heavily on global trade for their economic strength.

Let’s take a look at some of these language policy choices in action in real societies around the world.

No Official Language: The United States of America

While it seems logical that English would be the official language of the United States, it is not. This is an interesting issue because it generates a lot of debate in political circles. Despite this ongoing debate, no official decision has ever been made and thus, the status quo of no official language continues. The following is a brief look at some of the arguments *for* English as an official language of the U.S.A and some of the arguments *against* it.

Arguments FOR	Arguments AGAINST
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ English is a unifying force in an immigrant-heavy country. ✓ English is the language used in daily life. ✓ It would encourage more government funding for English language education. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ The government would have to increase the budget for English language education. ✗ Why state the obvious? ✗ An official language would infringe upon individual rights. ✗ An official language would infringe upon the rights of immigrants.

National Language: Mexico

Mexico is an example of a country that has chosen a national language over an official language. While Spanish would seemingly be the obvious choice for an official language, there are also dozens of indigenous languages in use in Mexico. Because of this, the government has created a language policy that encourages the preservation of these indigenous languages. Mexico’s decision to make Spanish the national language acknowledges that Spanish is the most frequently used language across the country but also supports the preservation and use of the various indigenous languages nationwide.

Lingua Franca as an Official Language: India

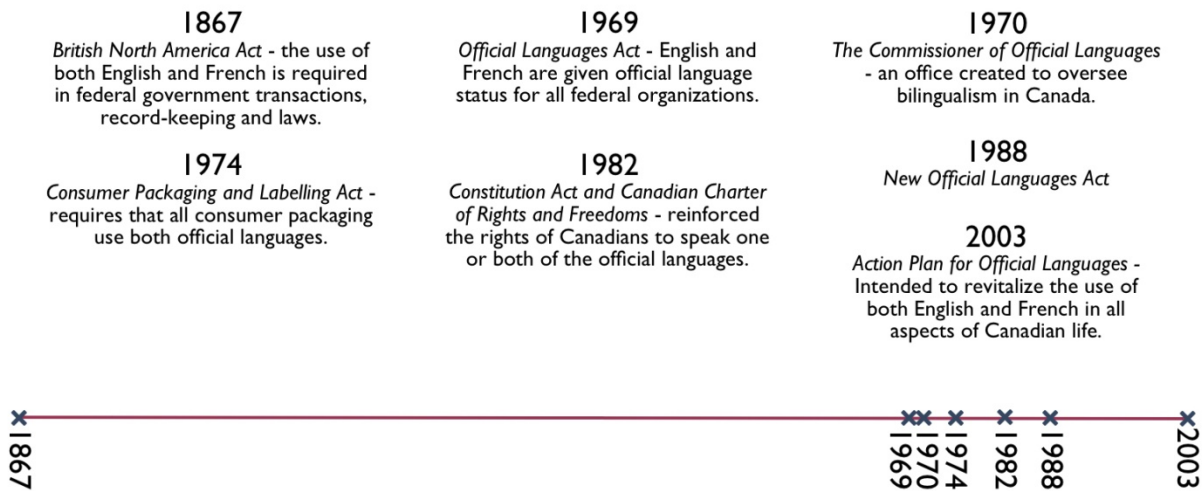
India is home to hundreds of different languages and thus trying to find a language policy that unites the country despite this language divide can be quite challenging. This has led to an interesting language policy choice to make both Hindi and English official languages in the country. Hindi is the most widely used language in India, making it an easy choice for an official language. However, to glue the rest of the country together, English was chosen to be the second official language as a lingua franca. English was selected because of its colonial use in the country historically as well as the practical reason that it is a neutral language when compared to the wide variety of other languages that are spoken in India.

Global Language as an Official Language: Taiwan and Chile

Both Taiwan and Chile depend heavily upon international trade for their economic growth. Both societies strategically selected English as an official language in order to encourage and support the learning of English to then facilitate the global trade that drives their economies.

Two Official Languages: Canada

Canada provides an example of a country that has chosen to have two official languages representative of the major language groups in the country – English and French. This policy dates back to the foundation of Canada in 1867. Below is a brief timeline of the bilingual policy decisions made throughout Canada’s history.



Regional Variations: Canada

Even within Canada’s policy of official bilingualism, there is regional variation. While both English and French are official languages at the federal level, each province also has legislation in place regarding language policies.

- **Quebec** - the official language of the province of Quebec is French. This means that all provincial government services and commerce must occur in French. There is also legislation in place that states that all children must be educated in French unless they can prove a history of English language education within their family. The Conseil Supérieur de la Langue Française is an organization which was established in 1977 to maintain the standards of French language usage in Quebec. It is similar in function to L’Académie Française in France.
- **Other Provinces and Territories** – Provinces with a high percentage of French speakers have mandated that provincial services as well as federal services be administered in both English and French. New Brunswick is an example of a province that is officially bilingual at the provincial level. In provinces and territories where there is a high percentage of aboriginal people, there is language legislation in place to both preserve and encourage the growth of aboriginal languages. Manitoba, Northwest Territories and Nunavut are examples of this.

- **Municipal Variations** – In some areas with a high immigrant population, there are policies in place at the municipal level to allow the children of immigrants to learn their heritage languages.
- **Newcomers to Canada** – Another policy that is in place in Canada allows for language instruction in English or French for newcomers to Canada whose first language is not either English or French. These programs are funded both federally and provincially and enable immigrants to integrate into the Canadian labour market and society more rapidly and more successfully.

Regional Variations: Switzerland

A final interesting example of a multilingual society in terms of language policy is Switzerland. Switzerland has four official languages: Swiss German, French, Italian and Romansh. Even though all four languages have official status in the country, Switzerland’s language use is highly regionalized. For example, there are some Swiss cantons that are almost 100% German speaking, some that are 100% Italian speaking, and so on. Switzerland’s language policy is an interesting approach to pulling together many different language use regions into a united whole.

3. Individual Choices in a Multilingual Society

So far we’ve taken a big picture look at multilingual societies from the perspective of government policy. Now we’ll take a look at multilingual societies from the perspective of an individual within that society. In multilingual societies, individuals make conscious and sometimes subconscious choices about which language they will use and when. They may change from one language to another depending upon the context, who they’re with and the purpose of communication.

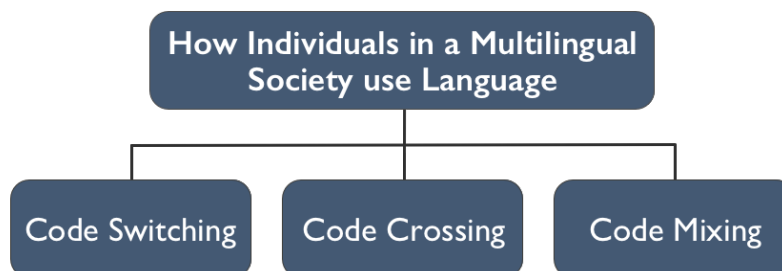
One of the main things that factors into individual choice of language use in a multilingual society is the concept of overt prestige versus covert prestige.

Overt Prestige

The status associated with being able to speak the standard or official version of a language in a society.

Covert Prestige

The status associated with being able to speak the language that the people around you are using, regardless of whether that is the majority language or the high status language in a society.



Code Switching

Code switching is the act of consciously selecting a language based upon the context, subject matter or the people we're speaking with. Individuals in a multilingual society who speak multiple languages often make conscious code switching choices based upon overt and covert prestige.

Code Crossing

A variation on code switching, code crossing involves using a language in context without belonging to a group that speaks that particular language. For example, someone who learned French but has no French heritage or background would be code crossing if they travelled to a French speaking region and spoke the language while there.

Code Mixing

Code mixing involves switching from one language to another language in the middle of a sentence. This may be done consciously or subconsciously. The most common reason to use code mixing is simply because it is easier. If we can't think of the word we want to use in one language, we'll substitute in a word from another language. Or if one language has a better word then we'll use that word instead.

Self-Reflection

Take a couple of minutes to reflect upon your own language use choices.

1. Do you code switch ? If so, when?
2. Do you code cross ? If so, when?
3. Do you code mix ? If so, when?

Thanks for Participating!

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