Ethnography and politics: A Critical Review of D.C. Johnson's "Critical discourse analysis and the ethnography of language policy"

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Abstract
This paper makes a critical review of the article of "Critical discourse analysis and the ethnography of language policy" written by D.C. Johnson based on three highlighted aspects: the informativeness of literature review, the feasibility of combining Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and ethnography and its contribution areas in Language Planning & Police (LPP). Comments on the advantages and shortcomings of the article are presented.

Keywords: ethnography, critical review, CDA, language policy

I. Introduction

David Cassels Johnson, as a contributor to the growing field of language planning and policy (LPP), has been working on how language policy is practiced at different levels (government, school, and community) and across different context; and what methods are employed to investigate the language policy cycle (creation, interpretation, appropriation, and instantiation).

Educational policy in general (Ball, 2006) and educational language policy in particular (Ricento& Hornberger, 1996) are generally conceptualized and researched as multi-leveled phenomena and processes. According to Hornberger and Johnson's (2007) metaphorical LPP onion, the goal for researchers is to slice through the onion and illuminate the connections across the various layers, which is, as Hult (2010) describes, the "perennial challenge" for the field. In dealing with a challenge on such scale, this article (2011) examines the combination of CDA (critical discourse analyses) and ethnography in revealing the connections between the multiple layers of policy activity and between the macro and micro.

However, after extensively reviewed this article, three major topics have been highlighted. They are the informativeness of literature review, the feasibility of combining CDA and ethnography and its contribution areas in LPP.

II. Summary

This article initiates to explore the compatibility of ethnography and CDA for the study of language policy. So, the whole process is "after establishing an ethnographic understanding of some local context, including the language policy or policies that the research participants create, interpret, and appropriate, CDA can be incorporated to analyze the intertextual and interdiscursive connections between the various layers of policy texts and discourses" (Johnson, 2011).

Specifically, the author as an observer studying language policy and bilingual education collected ethnographic data for 3 years from a series of research projects on language policy and bilingual education program through interviews with teachers, administrators even the makers of Pennsylvania and federal policy in the SDP (School of District of Philadelphia). The main language policy of research is the Title III of the No Child Left Behind Act. Then Johnson compared ethnographic data collection with CDA results of federal and state policy that involved multiple types of policy texts such as congressional debate on the NCLB.

However, the author mainly talks about two aspects: one is about language policy creation. Since part of the content of the BEA (Bilingual Education Act) was copied and replaced in the NCLB, analyzing the intertextual and interdiscursive connections is important for understanding the ideological creation. The other is about language policy interpretation and appropriation. Benefited by ethnographic research, intertextual and interdiscursive links could explain why the administrator, Lucia Sanchez, recontextualized, interpreted and appropriated NCLB as transitional program on her beliefs.

Lastly, Johnson concludes that critical analyses of policy text have revealed how dominant discourses about language and language education become instantiated in policy language, while

ethnographic research reveals that such discourses are interpreted and appropriated in different even contradictory ways.

III. Evaluation

3.1 The informativeness of literature review

This is a professionally written article due to the wealth of references and literature reviewed. The author does however attempt to open up the discussion to readers less familiar with the field through useful sets of definitions of key terms such as CLP (critical language policy) (p. 268) or background on, for example, the SDP agency in the USA (p. 273). It is a pity that the author introduced a small number of related studies, for example, studies have examined the ethnographic work on language policy (Canagarajah, 2005; Hornberger, 2008; Menken & García, 2010; McCarty, 2010), and none of critical analyses are mentioned and fully-illustrated conceptualizations or framework are absent as well. However, the detailed review of every area of the literature is an extremely valuable resource for anyone interested in understanding more about the minority language policy in the local context and the links between macro-level policy texts and discourses and micro-level language use.

As for the structure of literature review, it builds up a shared knowledge of both the theoretical arguments and practical evidence for combining CDA and ethnography to solve the "perennial challenge". Beginning with the beliefs of CLP that language as a mechanism of power has the ability to marginalize (especially) minority languages and minority language users and CLP aims to produce more democratic policies to reduce inequality and maintain minority languages (p. 268), Johnson argues that both CLP and CDA are interested in the relationship between discourse and power among multiple levels of social context and both work for the purpose of social justice. He goes on to look at ethnography, as a qualitative research approach, it focuses on the agents, contexts, and processes across the multiple layers of creation, interpretation, and appropriate of policy (Hornberger & Johnson, 2007). Thus, conduct CLP research ethnographically or the ethnography of language policy admits the power of participants to interpret and appropriate language policy across various levels and contexts which thereby can change what the policy means in that particular context and beyond. These ideas orderly and clearly pave the way for how the combination of CDA and ethnography works afterwards.

3.2 The feasibility of combining CDA and ethnography

In the study of Wiley & Wright (2004), Title III requires that programs for LEP (limited English proficient) students should be "based on scientifically based research", which means "it is up to each state to determine what qualifies as scientifically based research", also the accountability provisions of Title III are even more problematic and the accountability requirements to measure the goal of developing LEP students are strict, complex, and questionable. The change in funding distribution gives states a great deal of discretion in terms of what programs they will fund at the

local level (p. 156-157).

As it indicates, ethnography has insight into the problem of policies and it provides a methodological guidance for educational language policy study with empirical data. In this article, data emerged as participants observation and field note in schools and meetings in the SDP.

However, illuminated by ethnographic inquiry, how individual agents "make" language policy in everyday social practice advances the growing field of LPP by using a critical sociocultural approach. Language policy is conceptualized as language-regulating modes of human interaction, negotiation, and production mediated by relations of power. Pennycook (2002, 2006) argues that power does not solely rest with the state, or within the policy text, but is enacted by educational practitioners through discursive practices that operate in relation to some authoritative criteria. Based on this conceptual framework, a critical sociocultural approach emerged to explore how policy is enacted in social practice and expand policy discourses in ways that foster social justice for all (McCarty, 2011).

Thus, critical sociocultural approach shifts its focus to text analyses and local practice. That includes federal and state policy and discourse such as congressional debate on NCLB but within the context of the SDP in this article. But ethnographic and critical approaches are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, the ethnographic study includes critical analyses of state and national policy texts and discourses for they are part of ethnographic data, according to Johnson's explanation (2009), one must consider the (1) agents, (2) goals, (3) processes, and (4) discourse which engender and perpetuate the policy, and (5) the dynamic social and historical contexts in which the policy exists, keeping in mind that these categories are neither static nor mutually exclusive (p.144).

Theoretically, much discourse contain biased representation of reality and their analysis is not only to detect manipulation and discrimination but also to understand the essence of these societal problems. Discourse analysis must have the aim of empowering powerless groups or minorities and pay much attention to power relations and ideology. More specifically, CDA focuses on the ways discourse structures enact, conform, legitimate, reproduce, or challenge relations of power and dominance in society. One of CDA methods is genre analysis of the interleaver which meets the need of LPP study and Johnson (2011) also notes that "language policies rely on intertextual and interdiscursive links to multiple past and present policy texts and discourses" (p. 270). CDA deals primarily with discourse dimensions of power abuse and injustice and inequality.

Of course, the combination is supported by empirical findings. For example, the author gives a side-by-side comparison of BEA and Title III and reveals notable similarities as well as differences. For example, Title III rejects the multilingual discourse of the BEA, beginning with "purposes" by making English dominant; and the recontextualization obfuscates multilingualism and promotes English only, changing "bilingual" to "language" in the text. Also, Sanchez's words in the interview reflects her interpretation of Title III of NCLB as a language policy focused exclusively on English and in doing so she marginalizes minority language students.

Therefore, it is beyond all questions that combination of ethnography and CDA are compatible and reasonable. However, how this combination contributes to LPP areas is the topic in the following section.

3.3 The contribution to LPP areas

In Johnson's study (2009), he argues that theoretical conceptualization of language policy have grown increasingly rich, while it lacks of empirical data to test. So, the focus is on using ethnography and discourse analysis in education settings, which coincides with this repetitious study' goal (2011) for he carried forward the idea and further explored the combination of CDA and ethnography in revealing connections between policy texts and discourse within the same context, the SDP. Thus, compared with the previous one, this article adopts a particular discourse analysis method CDA with ethnography and validates the model with conclusion that critical analyses of language policy texts should be combined with empirical data collection on policy interpretation and appropriation in some local educational context. Therefore, it nicely contributes to the field of LPP study for it offers a new method to combine former study approaches such as Wodak's discourse-historical approach and the ethnography of language policy (Hornberger & Johnson, 2007, 2010) altogether.

While how to establish connections between macro-level policy texts and discourse and micro-level language use has posed challenges to LPP researches. Thanks to ethnographic illustrations, the hidden power in the process of appropriation has become a new research perspective. As it stands, the ethnography of language policy foregrounds the power of educators to capitalize on these implementational and ideological spaces for multilingual education, and diverging interpretations of educators may lead to different appropriation. Sanchez recontextualized NCLB as transition program as a result of her own interpretations. Johnson (2015) argues that language policy arbiters wield a disproportionate amount of power relative to other individuals in a particular level or layer and he focuses on how beliefs about language, language education, and educational research impact the decision-making of individuals identified as policy arbiters. Thus, the LPP research scope has been expanded with the foundation and the perspective provided by this ethnographic study.

On this well researched basis the author speaks for a minority language group than the group in power and highlights the difficulty that language policy interpretation and appropriation meets. President George W. Bush's No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was a federal policy for language-minority students learning English. The state purpose of Title III is "to ensure that children who are limited English proficient, including immigrant children and youth, attain English proficiency"(Title III, Sec. 3102). However, Title III does not maintain bilingual programs and LEP students do not have the right to develop bilingualism in school (Wiley & Wright, 2004). This paper uncovered how the recontextualization of macro-level language policy impacts bilingual education. It provides detailed examples to argue for both restriction and facilitation in the bilingual education area and speaks for minority language group in LPP study.

Actually, Johnson does not mention or specify certain reasons of choosing NCLB as the language policy of interest in this study. Since the advent of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) policies in the US in 2002, studies turned ethnographic lenses on it, for example, Menken (2008) looks inside New York City secondary schools, showing how NCLB's standardized testing amounts to de facto language policy and the language policy is examined from the top-down to the bottom-up, in both a practical and theoretical way. Other scholars tend to lead this possible trend to document the implementation and interpretation of NCLB in settings around the country (McCarty, 2008; Patrick, 2008; Watanabe, 2008), thus, it is necessary to explain the basis of this topic and introduce other related research in part so as to make the research more valid and related.

At the end of this article (Johnson, 2011), he raises a question "about the viability and the value of searching for uniform and unified intentions in a multi-authored text like a language policy" for future research. But before this assertion, he has already discussed that "this is impossible for a single ethnographer-the research cannot be everywhere at once-which is why multiple ethnographers should work together on multi-sited ethnographies" (Johnson, 2009). It is hard for researchers to obtain the data and answer this question with limited ethnographic data, of course. Therefore, this question to some extent is enlightening, but not available to be put into substantiated empirical research.

To conclude, this study contributes a new approach, that is combining CDA and the ethnography, in the field of LPP area; discovers the hidden power existing in language policy layers, especially in the interpretation and appropriation process and focuses on minority language and its development, however, what it expects for future study lacks of availability to make substantiations.

IV. Conclusion

As mentioned above, this article is so informative that it combines the complexity of the ethnographic methodology with the rigour of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), and tests the feasibility of CDA in an ethnographic context. Fairclough (2003: 15) wrote that,"[in order] to research meaning-making, one needs to look at interpretations of texts as well as texts themselves, and more generally at how texts practically figure in particular areas of social life, which suggests that textual analysis is best framed within ethnography". CDA offers an account of discursive representations and orders of discourse that enables the researcher to look at power. A combination has great potential in analyzing the disproportionate power of individuals in a particular level or layer. Despite that, the author presents a starting point for researchers who are interested in dominant notions of minority language and their users. Indeed, collectively looking at creation, interpretation, and appropriation across all the layers, from the office of the president to group work in a multilingual classroom is a good direction but it is relative hard to substantiate the conception.

In addition, Title III of NCLB plays an important role in language-minority education. Bilingual education is a matter of U.S. federal law, although it has never enjoyed widespread support in the USA (Garcia & Bartlett, 2007, p. 2). Nonetheless, a detailed illustration to claim the

importance of Title III was overlooked.

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