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### **Theoretical Approaches to Language Planning**

Language Planning like other branches of Applied Linguistics has tended to be shaped by the views on language dominant in Theoretical Linguistics from time to time. This dependency has been unfortunate as there is a basic incompatibility between a discipline seeking to understand the general nature of human language through abstract theories and an applied area in need of theoretical tools to help solve problems of a large diversity of concrete languages. A particular drawback of this relationship has been that theoretical linguistics is parameter poor whereas language planners need to consider a large number of parameters. As observed by Thomas (1980 : 90):

"You cannot meddle with one part of a complex system from the outside without the almost certain risk of setting off disastrous events you hadn't counted on in other, remote parts. if you want to fix something you are first obliged to understand, in detail, the whole system."

My paper will report on the development of the new theoretical approach of Ecological Language Planning that is concerned with 'the whole system' and its applications. It differs from conventional approaches to Language

Planning both in its question and in its methodology: Instead of asking about efficiencies that can be achieved through standardization and streamlining, ecological planning is concerned with the value of diversity: What are the ecological factors that sustain a structured diversity of languages over a long period of time?

To answer this question Ecological Language Planning must draw on the insights of Ecolinguistics (Fill & Mühlhäusler eds 2001) which provides the theoretical underpinning for integrating a very large number of social, environmental,



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psychological and linguistic factors. How ecological language planning work will be illustrated with examples from the Australia/ Pacific region.

Thomas, Lewis (1980) On Meddling. The Medusa and the Snail:More Notes of a Biology Watcher, New York :Bantam