Globalization and Minority-Language Policy and Planning

2.1 Introduction

The central purpose of this chapter is to construct a fresh conceptual framework to understand the relationship between the processes of globalization and minority-language policy and planning. The volume addresses a constellation of concerns including the simultaneous processes of globalization and glocalization, how these processes change our perspective on language and what this may mean for LPP. In particular, the book examines how global processes provide both opportunities and threats for such languages and highlights key concerns for minority languages in globalization.

The chapter will begin with a critical account of the approach taken in this book to globalization. Arguably, the process of globalization always takes place in some locality, while at the same time the local is (re)produced in discourses of globalization. Thus, glocalization is identified as an important theoretical concept when examining aspects of cultural and linguistic globalization. From here, the chapter will examine how traditional approaches to LPP need to be (re)examined in the context of global flows as per Appadurai (1990, 1996). An important aspect of Appadurai’s (1996) understanding of globalization is the idea that it has a mobilizing force at the local level. From this perspective globalization as a process that enables the fusion of global and local identities to produce a globalized locality can have ‘unexpected sociolinguistic effects’ (Blommaert, 2010: 4–5). The overriding premise on which this book is based is the idea
that globalization has changed the context for minority languages, which in turn demands a reconceptualization of LPP.

2.2 Globalization and language

A voluminous literature exists in which scholars from a variety of disciplines have been engaged in a vigorous debate about the social phenomenon of globalization (cf. Appadurai, 1996; Castells, 2000; Giddens, 2000; Inda and Rosaldo, 2008; Robertson, 1992). As such, globalization is not a new phenomenon. Many scholars describe historical processes of imperialism and colonialism as forms of globalization. However, the form and the intensity of the type of globalization we are currently experiencing is what marks this phase of globalization as new. Perhaps globalization is all too often being referred to as an economic process only. Yet, it is not only that, but also involves technological, cultural and ideological processes that ‘result in the transformation of contemporary social life in all its economic, political, cultural, technological, ecological and individual dimensions’ (Blommaert, 2010: 3). Much of the existing research that tackles globalization can be divided into two broad themes, which reveal a fundamental dichotomy in the study of globalization. The first theme examines the meaning of the concept of globalization, while the second looks at the impact of globalization on local communities. Many scholars involved in research that can be broadly placed under the first theme form part of what is described as the homogenization debate, a concept that sees globalization as involving the spread of Western values. From this perspective, the spread of Western values is seen to be leading to an eradication of local identities in favour of the so-called cosmopolitan Western ideals, which are propagated by concepts such as McDonaldization (cf. Ritzer, 1993, 1998) and Disneyization (Byrman, 1998). The second broad theme in globalization research addresses the heterogenization debate (cf. Matei, 2006). Here, scholars such as Appadurai (1996) argue that, while it is undeniable that local cultures have been affected by global flows of ideas, images and so on, such communities are not passive agents. As Matei (2006: 317) suggests: ‘These flows do not simply erase national cultures; they change some of their features, while reinforcing others.’ Appadurai outlines the failure to recognize the hybrid reality of globalization as one of the pitfalls of the homogenization debate. He argues: