Foreign Language Training for LDS Missionaries: Historical Antecedents and Foundations for Current Church Policies and Institutions

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In 1830, just one language -- English -- was used in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. One-hundred-fifty years later, in 1981, that number had grown to 71 (Deseret News 1983 Church Almanac 1982, pp. 252-253). Only 15 years later, in 1996, the number of languages in the Church had mushroomed to 175 (Deseret News 1997-98 Church Almanac, 1996, p.6).

Communication is crucial in accomplishing the mission of the Church. Nevertheless, as the Church becomes increasingly international, language differences often impede or block communication. What can and should the Church do when such differences hamper the preaching of the gospel, the perfecting of the saints, or the redeeming of the dead? On the other hand, what steps can or should be taken to respect language diversity and preserve language resources among the Saints in a worldwide Church? Furthermore, should these decisions be made at Church headquarters and implemented uniformly around the world, or is it better to allow for local decision making, adaptation, and “bottom-up” development? Such questions fall within the domain of language planning, the theme around which this paper revolves.

The research that this presentation reports on is intended to help provide a historical perspective that will assist future language planning and policy development in the Church. It looks at instances and trends in past language-policy formation processes related to the provision of support systems for missionaries learning the language of the people to whom they are to preach the gospel. Such a view can help us know how best to proceed in this and other language-related areas in the future.

Language Planning -- General Background Information
Language planning is a “political and administrative activity for solving language problems in society” (Jernudd & Das Gupta, 1971, p. 211). It is “an activity whereby goals are established, means are selected, and outcomes predicted in a systematic and explicit manner” (Rubin, 1971, p. 218). Language planning is usually seen as a process involving three activities: (1) the identification of a language problem, (2) the development of a language policy, and (3) the implementation of a language plan.

Language Problem
A language “problem” typically occurs when more than one language or language group comes in contact with other languages or language groups within a community, between communities, or even between nations. This contact often produces some tension or instability as communication becomes more complicated, limited resources must be allocated, or relative
status becomes important for speakers of these languages.

**Language Policy**

Once a language problem is identified, a language "policy" may be introduced by some person or organization in a position of power. This policy is a strategy, complete with overall goals or desired consequences, as well as general methods, which can be used to approach and resolve the identified language problem. Language policy creation "involves the construction of an over-all design of organized action that is considered necessary for economic utilization of resources and that is directed by a formally constituted authority" (Jernudd & Das Gupta, 1971, p. 195).

**Language Plan**

The actual modifications or actions that are based on the language policy constitute what is called a language "plan." This plan consists of methods and practices through which the language policy is realized. In other words, a language plan "is the vehicle for implementing a language policy; it tries to solve the problem . . . ." (Kaplan 1992, p. 144).

To summarize, ideal language planning begins with the clear identification of a language problem. The process then proceeds carefully through policy formation and the development of plans for implementing that policy, which are then carried out.

Sometimes in the real world, however, language problems are not clearly understood, policies are accidental or relative in nature, and planning for implementation is haphazard or incomplete. Language planning may involve only a spontaneous reaction to a social situation and that language policy may be merely "a vague, unarticulated notion of 'what should be'" (Eggington & Baldauf, 1990, p. 89). Sometimes, in the rush to arrive at a solution and do something about a solution, the planning phase of the process just described is shortchanged. While certain aspects of a language situation may be considered and planned, other aspects may be ignored. The result is what is called "defacto language policy and planning" or "unplanned language policy and planning" (Baldauf, 1993/94, p. 85). In such cases, the outcomes may, not unexpectedly, not always be what was intended. False starts and, later, backtracking, may be frequent. Time, energy, and other resources may seem to be wasted, but perhaps that is the price that must be paid for the development of a successful, workable, real-world policy.

**The Provision of Language-Learning Support for LDS Missionaries**

One of the first things that the history of the LDS Church’s policy regarding the provision of systems to support foreign-language learning by missionaries illustrates is the large, developmental price paid for the missionary-training policies and institutions that we currently enjoy and may even take for granted. Our current policies and institutions have taken over 150 years to develop. That history will now be presented within the language problem, policy, and plan framework just explained. Other lessons that this history teaches will then be discussed, and implications for Church language policy and planning in other areas will be suggested.

**Problem**

In regard to missionaries and foreign languages, the language problem is very
evident. When missionaries are sent outside of their native language communities, they often do not speak the language of the people to whom they have been sent to preach the gospel. This communication block prevents them from doing what they have been called to do.

**Policy**
The general Church policy that missionaries should learn the language of their proselytes is based on a well-known LDS scripture (D&C 90:11): “For it shall come to pass in that day, that every man shall hear the fulness of the gospel in his own tongue, and in his own language, through those who are ordained unto this power ...”

Joseph Smith elaborated on this basic idea. In 1841, for instance, he preached, “When devout men from every nation shall assemble to hear the things of God, let the Elders preach to them in their own mother tongue, whether it is German, French, Spanish, or Irish, or any other . . .” (Smith, 1954/1976, p. 195).

Brigham Young followed, established, and elaborated on this same policy. In 1860, for instance, he urged,

> We should be familiar with the various languages, for we wish to send missionaries to the different nations and to the islands of the sea. We wish missionaries who may go to France to be able to speak the French language fluently, and those who may go to Germany, Italy, Spain, and so on to all nations, to be familiar with the languages of those nations (Young, 1860, p. 39).

In this same, practical vein, Elder John Taylor, speaking in the Tabernacle in 1852 on his return from a three-year mission to Europe, noted, “It is good for the Elders to become acquainted with the languages, for they may have to go abroad, and should be able to talk to the people, and not look like fools. I care not how much intelligence you have got, if you cannot exhibit it you look like an ignoramus” (Taylor, 1852, p. 19).

This idea is so firmly established that we can hardly imagine missionaries not learning the language of the people they work with. Nevertheless, such has not always been the case. Nor has the policy that the Church should provide special language training to its missionaries always been well established. In fact, this policy has been the subject of considerable debate over the decades. During that time, Church policy has evolved from one of providing no official preparation (leaving missionaries to rely on the gifts of the spirit and their own self-preparation) to its current state of first-rate, Church-sponsored preparation, manifested in our world-famous Missionary Training Center.

**Plan**
The plans for putting this developing policy into practice have also evolved through several stages over the years. First, however, it was necessary for the language problem to arise and be recognized.

In the earliest days of the Church, most missionaries were English speakers and went to the United States, Canada, or Great Britain. In other words, there was virtually no language problem for them. Everyone involved spoke essentially the same language.

Later, as the Church’s missionary efforts expanded to other lands where English was not spoken, many missionaries simply served in their native lands or returned to them. In such cases, they could
already speak the language so there was really not much of a language problem to be concerned about, either. For example, my great-grandfather, Erik C. Henrichsen, a native of Denmark, joined the Church in that country in 1868. A year later, he was called to serve a mission in Denmark and Norway, which he did. Two years after that, in 1871, he immigrated to Utah (Erik C. Henrichsen, 1902, p. 439). Thirty-two years later, in 1903, at age 56, he was called to return to Scandinavia and serve another mission in Norway (Henrichsen 1988, pp. 367 & 387). For him, speaking the language of the people he taught on his mission was very natural and simple. Danish, after all, was his native language, and Norwegian a very close relative of Danish.

Of course, it wasn’t always so easy for every missionary. Even in the early days of the church, missionaries were called to labor in foreign lands where they did not speak the language of the people. As this problem manifested itself and gradually grew more daunting and complex, Church language policy and planning progressed through several stages:

1. Emphasis on Self-Preparation

2. Special Programs Developed and Implemented Locally

3. Adjunct Programs at Church Schools

4. Dedicated, Independent, Church Supported Institutions

Church policies and institutions for missionary preparation in general have gone through these stages. Those devoted to foreign-language learning by missionaries have followed them -- usually decades later.

In the remainder of this paper, I will briefly describe these efforts.

**Self-Preparation**

The linguistic problems that early LDS missionaries had to overcome were difficult but not insurmountable, and for many decades the emphasis was on individual effort and self-preparation. Elder John Taylor’s mission to Europe from 1849 to 1852 provides a good example of this emphasis. Although he went to France, at first he worked with Englishmen there and preached in his native English. After experiencing difficulties with this audience, however, Elder Taylor decided, “I would let the English alone, and turn to the French. I went from there right into the city of Paris...” Of course, this meant learning to speak French. As he noted in 1852, when reporting on his mission, “You may inquire, how did you get along preaching? The best way that we could, the same as we always do. We went to work (at least I did) to try to learn the language a little.” Elaborating on his French language-learning experience, he said,

> We found many difficulties to combat, for it is not an easy thing to go into France and learn to talk French well; but at the same time, if a man sets to work in good earnest, he can do it. I have scratched the word ‘can’t’ out of my vocabulary long since, and I have not got it in my French one (Taylor, 1852, pp. 18-21).

Elder Taylor went on to explain the need for study: “You may say, I thought the Lord would give us the gift of tongues. He won’t if we are too indolent to study them. I never ask the Lord to do a thing I could do for
myself.” Elder Taylor’s statement characterizes the early, widely encouraged and long-held Church philosophy of missionary self-preparation through individual study.

This emphasis on individual self-preparation began to change, however, when English-speaking Church missionaries first encountered and used more difficult, non-European languages. This happened first in the Pacific in the 1840’s. The first linguistic pioneer in this area was Addison Pratt. As a young man he had sailed the Pacific in whaling vessels and become acquainted with the languages of the region. Later, he returned to his native New England, where he married and then joined the Church. Eventually, after migrating to Nauvoo to join the saints there, he was personally called by the Prophet Joseph Smith to open a mission to the South Sea Islands. This mission was the first organized Church mission to a non-English-language area. It was preceded only by British and Eastern States missions. Departing on June 1, 1843, Elder Pratt eventually made his way to Tahiti, where he enjoyed considerable success. After five years there, he returned to the United States and joined his family in the Salt Lake Valley. There, during the winter of 1848-49, he taught a class in the Tahitian language for prospective missionaries before going back to Tahiti (Pratt, 1950, preface and pp. 245-247).

Except for the School of the Prophets in Nauvoo, which really focused more on religious instruction, Elder Pratt’s 1848 Salt Lake City class was the earliest known instance of a special Church-sponsored school or program for teaching missionaries the language of their missions. It was a noteworthy pioneering precursor to today’s Missionary Training Centers, but it seems to have been over a century ahead of its time. For many decades, the emphasis on missionary self-preparation continued to predominate.

As late as 1962, when the Missionary Foreign Language Institute was starting at BYU, many high-level Church leaders still questioned whether such an institute should even exist. Several “General Authorities were determined to avoid anything that resembled a professionally trained clergy” (Cowan, 1984, p. 27). Even some who favored professional-quality foreign-language instruction for missionaries thought that they should do it “at their own expense” (Cowan, 1984, p. 27). After all, missionaries support themselves in most other ways. The Church does not provide missionaries with free clothing and scriptures. Why should it provide free language training?

But in order to understand the full process of developing, approving, and implementing the plan to establish the Missionary Foreign Language Institute in the 1960’s, it is necessary to go back much farther in time -- to the Pacific in the mid 1800’s. In 1850, the Sandwich (or Hawaiian) Islands mission was organized. At first, the elders sent from Salt Lake City preached only to the other whites (or haoles) and in English. Elder George Q. Cannon’s momentous decision to preach to the natives of these islands and his determination to learn the Hawaiian language in order to do so are legendary. As he himself said,

I made up my mind to acquire the language, preach the gospel to the natives and to the whites whenever I could obtain an opportunity, and thus fill my mission. I felt resolved to . . . master the language and warn the people of
these islands, if I had to do it alone (Cannon, 1882, p. 22).

With the help of the Spirit, and never permitting an opportunity of talking with the Hawaiian to pass, he achieved his goal, providing a sterling example of missionary dedication and self-preparation.

Some of the other missionaries in Hawaii, however, did not enjoy the same degree of success that Elder Cannon did. Working toward some proficiency in Hawaiian, they used rather primitive language-teaching aids, such as a piece of paper with useful sentences in Hawaiian (and their English traditions) written on it (Cannon, 1882, p. 24). They quickly became discouraged. Elder Reddick Allred, a missionary in Hawaii in Cannon’s time, reported in his journal entry of 14 April 1853, “many of the natives came in to talke with us, but they would all talke with us, but they would all talke at once & so fast that it was like the ‘sounding brass’” (Allred, 14 April 1853). He probably wondered if he would ever learn to speak Hawaiian and noted, “The other missionaries [of protestant denominations] it was said was two & three years getting the language before they attempted to preach.” Some of the courageous Mormon elders “commenced in 3 & 4 months” (Allred, 18 April 1853).

Interestingly, at that time, Brother Jonathan Napela, a strong Hawaiian Church member and leader, suggested that all new missionaries come to his house for two months for language training. Napela himself proposed to teach them. In Allred’s words,

Napela came down & spent the day with us talking, reading &c . . . He said he wanted to keep us in school 2 months & then we might go for he thought we would begin to keep us in school 2 months & then we might for he thought we would begin to talk in that time to get to our places of appointment (Allred, 27 April 1853).

This plan sounds remarkably similar to the current MTC language programs that the Church did not develop officially for another 100 years. Ironically, the Hawaii missionaries themselves seem to have rejected it at that time as being impractical and as taking them away from their labors. Some argued that they had been sent to preach the gospel, not study foreign languages. They were apparently not ready for the next stage -- special language programs. Nor was the Church. For nearly a century, missionaries who did not already know their mission language were sent to their fields of labor and expected to learn the language there, sink-or-swim fashion, essentially on their own, with the help of their companions, local members, and the Spirit.

For some, this approach worked -- especially as long as most English-speaking missionaries were learning European languages closely related to English. Even in such cases, however, missionaries often struggled for a long time and served with reduced effectiveness because of their language-learning difficulties.

This immersion approach turned out to be even less successful with the more difficult Asian languages. In 1901, Elder Herbert J. Grant opened the Japanese mission. Even Elder Grant, who was famous for never giving up, eventually abandoned his attempts to learn the Japanese language after spending two years there (Britsch, 1992, p. 32; Heber J. Grant, 1972,
Foreign Language Training

One can only imagine what effect President Grant’s frustrating language-learning experience had on the later evolution of Church language policy regarding language instruction for missionaries.

Fifty years later, in 1955, missionaries sent to Hong Kong (part of the newly opened Southern Far East Mission) experienced the same language-learning frustration. They received no special Church-sponsored language training, and, not unexpectedly, they found learning Cantonese on their own to be extremely difficult. In the face of these difficulties and persecution that they suffered, they almost gave up and returned home (M. Bohn, personal communication, 16 February 1999). Fortunately, President Grant Heaton was able to engage the services of an investigator, Ng Kat Hing, to give basic Cantonese language lessons to the missionaries (Ricks, 1992, p. 51).

The missionaries’ experience in Hong Kong was not a unique one. As time went by and as the Church expanded into increasingly difficult linguistic situations, the need for special missionary preparation in languages became even more widely recognized by Church leaders. In addition, Church resources for providing such preparation grew. Little by little, special programs for preparing missionaries were developed. At first, as in Hong Kong, these programs were small, local efforts. In the early days of the Church, they focused on missionary preparation in general. Special language-learning programs did not come until many years later.

Special Programs Developed and Implemented Locally

The first of the special Church programs for missionary training in general was the School of the Prophets. This institution of learning was established in Kirtland in 1833, less than two months after the revelation known as section 88 of the Doctrine & Covenants was received. Section 88 outlined an extensive curriculum “Of things both in heaven and in the earth . . . things which are at home, and things which are abroad; the wars and the perplexities of the nations.” The sixty students, primarily prospective missionaries, attended “for the avowed purpose of better fitting themselves for the arduous duty of proclaiming an unpopular message to the world” (Bennion, 1939, p. 7). The program of study included more than theology. Political science, literature, and geography were also taught. Interestingly, however, the only foreign languages mentioned were Greek, Latin, (and later Hebrew), which were useful for studying ancient writings, but not for preaching the gospel (Bennion, 1939, pp. 8, 11).

Although it did little in the way of foreign-language training, the School of the Prophets established firmly the idea that Church members called to serve as missionaries would benefit from special schooling. This concept was a foundation stone for the development that would follow. For instance, it paved the way for Addison Pratt’s Tahitian language classes in Salt Lake City in 1848. Still, the development of large-scale, long-term, Church-sponsored programs to help missionaries learn the language of the people to whom they would preach the gospel was over a century away. Numerous small, local language-learning programs were developed first.
As the Church grew, formal, organized missions were established in many foreign lands. In many of these missions, the mission presidents provided on-site language training for arriving missionaries. These local efforts produced mixed results.

In some areas, such as the Finnish Mission, this training was well organized and met with a considerable degree of success. The mission president sent newly called missionaries a few sheets of "language helps" (mostly useful phrases to memorize), which they were to study prior to their arrival. Then, for the first week after these missionaries arrived in the mission field, they attended intensive Finnish courses taught by experienced missionaries. In the evenings, however, the new missionaries would go out proselytizing among the Finns. This experience not only provided the missionaries with valuable practice, but also gave them additional motivation to learn Finnish. After a week, new missionaries were able to tell the Joseph Smith story in Finnish, and they were then sent out to proselyte. Periodically, however, they returned to the mission home for additional language course work. They also studied on their own. The mission attitude was that language learning was part of a missionary’s responsibility, and missionaries continued to learn new vocabulary and develop their Finnish skills up until the time they were released (M.J. Luthy, personal communication, 18 February 1999).

In many other mission areas around the world, however, the missionaries’ language-learning experience was not so positive, and the quality of the language training they received was not unsatisfactory. For instance, “early in 1947, Elder S. Dilworth Young of the First Council of the Seventy toured the Spanish-American Mission located in the Southwestern United States. In his official report of this tour, Elder Young pointed out...

The chief difficulty to good missionary work is the inability of the missionaries to speak Spanish. The president is under the necessity of keeping missionaries for a month, oftentimes, to give them even an idea of the language. Then they often go out to learn further from companions who know little more than they do. (Spanish-American Mission, 1947, in Reports on Mission Tours by General Authorities, MS, Church Archives; as cited in Cowan, 1984, p. 8).

Furthermore, providing this training took the presidents and senior missionaries away from other important responsibilities. Something else needed to be done.

**Adjunct Programs at Church Schools**

The next stage in the development of Church language policy and planning in this area was to make missionary training part of adjunct programs at Church schools. Here again, general missionary preparation preceded specialized foreign language training by many decades.

**General missionary preparation at Brigham Young Academy and other Church schools**

In 1840, under Joseph Smith’s direction, the University of the City of Nauvoo was established. “In it, mathematics, chemistry, geology, literature, history, German, French, Latin and Greek were taught” (Bennion,
1939, p. 25). It is likely that many future missionaries studied at this “first municipal university in America” (Bennion, 1939, p. 22).

During the latter nineteenth century, Church schools were founded in Utah, and they soon created programs for missionary training. In 1833, missionary meetings were added to the offerings of the Theological Department at Brigham Young Academy in Provo. Returned missionaries and even General Authorities addressed the young men. By 1894, missionary classes at BYA were being well attended (Cowan, 1984, pp. 1-2). Academy President Benjamin Cluff, Jr., enthusiastically promoted these classes. In an 1899 letter to the First Presidency, he noted:

It is often asserted by missionary presidents that many of our young men who are called to preach the gospel are wholly, or in part, unprepared, not because they have a strong testimony, but because they are ignorant of the principles of the gospel and of the scriptures. These missionaries must study, therefore, a year at least before they are ready to do much work (General Board Minutes, 1 May 1899; as cited in Wilkinson, 1975, p. 271).

He then offered to organize a missionary-training program at Brigham Young Academy at no additional charge to the Church. This course got underway in February of 1900, and enrollment averaged 120 per year.

Those receiving mission calls were requested to report first to Brigham Young Academy for training. Mission presidents enthusiastically praised the results. Elias Smith Kimball, Jr., president of the Southern States Mission, described Church schools as ‘the natural nurseries of missionaries -- educating the mental and spiritual alike.’ He praised the results of the BYA missionary-training program highly, saying, “A thorough, faithful course in one of our Church schools places a young man in the missionary field one year in advance of another who has not been blessed in a similar way” (Elias Smith Kimball, Sr., to Benjamin Cluff, Jr., 5 March 1899, Cluff Presidential Papers; as cited in Wilkinson, 1975, p. 272). So favorable were the results that “each missionary call from President Snow was accompanied by a request for the new missionary to take a preparatory course at Brigham Young Academy” (Wilkinson, 1975, p. 273). The BYA went on to organize a “Missionary Department” that brought as many prospective missionaries as possible to the campus. “Participation was available only to those called by the First Presidency.”

All participants were required to present, at registration, a recommend from their Bishop which entitled them to free tuition in a missionary-oriented core of classes. These classes included instruction in theology, public speaking, vocal music, language, penmanship, correspondence, and the conducting of meetings (Cowan, 1984, p. 4).

Similar programs were soon initiated at Ricks College in Idaho and at the LDS
University in Salt Lake City. There, Elder B. H. Roberts addressed three evening sessions per week, and Evan Stephens, the well-known composer of LDS hymns and conductor of the Tabernacle Choir, trained the missionaries in music (Cowan, 1984, pp. 4-5). Training in modern foreign languages, however, was apparently not part of the curriculum. For that, it would be necessary to wait nearly fifty years.

**Foreign language training at Brigham Young University**

In his 1947 report on the Spanish-American Mission, Elder S. Dilworth Young extolled the benefits of specialized foreign-language training for missionaries. Arguing that it would greatly increase their effectiveness, he proposed that three months of intensive study at Brigham Young University under Brother [Gerrit] de Jong [a professors] would make it possible for the missionaries to be of value in the field immediately. This period could well be a part of the mission time, and would save time by the increase in usefulness of the missionaries upon their arrival in the field (Spanish American Mission, 1947; as cited in Cowan, 1984, p. 8).

Apparently, the time was finally getting to be right for this idea, proposed in Hawaii by Jonathan Napela a century earlier.

In December of that same year, the entire First Council of the Seventy sent a proposal on this same subject to the First Presidency. This document outlined many features of the program and... recommended that Brigham Young University become the missionary training center for the Church.

Its authors said,

> 'We feel that much more could be accomplished in a two year period of time with three months of that time devoted to intensive training.'... the 'new Army method of teaching foreign languages' could help the missionaries learn as much as possible during the brief period of three months (Unanimous Report Made by the First Council of the Seventy to the First Presidency, December 3, 1947; as cited in Cowan, 1984, pp. 8-9 & Appendix A).

Around this time, the idea of missionary training at BYU was also being discussed by the language faculty. As early as the winter of 1950, Professor H. Darrel Taylor of the Department of Languages spoke of “instituting special classes at the BYU for those who had been called on foreign missions.” He reasoned that in these classes, missionaries could learn not only the language, but also the culture, customs, and history of the countries where they had been called to serve. The classes would help lessen the culture shock experienced by new missionaries, and they could also serve as as a screening function for those lacking the aptitude for language learning (Taylor & Taylor, 1981, p. 103).

In 1952, “in a five-page letter to the First Presidency,” the new president of BYU, Ernest L. Wilkinson, “pointed out the advantages of combining the Salt Lake Missionary Home with a language-training program at BYU. He claimed that BYU faculty members could teach every language” (Wilkinson to the First
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Presidency, August 7, 1952, cited in Cowan, 1984, p. 11). For the next nine years, however, committees met and made recommendations. Finally, in 1961, things began to move when visa problems for missionaries called to Mexico provided an unexpected, but welcome, catalyst. Typically, they had to wait three months from the time of application until their visas actually arrived. Joseph T. Bentley, former president of the Northern Mexican Mission, "proposed the inauguration of a program at BYU by which the newly called missionaries could learn missionary methods and the Spanish language while waiting to receive their visas" (Bentley to Ernest L. Wilkinson, September 19, 1961; Bentley to Marion G. Romney, September 20, 1961; as cited in Cowan, 1984, p. 18). The First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve approved Bentley's proposal in October.

Missionary Foreign Language Institute at BYU
On November 1, 1961, President Wilkinson proposed to the BYU Board of Trustees the establishment of a "pilot program for a Missionary Foreign Language Institute at BYU." With urging from President Marion G. Romney and Elder Gordon B. Hinckley, the Board approved this pilot program. Extract from Church Board of Education minutes, November 1, 1961, cited in Cowan, 1984, p. 19). Darrel Taylor, chairman of the Department of Languages, went to work immediately organizing the "LDS Missionary Foreign Language Institute." Shortly, Ernest J. Wilkins, a BYU professor of Spanish, was named as the institute's first director. President Wilkinson cautioned, for any flaws or weaknesses, and there will be many in the Church critical of it because it is a departure from past practices, and any departure is difficult for some members of the Church to accept (Cowan, 1984, p. 20).

Many details on the history of this institute can be found in Richard O. Cowan's excellent history of the Missionary Training Center and its predecessors. It opened on December 4, 1961, with fourteen elders going to Argentina and fifteen going to Mexico. They lived in the Hotel Roberts in downtown Provo and attended classes in the Alumni House. The Institute's operations were subjected to rigorous scrutiny. Its successes and continuation were by no means a foregone conclusion. For instance, "President Moyle questioned the appropriateness of expending Church funds to provide training in Spanish for some missionaries while no comparable program was provided for those assigned to learn other languages." It would be more fair if they would "attend an intensive Spanish course at BYU at their own expense" (Cowan, 1984, p. 27). Some proposed that missionaries needing a foreign language be given a tentative call six months prior to their entrance into the field and be asked to enroll for one semester at BYU where they would take an intensive language course plus classes in history, geography, religion, and other related subjects (Ernest J. Wilkins to Advisory Council, March 4, 1963, cited in Cowan, 1984, p. 43).

These competing proposals were "intensely debated," but as you can undoubtedly figure out on your own, the institute successfully
navigated these waters and went on to become the Language Training Mission, not just a BYU-sponsored language institute.

Church Missionary Home in Salt Lake City.
Dedicated, independent, Church-supported institutions for missionary training in general had been around for about forty years. In October of 1921,

a committee of the Twelve met with mission presidents who had come to general conference and considered the advisability of having all missionaries ‘undergo two weeks training on the temple block under the direction of the bureau of information’ (Mission Annual Reports, 1922, Ms Church Archives; as cited in Cowan, 1984, p. 5).

Nearly three years later, “in May of 1924, the First Presidency approved a “Church Missionary Home and Preparatory Training School.” It was located at 31 North State Street and could accommodate 64 missionaries. Compared to today’s MTC complex, this building was small, but it is noteworthy as the first independent, Church-sponsored institution devoted exclusively to missionary preparation. By 1926, the Missionary Home program was extended to two weeks. Seventy-one classes were taught and included “English and foreign languages, singing, genealogy, ... personal health and hygiene, ... gymnasium exercises and swimming, table etiquette and manners” (Snows, 1928, p. 553). This program and the building that housed it were later refined and expanded. Given the breadth of topics addressed in just two

weeks, however, it is obvious that in-depth serious foreign-language training could not be accomplished. That training had to wait for the establishment of the BYU Missionary Foreign Language Institute. Even that institute, however, was not an official Church program. At first, as noted above, it was merely a BYU program operating on an experimental basis.

Language Training Mission
In mid 1963, however, the status of the pilot Missionary Foreign Language Institute was changed. On April 30 of that year, it was granted permanence and mission status. The name was changed to “Brigham Young University Foreign Language Institute Mission.” (later shortened to “Language Training Mission”) (Cowan, 1984, p. 45), and Dr. Wilkins was called and set apart as its president (Cowan, 1984, pp. 44-45).

Within a month, the operations of the LTM (which had been spread through at least four different campus buildings) were consolidated in Knight Mangum Hall, a former “women’s dormitory located on the southeast edge of campus” (Cowan, 1984, p. 46). This spacious building had twenty classrooms and space for up to 200 missionaries. “The move into this building cleared the way for the addition of training in new languages” (Cowan, 1984, p. 47). As Elder Hinckley had insisted, “If the Missionary Language Institute is good for Spanish-speaking missionaries, it is also good for others and there should be no discrimination” (Wilkins to Advisory Council, March 4, 1963, as cited in Cowan, 1984, p. 47). As personnel, housing, and teaching materials became available, new languages were added, (1967), and French (1967). By 1968, instruction was offered “in all sixteen languages then being used by
missionaries” (Cowan, 1984, p. 49). In that year, two additional LTMs were created -- one at Church College of Hawaii (for Asian and Pacific languages), and another at Ricks College (for Scandinavian languages and Dutch).

**Missionary Training Center**

In 1974, ground was broken for the large new LTM complex near BYU, and over the next two years the diverse operations in Hawaii and Idaho were consolidated. In 1978, pilot groups of English-speaking missionaries came to the LTM. Based on data gathered from that experience, the First Presidency decided that “all missionaries would go directly to the LTM in Provo for training, and that the Salt Lake Missionary Home would be closed” (Cowan, 1984, p. 108). Subsequently, because of the more comprehensive nature of the training it now offered, the name of LTM was changed to the Missionary Training Center (MTC). For further details on the development of the LTM and MTC, see Richard O. Cowan’s excellent, in-depth history, *Every Man Shall Hear the Gospel in His Own Language: A History of the Missionary Training Center and its Predecessors*. Another good resource on LDS Church language teaching and learning policies and practices over the years is Cynthia Hallen’s 1982 M.A. thesis, titled *LDS language teaching and learning: Highlights from 1830 to 1982* (Department of Linguistics, Brigham Young University). Yet another is Grant Shields’ 1976 doctoral dissertation, titled *Language challenges facing the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in preaching the gospel to every nation* (Department of Church History and Doctrine, Brigham Young University).

**Conclusions Regarding the Process of Developing Language Policy and Plans in the LDS Church**

In retrospect, it is apparent that Church language policy, plans, and institutions for helping missionaries learn their mission languages did not emerge fully developed. They were not the products of decisions made by committees of language-planning experts. Rather, they developed gradually over a period of 150 years in the councils of the Church leaders and devoted academics, in the laboratory of the real world, and in response to increasingly pressing language problems.

The last few decades starting in the 1960’s, have seen a clear shift away from the old “sink or swim” and self-preparation approaches to missionary preparation in general and missionary language learning in particular. Now the Church provides strong support when The Church provides them with teachers, first-class physical facilities, and even computer-assisted language instruction. In retrospect, the shift in Church policy and plans for missionaries learning foreign languages took place slowly, but the end was radically different from the beginning.

The evolutionary, problem-driven, bottom-up, experiment-supported process that eventually led to our current policies and institutions for helping missionaries learn the languages of the people to whom they have been called to preach the gospel has been followed in other language-related areas in the Church, also. The translation of the scriptures, for instance, was originally done by individuals who acted mostly on their own and independently prepared themselves for the work. Their early, local pilot efforts pioneered the scripture-translation process. Later, units and
individuals in the Church higher-education system provided assistance. Eventually, the current, highly refined Church policies, procedures, and facilities for translation emerged.

**Stages in the Process of Developing Specialized, Church-Supported Institutions**

Once specialized institutions for missionary language learning were established, they still went through various stages of development. These can be grouped into four major steps:

1. Small-scale experiment (after much deliberation, recommendation, and preparation)
2. Evaluation
3. Refinement
4. Expansion and consolidation

This four-step process would seem to constitute the Church’s unofficial yet historically established procedure for developing and implementing language plans. Details and examples related to each of these stages in the development of Church policy and plans for providing foreign-language training for missionaries follow.

**Small-scale experiment**

After years of waiting for the Church to start a program based on the deliberations and recommendations of many committees and leaders, in September of 1960 “President [Henry D.] Moyle suggested that [BYU] begin doing something ‘in a limited way’ on its own” (Cowan, 1984, p. 13). Shortly thereafter, the BYU Missionary Committee proposed a program in which two pilots of missionaries would receive training at BYU. One group would consist of missionaries going to English-speaking missions and would spend four weeks on campus. The other group would be made up of missionaries going to Spanish-speaking missions. Because of the language instruction they would receive, missionaries in this second group would spend an additional two weeks on campus.

Apparently, however, these plans were not implemented “until the fall of 1961 when an unforeseen problem provided the stimulus that moved the project from discussion to reality” (Cowan, 1984, p. 14). As noted above, missionaries going to Mexico had to wait three months to receive visas. In mid-September, Joseph T. Bentley proposed that they receive missionary and Spanish-language training at BYU while awaiting their visas. By October, the proposal had been approved by the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve, and on November 1, 1961, the BYU Board of Trustees approved the formation of a pilot LDS Missionary Foreign Language Institute.

The very next day, Darrel Taylor, chair of BYU’s Department of Languages, submitted a specific plan outlining the Institute’s personnel and budgetary needs. At his recommendation (Taylor & Taylor, 1981, p. 104). Ernest J. Wilkins, a professor of Spanish, was named the Institute’s first director. Within a week, Wilkins was reporting on progress and making additional recommendations, such as changing the official name from “LDS Missionary Foreign Language Institute” to the more manageable “Missionary Language Institute” to the more manageable “Missionary Language Institute” to the more manageable “Missionary Language Institute” (Wilkins to Bentley, November 13 & 14, 1961; as cited in Cowan, 1984, p. 21).
Just a few weeks later, the first group of missionaries (14 going to Argentina and 15 going to Mexico) arrived, and the Institute was officially opened on December 4, 1961 -- only a month and three days after its approval by the Board of Trustees. This quick implementation was possible because the plans approved during November of 1961 were not new. They represented the culmination of proposals, inspired deliberations, committee reports, responses, and directives dating back at least to 1947. Finally, after this decade-and-a-half discussion, the time was right to move forward (Cowan, 1984, pp. 22-23).

The new MFLI, although still a small-scale experiment, was finally a reality.

**Evaluation**

Although it had received the approval of BYU’s Board of Trustees, the First Presidency, and the Quorum of the Twelve, this experimental pilot program was still subjected to evaluation of all sorts. Apparently, some of its strongest supporters in the earlier committee deliberations turned out to be its more careful examiners in this stage. For instance,

following an excursion to the Salt Lake Temple on January 12 [1962, about a month after the start of the Missionary Foreign Language Institute at BYU], the elders were invited to meet with Elder Gordon B. Hinckley. He frankly encouraged the missionaries ‘to tell him what was wrong with the program and to suggest how they would improve it.’

They made a number of critical, but useful, suggestions that were later addressed as the program developed (Cowan, 1984, p. 28).

Elder Hinckley was not the only Church General Authority to investigate the new Missionary Foreign Language Institute. Several ‘Church leaders were concerned that the missionaries’ experience at BYU not to be a waste of time’ (Cowan, 1984, p. 36). Elder Marion G. Romney actually made a personal visit to a Spanish class. “One day, about three months after the Institute had started, Elder and Sister Marion G. Romney came to check on the program personally.” They actually joined a class in progress, and the teacher was instructed to “treat the Romneys the same as anyone else in the class.” This he did quite convincingly,

Elder Romney wanted to sit next to his wife, but Steve had them sit on opposite sides of the room, explaining that this would be better for their pronunciation. Elder Romney insisted that he already knew Spanish, having been raised in the Colonies. [The teacher] replied that this was ‘pocho [border] Spanish’ and was not pure. [He] really drilled the class. When Elder Romney left at noon, he told Wilkins that he wondered ‘if the kids could take that kind of treatment’ (Frederick G. Williams, “History of the Language Training Mission,” August 8, 1996, p. 11; as cited in Cowan, 1984, p. 36).

Feedback from mission presidents who received missionaries who had gone through the Institute was also received and, fortunately, was “quite encouraging.” One president in Argentina
considered the results of the Institute’s programs ‘very favorable.’ Elders coming from the MFLI, he insisted, were ‘much further advanced than most of the missionaries . . . who have been in the field from six months up to as high as a year.’

A mission president in Mexico wrote, “Seldom have missionaries come into the field with greater enthusiasm and desire to do missionary work” (Cowan, 1984, p. 41).

Elder A. Theodore Tuttle, the General Authority supervisor for all for South American missions . . . was convinced that elders coming from the program in Provo had (1) an amazing facility in the language compared to the others who had studied language elsewhere; (2) a well-developed missionary spirit . . . ; (3) a desire to get out and go to work immediately; (4) study habits which carried over into the subsequent study of the language and the Gospel (C. Laird Snelgrove to Wilkins, March 17, 1962; Wilkins to Wilkinson, March 29, 1962; Wilkins to Spencer W. Kimball, April 3, 1964; all cited in Cowan, 1984, p. 41).

If the problems had been too great and the successes few, the experimental Institute program might have been rejected and something else tried. As the preceding comments illustrate, however, the experimental program was very successful. Consequently, it moved on to the next stage -- refinement.

Refinement

Although the pilot program was judged successful, it still needed refining in several areas. Missionaries visiting with Elder Hinckley had complained that they felt like they were in school instead of on a real mission (Cowan, 1984, p. 29). Accordingly, one of the major refinements was to change the name of the Missionary Foreign Language Institute to the Language Training Mission. At the same time, it was granted mission status and Professor Wilkins was called as the mission president.

Another refinement was related to missionaries’ Sunday activities. In the MFLI’s first days, elders attended Sunday Church meetings at the Spanish-American branch in Provo. This arrangement was later abandoned, and special, on-site Sunday meetings and gospel classes were set up for the missionaries at the LTM (Cowan, 1984, p. 29).

A third major refinement was the development of a specialized language-learning curriculum for missionaries. Within a relatively short time, a tailor-made Español para misioneros textbook was created and published by the LTM (Cowan, 1984, p. 34). Although similar in many respects to Español a lo vivo (a highly successful Spanish textbook authored by Ernest Wilkins and Terrence Hansen for college students), the dialogs and drills in Español para misioneros focused on language and situations typical to missionary work. In subsequent years, this book went through many editions and served as a model for similar missionary textbooks in a variety of languages -- Navajo, Serbo-Croatian, Swedish, Mandarin, etc.

A final refinement worth mentioning here is the reduction in the length of time missionaries spent at the LTM. Initially set
at three months, this time was later reduced to only two months.

Expansion and Consolidation
As it went through refinements and enjoyed continuing success, the LTM was expanded in size and scope, and the pilot programs were consolidated. As noted earlier in this paper, the number of missionaries participating increased as did the number of languages in which the instruction was given. Portuguese and German were added in 1964, Navajo and French in 1967, and by 1968 instruction was offered in sixteen languages (Cowan, 1984, p. 49). Expanding this training to all foreign-language missionaries was both a sign of the LTM’s success and a way of addressing Elder Hinckley’s “concern over the inequality of providing language instruction for only some Spanish-speaking missionaries but offering no comparable help to any others” (Cowan, 1984, p. 43).

By the late 1960’s, the Church had Language Training Missions operating in three locations -- Provo, Utah; Laie, Hawaii (for Asian and Pacific languages); and Rexburg, Idaho (for Scandinavian languages and Dutch). In the mid-1970’s, however, these diverse operations were consolidated into one large Missionary Training Center in Provo, where training was offered for all missionaries, not just those learning a foreign language. Later, this MTC model was exported to a variety of locations around the world so that missionaries from many nations could receive similar training without going to Provo.

Lessons and Prospects for Church Language Problems, Planning, and Policy in Other Areas
The Deseret News 1999-2000 Church Almanac notes that

The Church began the [twentieth] century with 271,681 members who nearly lived in Utah and the West. It is projected that the Church will end the century with nearly all lived in Utah and the West. It is projected that the Church will end the century with nearly 11 million members in more than 165 lands. In February of 1996, the milestone was reached of having more members outside the United States than within (p. 121).

If present trends continue, the prediction is that by the year 2025 Church membership worldwide will total 35 million. Twenty-six million (or 75%) of these Latter-day Saints will live outside the United States, and most of these people will not be English speakers.

These statistics lead to the conclusion that providing language training for LDS missionaries in the future will become even more complicated and challenging. For instance, missionaries will need to function in more languages, and many of them will not start from an English-language base.

As the Church becomes more and more international in its membership and activities in the years to come, language problems similar to, but more complicated than, those of the past are bound to occur with increasing frequency. These problems will certainly not be limited to the provision of language training for missionaries. Nevertheless, the lessons to be learned from the development of policy and plans for providing foreign-language training for missionaries may prove valuable in addressing other language problems in the Church. These lessons can assist our rapidly internationalizing Church in making the best choices as it encounters and deals with other
language problems. Obviously, with the quickening pace of the work, we will not always be able to afford to wait over a century for appropriate policies and plans to develop and be implemented.

As this paper has explained, much has already been done in the way of policy, planning, and program development in the development of support systems for missionaries learning the language of the people to whom they are to preach the gospel. Also noted have been the significant developments in the translations of latter-day scriptures, Church manuals, magazines, temple ceremonies, and other materials from English into other languages.

In several other language-related areas, however, we still seem to be pioneering today. These areas include . . .

- Programs to help Church leaders with limited English improve their skills in order to communicate with Church headquarters and visiting authorities
- Missionaries’ teaching of English to speakers of other languages as a service or proselytizing tool
- The provision of minority-language Church units (branches, wards, forums, etc.) or other forms of linguistic support (e.g., concurrent translation into their language) for members who do not speak the majority language in an area
- Programs to help non- or limited-English-speaking Latter-day Saints who live in English-dominant societies learn English so they can integrate, participate in, and benefit from Church programs and activities
- The use of English and/or local vernaculars as the language of instruction in Church Education System schools operating in non-English societies.

In these areas, problems are still being recognized and policies and plans developed. In many of these areas, the current Church policy still seems to be self-preparation and immersion, as it once was for more missionaries who needed to learn a foreign language. Nevertheless, in some of these areas preliminary plans are being piloted and evaluated. This state of affairs raises a number of interesting and important questions, such as the following: Will Church language policy and plans go through the same stages in these areas as they have in translation and missionary foreign-language training? As the Church grows in size and resources and language problems become more pressing and complex, will we continue to use the evolutionary, deliberative, experiment-based policy-development approach of the last century and a half? Will we eventually have policies, plans, and institutions for preparing missionaries to teach English to speakers of other languages, or to help Latter-day Saint leaders and members learn English as a second or foreign language? These are fascinating questions, but I don’t have answers for them today. Only time will tell.

I can tell you this much, though. In all of these areas there historical antecedents that are worth knowing more about, as well as future challenges that will require a great deal of work. I invite you to join me in researching the history and supporting the
future development of LDS Church language policy and plans in these important, language-related areas. As President Gordon B. Hinkley has challenged, we can and should build a superstructure on the foundation our forebears have left us (Hinckley, 1997, May, p. 67).

This is a season of a thousand opportunities. It is ours to grasp and move forward. What a wonderful time it is for each of us to do his or her small part in moving the work of the Lord on to its magnificent destiny” (Hinckley, 1997, November, p. 67).

Nowhere is this more true or important than in the area of Church language policy and planning.

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