ABSTRACT

Recent work on scale has emphasized upscaling, or the ways people try to make their discourse seem more universal and authoritative. To explore how people engage in other kinds of scale jumping, I examine how scaling practices vary among policymakers and activists in the US English-only movement. This ethnographic, discourse analytic study focuses on people who shape language policy in four counties in the state of Maryland as well as the organizations U.S. English and ProEnglish. Drawing on interviews, observations, and texts, I argue that upscaling and downscaling can both play a key role in successfully developing linguistic authority, legitimizing English-only ideologies, and enacting new English-only policies. At the same time, when people mix different scaling practices in interaction, the combination may occasionally come across as more dissonant to their interlocutors. Ultimately, the US English-only movement’s penchant for scale jumping has led to more restrictive local language policies but also to more opportunities for questioning and resisting those policies.