

Normative Language Policy

Ethics, Politics, Principles

Leigh Oakes and Yael Peled



Language politics in the new global era presents policymakers with significant ethical challenges. How should the reality of English as a global language influence the normative considerations underpinning national language policies? What moral arguments justify the imposition of national languages in an era of increased immigration and ethnolinguistic diversity? What role is there for non-dominant varieties in a globalised world? Building on the emerging notion of 'normative language policy', this book proposes an integrated framework for the study of such questions, combining recent normative work on language in political theory and philosophy with empirically derived insight from the fields of sociolinguistics and applied linguistics. The case of Quebec forms the backdrop of the study, providing a particularly illuminating setting for investigating the common moral challenges that face contemporary polities seeking to maintain distinct linguistic identities, in an irreducibly diverse world increasingly dominated by English as a global lingua franca.

Leigh Oakes is Reader in French and Linguistics at Queen Mary University of London. His research focuses on language policy and planning, language and national identity, and language attitudes and ideologies, especially in the contexts of Quebec, France and Sweden.

Yael Peled is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Language and Health at the Institute for Health and Social Policy and Faculty of Law at McGill University, Canada. Her research interests focus on the moral and political philosophy of language and the phenomenon of interdisciplinarity in academic research.

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Leigh Oakes and Yael Peled have written a book that changes the academic terrain in the field of language policy and planning. Their analysis of the history of language politics in Quebec is incisive and even-handed, revealing all of the complexities and elements that must be considered by political theorists who too often operate from abstract principles and universals at the expense of the role and effects of history and politics 'on the ground'. This book is ambitious in its aims and it delivers what it promises; it is required reading for anyone who wishes to better understand what is at stake when controversies involving language(s) arise in liberal democracies, and how we can better evaluate the risks and benefits of different approaches to dealing with those controversies.

– *Thomas Ricento, University of Calgary*

Discussions of language rights that traverse political theory and sociolinguistics are still rare. This book is an eloquent and timely contribution that addresses directly this troubling lacuna. In so doing, Oakes and Peled both demonstrate and exemplify the importance of strong interdisciplinary work in examining and addressing language rights, along with their social, political and policy implications. Highly recommended.

– *Stephen May, University of Auckland*

A highly valuable addition to the language policy literature. It offers a novel and original angle on a classic case, linking it up with the most recent and solid scholarship on the normative issues involved.

– *François Grin, Université de Genève*

Effective language policy must unite the findings of disinterested empirical research with the more general and cross-contextual insights of political philosophers. This book represents one of the first sustained attempts at finding common and complementary ground here.

– *John Edwards, St Francis Xavier University*

Normative Language Policy

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London, May 2016

Abbreviations

cégep	<i>collège d'enseignement général et professionnel</i> (college of general and vocational education)
CSLF	Conseil supérieur de la langue française
ELF	English as a lingua franca
FL	foreign language
FRANQUS	<i>français québécois – usage standard</i> (Quebec French – standard usage)
IMLR	intercultural minority language rights
L1	first language
L2	second language
LE	language ecology
LHR	linguistic human rights
MLR	minority language rights
OIF	Organisation internationale de la francophonie
OQLF	Office québécois de la langue française
PELO	<i>programme d'enseignement des langues d'origine</i> (heritage language programme)

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Language politics in the new global era presents policymakers with significant ethical challenges. What moral ends and principles justify state interventions in matters such as language endangerment, language shift, language maintenance and language change? The liberal ‘laissez-faire’ or ‘hands-off’ principle which is closely associated with the English-speaking world would seem to suggest that language matters ought to be left to market forces rather than be regulated by governments. Indeed, the equating of free trade with free thought and expression in the history of liberal thinking has seen the state traditionally afforded only a minimalist role, as an overseer of fair competition, protector of property rights and administrator of justice (Gazzola 2014: 22). According to this view, the state has no place intervening in matters such as religion, culture and language. As Phillipson (2003: 137) notes in the particular case of the latter, however, ‘[i]n many international contexts, a *laissez faire* language policy is akin to a game of linguistic poker, in which speakers of English, whether as a first or second/foreign language, increasingly hold all the good cards.’ Such an approach, he maintains, is ‘bound to strengthen those languages that are powerful in the national and international economy’ (Phillipson 2003: 143). The question that thus arises is: in a globalised world increasingly dominated by English, just how fair is *laissez-faire*?

Over the past two to three decades, the assumption of a *laissez-faire* policy of state neutrality with regard to language has come under increasing pressure, both for its feasibility and moral acceptability (e.g. Kymlicka 1995; Calvet 1996; Phillipson 2003; Van Parijs 2011). The realities of a world dominated by a global lingua franca and a *laissez-faire* ethos have cast significant doubt over the presumed link between free trade, free thought and free speech. They have also challenged the liberal preference for the notion of ‘freedom’ understood as ‘freedom from state intervention’ over the idea of ‘freedom’ as ‘freedom to self-realise’. Such questioning has come at a time when many nation-states outside the English-speaking world are debating the desirability of language policy and planning initiatives themselves. A country like France may be renowned for its long history of state interventions in language matters; what is less known, perhaps, is that language policy questions have also risen to the

fore for example in Sweden, Denmark and Norway, countries traditionally cited for their enthusiastic adoption of English, but which have all sought over the last decade to introduce measures to protect their respective national languages from English (Oakes 2005; Linn and Oakes 2007; Siiner 2010).

This book sets out to examine the ethics of such interventions. It does so using the notion of ‘normative language policy’, an integrated theoretical framework that bridges the empirical literature on language policy and planning that has emanated especially from the fields of sociolinguistics and applied linguistics with the emerging normative work on language in political philosophy and political theory (e.g. democracy and linguistic diversity, language rights and duties, linguistic justice). Although these fields share a strong common interest in the political ethics of language, there exist to date relatively few integrated interdisciplinary frameworks (theories, concepts, methods) which successfully combine them in a systematic manner (Ricento, Peled and Ives 2014; Peled 2014). The notion of ‘normative language policy’ as a consolidated interdisciplinary framework that is explored in the book therefore aims to address this unfortunate state of affairs, in the hope of eliciting further work, both theoretical and applied, in and across particular case studies.

Using the ‘normative language policy’ framework, the book examines a set of core challenges that face language policy makers in contemporary democratic societies today in the three areas of language planning traditionally identified in the literature. For example, how should the reality of English as a global language influence the ethical considerations that underpin national language policies (status planning)? What moral arguments can be used to justify the imposition of national languages in an era of increased immigration and concern for ethnolinguistic diversity (acquisition planning)? And what role is there for non-dominant varieties of language in a globalised world that encourages linguistic unification (corpus planning)? In order to examine these and other related questions, the book focuses on the case of Quebec, the predominantly French-speaking province of Canada. Well known for its overt interventions in language matters, Quebec offers a particularly insightful case study for examining the ethics of language policy and planning questions. It also serves as a useful point of comparison not only for other linguistically distinct stateless nations (e.g. Catalonia, Basque Country, Wales, Scotland, Brittany, Puerto Rico), but also for all those non-anglophone political communities that are now seeking to ensure the future of their linguistic identities in a world increasingly dominated by English.

1.1 Why Quebec?

It is often said about postmodern theory that the number of people who disagree with it exceeds the number of people who have actually read it.