

## BOOK REVIEW

**Normative language policy: ethics, politics, principles**, by Leigh Oakes and Yael Peled, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2018, xi + 190 pp., £85.00 (hbk), ISBN 9781107143166

This book is a welcome addition to the literature on language policy. The authors are mainly concerned with providing an axiological account of normativity in language, using the province of Québec as a case study to explore the extent to which normativity can be morally justified in certain contexts. This focus represents a significant departure from the mainly descriptive and ontological accounts of implicit and explicit policy that are current in many strands of language-policy research. In fact, the focus of the book emerges from the authors' view that contemporary language-policy scholarship maintains a strongly descriptive and empirical character, with the 'ought' of language in society (i.e. normativity) often not a central concern. Indeed, they argue that normativity in language is often associated with illegitimate power and coercion, and is thus regarded negatively, with authors criticising it but not offering insights into how things might be improved.

An interdisciplinary approach is adopted here, drawing mainly on literature from sociolinguistics and normative political philosophy, in order to argue for a more nuanced view of prescriptivism. The authors contend that normativity is not inherently wrong in and of itself. Ultimately, they argue for a research agenda that includes an examination of the ethics and morality of normative language policy.

The book is presented in six chapters. A high degree of internal consistency and coherence is evident throughout, and the effective use of cross-referencing and signposting makes for a very fluid narrative. The authors are concerned with overt, explicit and top-down language policy as formulated and enacted at official, institutional levels. The case is convincingly made for the inclusion of moral and ethical considerations in the analysis of language policy at this level. In-depth considerations of implicit, covert language policy are notably absent, however – although it is quite easily argued that these form a core part of normativity in language.

Québec is presented in the introductory chapter as an ideal test case. Furthermore, and in light of developments in the field of political philosophy since the turn of the millennium, an argument is made for the addition of a fourth phase (focused on normativity) to Ricento's taxonomy of language policy (which includes the practical solutions, critical approaches, and postmodern/linguistic human rights phases). The interdisciplinary challenge faced by Oakes and Peled in marrying sociolinguistics and political philosophy is outlined. This challenge is evident from time to time in the book, where the authors have to rely on a limited number of sources to illustrate and support their arguments. This is unavoidable when breaking new ground and when faced with the unenviable task of constructing a theoretical framework with scarce existing sources. Chapter 2 provides context, outlining elements of normative language policy in Québec, organised according to aspects of status, acquisition and corpus planning. This sets the context for the remainder of the book. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 form the core and, like Chapter 2, they are arranged according to status planning (Chapter 3), acquisition planning (Chapter 4), and corpus planning (Chapter 5).

Chapter 3 is concerned with the extent to which the end goal of linguistic protection justifies the prescriptivist means through which it is sometimes achieved. Taking a selection of the status-planning arrangements in Québec that favour French – in the areas of public signage and education for example – the authors explore whether these can be morally justified with regard to liberal democratic rights principles. On the surface, there appears to be an inherent tension between individual and collective rights agendas in Québec. Language policy that valorises French, for example by limiting access to English-medium instruction in public schools, can be seen to place limits on individual

freedom. Nevertheless, the authors take the view that individual and collective rights are not mutually exclusive. Status planning in Québec can thus be morally justified in that it creates a context for individual choice by legislating for collective rights. The official status of French in Québec is mostly discussed with reference to the status of English. While there is some discussion later (in Chapter 4) on support for newcomer languages and identities, Oakes and Peled don't delve deeply into this question; they also see issues of indigenous aboriginal languages as being beyond the scope of their enquiry. However, as the ethics of status planning for French in Québec is intertwined with the fate of newcomer and indigenous languages alike, a deeper discussion of these power relations seems fundamental to the issues at hand.

The ethics of interculturalism as language policy in Québec is the focus of Chapter 4. In particular, acquisition planning for French among immigrants and their children is investigated. Québec's model of intercultural minority language rights (IMLR) is contrasted with Canada's model of multiculturalism. The authors outline criticisms of the minority-language rights (MLR) movement, drawing strongly on May's work to defend this agenda. They argue that MLR remains a useful concept, but that it is appropriate to frame it within an intercultural framework. Québec's IMLR model is regarded positively by the authors. The promotion of French as the majority language, and the identity planning that accompanies it, are considered legitimate and justifiable. This model of acquisition and identity planning is seen to take place in a way that facilitates integration without mandating assimilation. French is promoted as part of shared culture, for sure. In the authors' view, however, this is done in a way that does not diminish the role of minority cultures or the majority French-Canadian one. Rather, the model of Québec national identity is seen to allow individuals to maintain multiple identity affiliations. Despite the egalitarian underpinnings of the model, questions remain as to whether it actually allows all citizens to participate in the provincial national project on equal terms. Furthermore, the Québec model of interculturalism is described as explicitly embracing minority identities. The extent to which the minority components of Québec national culture are supported or sustainable, however, is not explored in depth here. Both of these points relate to *de facto* policy. While the authors are mainly concerned with explicit language policy in the book, an interrogation of how Québec interculturalism plays out in practice would have added to the discussion.



Language standards and standard language are investigated in Chapter 5, where the focus shifts to corpus planning. It is argued that standard language remains relevant to many of the real-world challenges facing language policy today. At the beginning of the chapter, the familiar instrumental and identity functions of standardisation are presented. Oakes and Peled then briefly describe historical ideologies of variation in the French language – at a global level and at a local provincial one. In particular, they are interested in French as a monocentric language (with France as the only norm centre) versus French as a pluricentric language (with many endonormative standards). They interrogate the instrumental and identity functions of standard language, ultimately arguing in favour of Québec French as a standard, justifying their point from an ethical and moral perspective. Often using English in Australia as a point of comparison, and with reference to the 'three circles of English' model, the authors convincingly present French as a pluricentric language with Québec among the norm centres. Among other results, the authors see the re-standardisation of French along these lines as promoting equality of opportunity. Although it is acknowledged in passing that such a re-standardisation process potentially creates new relations of power at a local level, they do not elaborate on this important point. This is all the more salient given the focus in the preceding chapter on acquisition and identity planning for immigrants and their children in Québec.

The final chapter synthesises arguments made earlier in the book. It begins by considering the implications of those arguments for normative language policy in a broader sense, and then discusses how key concepts introduced here apply to contexts other than Québec. It concludes with an assessment of the current state of normative language-policy research and by outlining possible future directions for researchers.

Oakes and Peled set out in this book to shake off the negative connotations of normativity in language policy. It will of course take a more sustained discussion on the ethics of normativity to mend its image. This is perhaps particularly true in sociolinguistics and the sociology of language, where researchers have long been critical of illegitimate and coercive forms of prescriptivism. The authors are aware of this and they carefully explore the nuances of normative language policy. In doing so, they point out that structures of power cannot be entirely eliminated – but that it is possible to differentiate between relations of power that are just, legitimate and moral, and those that are not. They encourage language-policy researchers to actively seek to make this distinction in order to advance the field. In this pioneering, interdisciplinary work, Oakes and Peled provide a road-map for researchers, and their book will be an important reference text for scholars who wish to join them in rehabilitating normativity and in exploring the ethics of prescriptivism in language.

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<https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2019.1632513>



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