

**Language and Minority Rights: Ethnicity, Nationalism and the Politics of Language.** Stephen May. Harlow, UK: Pearson Education, 2001. 384 pp.

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This interdisciplinary volume presents a provocative, comprehensive analysis of issues related to linguistic pluralism. It is informed by May's long involvement in multicultural and bilingual education in New Zealand, and by his commitment to extending minority-language rights and to recognizing cultural and linguistic plurality within modern nation-states. May addresses arguments about ethnicity and nationalism, social and political theory, education, law, and history as well as the sociology of language and sociolinguistics. A wealth of examples drawn from communities world-wide illustrates his points. Accessibly written and extensively referenced, *Language and Minority Rights* is an excellent resource for students, teachers, and researchers in the fields of anthropology, sociology, sociolinguistics, political science, and education.

The book is divided into nine chapters. Chapter 1 provides a detailed exploration of academic debates on ethnicity, focusing on the polarization between "primordial" and "situational" views. May largely adopts a situational view, arguing "language is a contingent marker of ethnic identity" (p. 10). However, he notes that a situational view of ethnicity fails to account for the prominent role that language plays in the ethnic and national claims of many minority groups. Thus he argues that ethnicity is both constructed and contingent, encompassing social, political, and cultural forms of life.

In Chapter 2, debates on nationalism are also shown to have polarized around essentialist and constructivist positions. While May broadly concurs with the constructivist position, he points out its failure to account for the influence of ethnicity and nationalism in the modern world. May calls for a middle position, acknowledging not only the "legal-political" dimensions of nationalism but also the "cultural-historical" ones (p. 11). May contends that the purely constructivist position's disavowal of any link between ethnicity and nationalism conflates the nation and the state, and fails to explore adequately the differential power relations that result in the representation of the dominant ethnic group's language and culture as the civic culture of the nation-state, and the marginalization of the languages and cultures of minority groups.

Drawing on political theory, in chapter 3 May explores the claims of minority groups to greater representation within existing nation-states, particularly with respect to linguistic and cultural rights. He examines the debate between orthodox liberalism and multiculturalism over the merits of individual and group-differentiated rights, concluding that group-differentiated rights are defensible as long as individual liberties are protected. Chapter 4 returns to questions of language loss and language shift, and the social, political, and linguistic processes underlying them. Drawing primarily from the literature of the sociology of language and sociolinguistics, May explores the link between languages and ethnic and/or national identities. In discussing the replacement of Irish by English in Ireland, he argues that a historically associated language is not a necessary marker of ethnic identities. However he also criticizes the view of some sociolinguists that particular languages are peripheral to identity, and the implication that minority-language loss is an inevitable, voluntary, and beneficial process for minority groups. May contends that this process is more about differential power relations than modernization; uses Bourdieu's notions of cultural capital, linguistic capital, symbolic violence, and misrecognition to provide an explanatory framework; and illustrates his thesis with the development of French as the national language of France.

Chapter 5 examines the links between minority-language policy and education. While acknowledging that education alone cannot bring about language change or reverse language shift, May examines the variety of approaches to educating minority group members in modern nation-states and argues that different language rights can be accorded to different minority groups. Distinguishing between promotion-oriented rights and tolerance-oriented rights, May argues that only national-minority groups—previously self-governing and with a historic claim to a particular territory—can claim a promotion-oriented right: i.e., an automatic right to formal representation of their language in the public domain and to state-supported minority-language education. Ethnic-minority groups (immigrant groups) should have tolerance-oriented rights, minimally the right to preserve their language in the private, non-governmental sphere of national life and, where numbers warrant, some form of active state support in education.

Chapters 6 through 8 present specific cases. In Chapter 6 May discusses the English Only Movement in the United States and Quebec's regional language policy. Although both policies are restrictive, May argues that only the former is illiberal, a deliberate attempt to marginalize minority languages in the United States, while the latter seeks to preserve French from marginalization by English in Canada. In Chapter 7 May examines national-minority language policies in Catalonia and Wales. Both are considered to have been largely successful in protecting and promoting their national-minority languages, but both cases also demonstrate the continuing contentiousness of minority language policy in modern nation-states. In Chapter 8 May explores attempts by indigenous peoples to obtain greater cultural and linguistic rights and recognition. He begins with a discussion of recent developments in national and international law, then briefly discusses recent controversial policies in Norway, Canada, and Australia, concluding the chapter with a detailed examination of the case of the Maori of New Zealand.

In Chapter 9, May restates his position that minority-language rights are both sociologically and politically defensible in the modern nation-state. In advocating bi- or multilingualism, May calls for a radical re-imagining of the nation-state to accommodate greater cultural and linguistic diversity; the legitimation and institutionalization of the languages of national-minority groups; and the active protection of all other minority languages—at least in the private domain and where numbers warrant in the public domain as well.

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