
Optimal and politically opportune language policies for the vitality of minority languages

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Abstract

Language policies for the purpose of (re)vitalizing a minority language are analyzed as a dynamic cost-effectiveness problem. We focus on policy measures with two types of cost structures: costs largely proportional to the number of beneficiaries (a rival measure) and costs independent of the number of beneficiaries (a non-rival measure). An examples of the former is for instance home nursing in the minority language and an example of the latter is street signs in the minority language. Both types of measures are assumed to contribute positively to the vitality of the minority language. We stylize the analysis, letting the rival measure have an immediate direct effect on the vitality and the non-rival one an indirect effect over the language's status, generated by the policy measure.

Two problems are addressed. Firstly, we study how the optimal combination of the two types of measure changes as the policy is implemented and the vitality of the minority language increases and show that a policy with fixed budget shares as a rule is sub-optimal. Secondly, we compare the opportune policy of a policy maker planning with a fixed time horizon with the optimal policy as the time horizon approaches infinity. The policy maker has incentives to plan for a sub-optimal policy at the beginning of the planning period and at times close to the time horizon.

All effects are illustrated in numeric examples.

Keywords: Language policy, cost structure, cost-effectiveness analysis, planner objectives, long-run optimal policy, short-run opportune policy.

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