



Towards an index of linguistic justice

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Abstract

As a step towards systematic comparative evaluation of the fairness of different language policy regimes, a rationale is presented for the design of an Index of Linguistic Justice. The approach taken is to define a “minimum threshold of linguistic justice” with respect to government language policy in three domains: law and order, public administration, and essential services. The benchmark for evaluation is the theoretically ideal situation in which all individuals have the same rights, independent of their language repertoire; departures from this standard incur lower scores. Indicators are chosen to assess effective access to three kinds of language rights: toleration (lack of State interference in private language choices), accommodation (accessibility of public services in different languages) and compensation (symbolic and practical recognition of languages outside the fundamental language regime). In order to take account of the cost-benefit trade-offs involved in providing language-related goods to language groups of varying sizes, a method is proposed for weighting scores with respect to compensation rights so that lack of recognition for larger groups incurs greater penalties, while factoring in the particular characteristics of each language-related good. A trial set of ten indicators illustrates the compromises entailed in balancing theoretical rigour with empirical feasibility.

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