

Language, Rights, and the Language of Language Rights: The Need for a New Conceptual Framework in Political Theory of Language Policy

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ABSTRACT: it is only in recent years, after a surprising long period of neglect, that political theorists began to engage with matters pertaining to the field of language policy studies, such as linguistic justice and linguistic protection. Within this emergent body of literature, the most common conceptual framework employed was and still is that of language rights. The article examines this contemporary discourse on language rights, while identifying both advantages and disadvantages of the normative conceptualization of language policy issues primarily in the language of language rights. As defining and conceptualizing language is a tremendously difficult task, without sufficient background in linguistics, the resulting political theory produced is often prone to common linguistic misconceptions and misinformation. Recognizing this worrying state of affairs, the article argues for the need to develop a new conceptual framework in political theory of language policy, by expanding the debate beyond the rights discourse into convergent approaches such as environmentalism. The article outlines some preliminary propositions for a more informed and better-reasoned engagement with the normative aspects of language policy, and calls for the need to maintain greater contact between both subject areas, as well as with real-world contexts and input.