Abstract

Language rights and linguistic citizenship

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Language rights and linguistic human rights have been offered as the answer to inequality and the marginalization of minorities. However, they have been vigorously criticized for relying too heavily on essentialist notions of identity, thus excluding minorities they were intended to protect, and contemporary analyses also show language rights to be ineffective in relation to the sociolinguistic nature of multilingual ecologies. Furthermore, in the context of liberal politics, either postcolonial practices render LHR policy impotent or, alternatively, LHR becomes an active agent in the reproduction of colonial wrong-doing. On the other hand, whilst language as a resource has been present in ideological debates about language for thirty years, this has not yet yielded a sufficiently robust alternative to rights-based planning. In this paper, I will discuss the notion of linguistic citizenship (Stroud 2000, 2001, Stroud and Heugh 2004) as a replacement to LHR which accommodates both the ethical concerns of LHR and the prospects of language as a resource. Linguistic citizenship focuses on a broad articulation between the diversity of linguistic practices and resources which civil society draws upon, and emphasizes the political and social participation of linguistic communities rather than a reliance on legal provisions and inappropriate institutionalization.

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