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*Minority Language Promotion, Protection and Regulation: The Mask of Piety*, Williams, Colin H. (2013). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 343 p. ISBN : 978-1-137-00083-5

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## **Book Review**

### ***Minority Language Promotion, Protection and Regulation: The Mask of Piety***

WILLIAMS, Colin H. (2013). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 343 p.  
ISBN : 978-1-137-00083-5

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Over the last fifty years, there have been continuous attempts to incorporate minority languages into the mainstream of public policy. Whilst this has led to legislative developments and the recognition that the state should construct a supportive framework for minority languages, concurrent processes such as the hollowing out of the state and citizenship along with neo-liberal arguments predicated on market forces, competition and citizen choice mean that progress in the field of minority language legislation and policies is not always translated into the daily lives of minority language speakers in Europe. This is particularly evident during the current period of Western financial crisis when governmental cuts are perceived as having an impact on minority language speakers. For Colin H. Williams, governments give with one hand and take with another; ‘government demonstrates inconsistency when it comes to official language policy. On the one hand it more clearly specifies what it wishes to achieve in society through consecutive declarations of official strategies, while simultaneously eroding or attacking the conditions of possibility by which such strategies are to be realized as a social fact—a stance I describe as the Mask of Piety’ (2013: 3). This divergence between the presence of a supportive legislative framework and its impact on the everyday lives of minority language speakers is the basic premise of the book. To uncover the extent to which governments hide behind a ‘Mask of Piety’, Williams focusses on the language regimes and the promotion, protection and regulation of a number of minoritized languages in a Canadian and European context and asks; how are minority language rights upheld as a matter of routine, daily behaviour?

The book is divided into nine chapters. The first introduces the reader to the concept of 'Mask of Piety' and the importance of analysing the embedded nature of decision-making and management of official minority language policies and programmes. The second chapter turns its focus to the process of managing official language legislative regimes and explores the role that European network agencies play in advancing language diversity. It then investigates the Canadian language regime and highlights two examples of best practice worthy of emulating internationally; the principle of 'Active Offer' in bilingual services and a robust policy of language of work. Chapter three advances the discussion on human rights and language standards and locates it within a wider international and European context. It begins by offering a detailed evaluation on European minority language law and rights and develops to discuss micro- and macro-level evidence from a comparative research project, 'From Act to Action'. Chapters four and five expand on the findings of the comparative project on bilingual public services in Finland, Ireland and Wales, analysing the component parts of the legislative systems in all three case studies in great detail. It includes policy recommendations that could be relevant to other EU contexts. Chapters six and seven analyse the implementation, methodology, targets, evaluation and monitoring of language strategies in the Basque Country, Catalonia, Galicia, Ireland, Scotland, Wales and Canada and advance recommendations of best practice following an in-depth discussion of each case study. Chapter eight investigates the role Official Language Commissioners play in regulating language legislation and policy in Canada, Ireland and Wales. The concluding chapter reflects on previous discussions on minority language protection, promotion and regulation and reminds us that, despite the presence of language strategies, networks, legislation and a positive public rhetoric on the promotion of official languages, governments often hide behind a 'Mask of Piety'.

The book has several merits. It offers a very rich and comprehensive comparative account of legislative frameworks, acts and strategies from a Canadian and European perspective and imparts policy recommendations based on extensive micro-, meso- and macro-level evidence. Elaborating on the language regimes in eight case studies, the 'Mask of Piety' successfully engages with language legislation and regimes on a macro-level whilst simultaneously contextualising it within a detailed discussion on language policy on a meso- and micro-level. Thus, it is able to situate the issues facing minority language communities within a local, national, European and international context.

Second, it provides the literature on minority language legislation and policy with a valuable evaluation of the management of language regimes in a variety of comparative contexts. It also explores the relationship between official language promotion, protection and regulation and the management of language strategies and frameworks within a neo-liberal or liberal state. Indeed, Williams reminds us of the political nature of language legislation and governmental policies; 'Language planning and policy agencies are essentially political and

not just professional constructs. They are useful in so far as they give tangible support to officially recognized languages, but they are established, nurtured and made operational within fairly limited confines which have as much to do with political expediency as they have with the long-term vitality of the target language' (2013: 19).

Third, the fact that a large part of the book is based on two substantial research projects, the 'From Act to Action' project and a project sponsored by the European Network to Promote Linguistic Diversity (NPLD) means that the work is both relevant and accessible to policy-makers, civil servants and practitioners working in the field of minority language protection, promotion and regulation. In deriving policy implications from the extensive empirical research and elaborating policy recommendations based on data collected through various methodological techniques, the 'Mask of Piety' informs our understanding of the public policy process, including decision-making in the field of language policy. In analysing the gap between public rhetoric and reality, the book uncovers the challenges facing those working to protect minoritized languages and suggests examples of best practice that could potentially be emulated in other contexts. Whilst the book's strength and contribution lies in its detailed and multi-level analysis of a number of case studies, it means that, at times, the main argument is sometimes lost amongst the richness of the empirical data. The grouping of chapters according to research projects also impacts upon the flow and continuum of the argument. Nevertheless, the reader whether a postgraduate student, practitioner or policy-maker is able to benefit greatly from this empirical, policy-oriented research.

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