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Using language to help people, or using people to help language? A capabilities framework of language policy

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Abstract

Language policy is a hugely diverse field, united only by the intent to influence language use in some way. Much early research in the field asserted that language policy had an emancipatory drive, to empower downtrodden minorities against the cruelty or indifference of majoritarian politics. But over the years, critical accounts have increasingly questioned who precisely benefits from promoting minoritized languages. Indeed, can the language itself, valorized as an emblem of heritage, sometimes become invested with its own separate value? Can that value even outweigh concerns over improving people's prospects and capabilities? In what follows, I compare that balance between people's capabilities and the language itself, across a range of cases. I show especially how a growing focus on "new speakers" affects that balance.

KEYWORDS
capabilities, language policy, language rights, new speakers

Abstract

Kielipolitiikka on hyvin monimuotoinen ala, jota yhdistää pyrkimys vaikuttaa kielenkäyttöön jollakin tavalla. Monissa alan varhaisissa tutkimuksissa esitettiin, että kielipolitiikalla oli emansipatorinen tavoite, jolla pyrittiin antamaan alistetuille vähemmistöille voimaa taistella enemmistöpolitiikan julmuutta tai välinpitämättömyyttä vastaan. Vuosien mittaan kriittisissä tutkimuksissa on kuitenkin yhä useammin kyseenalaistettu se, kuka tarkalleen ottaen hyötyy vähemmistökielten edistämisestä. Voiko itse kieli, jota arvostetaan perinnön tunnuskuvana, joskus saada oman erillisen arvonsa? Voiko tämä arvo jopa olla merkittävämpi kuin ihmisten tulevaisuudennäkymien ja kyvykkyyksien parantamiseen liittyvät huolenaiheet? Seuraavassa vertailen tasapainoa ihmisten kyvykkyyksien ja itse kielen välillä useiden esimerkkitapausten kautta. Painotan erityisesti sitä, miten kasvava keskittyminen "uusiin puhujiin" vaikuttaa tähän tasapainoon.

Asiasanat: kielipolitiikka, kielelliset oikeudet, kyvykkyydet, uudet puhujat

What is language policy for? Who is it for? Who benefits, and why? Language policy is no stranger to debates over its purposes, ideologies, and moral foundations. But as I outline below, these debates have been somewhat diffuse, often contradictory, and lacking in overall structure. There have been some attempts to remedy that, and I build on those, aiming for a clearer view of moral orientations in this bustling field. I do this by using a theory from development studies: capabilities. This theory centers on people's ability to improve their life circumstances, and by extension it sets a standard for all policy interventions: namely whether people are materially empowered to achieve such improvement as a result. This, I argue, is a powerful benchmark for language policy, and any claims that it is helping people.

In recent decades, interest in and debate about minoritized languages have evolved rapidly. In 2008 a documentary came out, *The Linguists*, capturing a vogue interest in language documentation. It followed two intrepid American linguists as they traversed exotic locales recording speakers of endangered languages. It debuted at the Sundance Festival and received an Emmy nomination. A particularly effusive review from The Hollywood Reporter described the two protagonists as "bold academics who plunge into the jungles and backwater villages of the world to rescue living tongues about to go extinct." The documentary was also an effective recruiting sergeant for linguistics. But such recording work has long been criticized for not really "rescuing" languages at all—perhaps providing them with a dictionary before departing back to the ivory tower. As Heller and Duchêne (2007, pp. 4–5) put it, "a frequent critique of language endangerment discourse is that it displaces concerns with speakers on to a concern with languages." Indeed, even that concern with languages has turned out to be mostly illusory: "There is scant evidence after 25 years that documentation has played a significant role in saving languages" (Bird, 2020, after Nathan & Fang, 2014; cf. Akumbu, 2020). Bernard Perley—a native American and anthropologist—goes further, castigating language documentation as "a ghoulish process where linguists go out to find the last speakers of dying languages and record their last words. That is not saving the language. It is mortuary linguistics" (Perley, 2012, p. 140). That is a fair heckle if documentation ends there. There are some scholarly retorts to that, mobilizing the results of documentation toward new goals: promoting cultural or heritage value of historical vernaculars; leveraging their usefulness in describing diverse wildlife and knowledge systems; fostering a sense of identity or community (perhaps even limited to ceremonial capacities); and as a directly instrumental means to certain ends. Bradley and Bradley (2019, pp. 5–10) overview these diverse motivations (cf. Wickström et al., 2018, pp. 16–22).

These diverse motivations also carry with them quite different levels of explicit interest in the people actually speaking minoritized languages—as groups or as individuals. Hill (2002) offers a critical review of "expert rhetorics" that promote minoritized languages but may sit at odds with the needs and desires of their speakers. As discussed below, that critical debate has grown significantly since. All this is highly pressing, because minoritization of a language often coincides with various other forms of marginalization and injustice. Those people need more than just scholarly interest and dictionaries. (As Markus Zusak put it in his novel *The Book Thief*, "You can't eat books, sweetheart.")

1 | LINGUISTIC HUMAN RIGHTS (AND ITS DISCONTENTS)

Spurred by the harms that surround language minoritization, the field of "linguistic human rights" (LHR) has arisen over the last few decades, probably best associated with Tove Skutnabb-Kangas. In her words, LHR aims for "those language rights … which are so basic for a dignified life that everybody has them because of being human; therefore, in principle no state (or individual) is allowed to violate them" (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2008, p. 109). This means not just documenting languages but working to ease the disadvantage faced by their speakers.

Skutnabb-Kangas (2005) relates LHR to economist Amartya Sen's "capabilities" theory, which broadly states that economic development should be about more than just money; that disadvantaged people need structures in place enabling them to become educated, vote, plan their finances, start a business, and generally get on in life just as well—just as capably—as anyone else (see e.g., Sen, 2004); hence "language rights … so basic for a dignified life," in Skutnabb-Kangas' terms. I have since discussed the relationship between language policy and capabilities (e.g., Sayers, 2009, pp. 218–222; Sayers, 2017). Lewis (2017) offers further links in the same vein. The grim alternatives are either continued marginalization, or a gradual grinding coerced assimilation which Skutnabb-Kangas (2005) powerfully labels "linguistic and cultural genocide" (cf. "language oppression," Roche, 2019).

LHR has principally advocated "mother tongue medium" education for minoritized language speakers to aid literacy, at least in primary education, before any involvement of majority languages (Fafunwa et al., 1989). This, it is argued, enables greater social inclusion, and loosens the knots of marginalization tied up over centuries—often during colonization or other subordination. LHR is an emancipatory mission, a reparatory enterprise.

Mother tongue medium education is based on the long-attested finding that children learn best in the language used by their mother (and/or other caregivers)—whereas, if taught in an unfamiliar language, they will struggle, lose motivation, and disengage, ultimately getting lower grades. Case studies are discussed below; for broad reviews of evidence, see Batibo (2005, pp. 54–55), Bhattacharjea et al. (2011), Pinnock and Vijayakumar (2009, p. 69). However, actually doing this in practice has rubbed up against the awkward politics of recognizing—much less actually using—stigmatized languages or language varieties in schools. This is a contentious debate, often based more on feelings than on evidence (see e.g., Coleman, 2016, for a revealing account).

LHR has therefore had its work cut out, but it can deliver on its promises if done well; for example, the "Academic English Mastery Program" in Los Angeles, USA:

> "a comprehensive, research-based program designed to address the language and literacy needs of African American, Mexican American, Hawaiian American, and American Indian students for whom Standard English is not native. The program incorporates into the curriculum instructional strategies that facilitate the acquisition of standard and academic English in classroom environments that validate, value, and build upon the language and culture of the students." (LAUSD, 2017)

Such instructional strategies center on contrastive analysis: showing the prescribed linguistic structures of grammar, morphosyntax, etc. in Standard English alongside the same structures in the minoritized variety. This acknowledges that both do have a structure, minoritized varieties are not simply "wrong," and it provides a more transparent basis for learning. There is a long debate (in linguistics and in law and politics) about whether these non-standard varieties can be considered separate languages. I advance no position on that, nor do I aim to conflate second language and second dialect acquisition; I only point out the similarity of outcomes in either using or ignoring the vernacular that children bring to class. For pedagogically similar strategies in transitioning between more distinct languages, see for example, Cummins (2017a) and Ramachandran (2017). In the Academic English Mastery Program (AEMP), children are taught not that their language is wrong, but rather the value of proficiency in the dominant standard for use in other contexts (Nero, 2012, p. 45) and how to transition toward that as an educational outcome.

Such transitional pedagogy is attended by a host of critical issues. Even if a program like AEMP recognizes minoritized varieties, does it nevertheless reify and formalize a hierarchy of prestige, and the supremacy of Standard (White) American English? Does it impose and perpetuate a colonial understanding of minoritized languages and varieties as discrete and autonomous entities, instead of considering more fundamentally how minoritized people could be educated on their own terms? Why not reach higher for even greater equality? There is interesting work emerging in that vein, for example, fully multilingual assessments to diversify understandings of learning and academic achievement (see e.g., Shohamy, 2022). But AEMP emerged only after decades of gridlock over the sensitive politics of including stigmatized vernaculars in education at all (see e.g., Rickford, 2002), and careful fine-tuning to local sociolinguistic realities. We are interested here in motivations, and the motivation for AEMP was simply the most attainable capabilities within a highly limited set of available options. That is the benchmark for our current discussion.

So, LHR is an attempt to attend to capabilities by including minoritized languages and varieties, even if the end goal may not address bigger iniquities in the status quo. But there are other critical issues besides this, and the original fine principles of LHR can end up rather distorted by a range of unintended outcomes in practice. Let me review six broad existing critiques of LHR.

1.1 | The question of "mother-tongue-ness" and the wider consequences of standardization

What actually is a mother tongue or home language? Can humans be sensibly categorized this way? Various thorny issues arise from one's starting point here. To begin with, documentation of minoritized languages, and subsequent education in them, both rely on standardized materials. As Person (2005, p. 158) puts it matter-of-factedly in a technical discussion of how to document a language: "The aim of a good [documentation] orthography is to fully represent a language's phonemes while eliminating variant spellings by limiting the number of symbols (letters) and establishing rules for their use." This comes across as a fundamental, universal practical matter. But if a minoritized language has distinct dialects (Corker, 2000, p. 455; Odugu, 2015, p. 150; Wright, 2007, pp. 204—205), then new disadvantages immediately arise. The original inequality of majority versus minority language is simply nudged down a level (cf. Jaffe, 2019, on the rare embrace of "polynomie"). This was recognized at least as far back as Haugen (1966, p. 932): "To choose any one vernacular as a norm means to favor the group of people speaking that variety. It gives them prestige as norm-bearers and a headstart in the race for power and position". Wright elaborates on the issue (2007, pp. 204–205, italics added):

> "Skutnabb-Kangas [and other LHR proponents] … have demonstrated clearly how minority groups … are disadvantaged. What is less often considered is that the problem may be replicated for the *minorities that minority groups themselves have among them*. When a minority language is adopted for use in educational, legal, bureaucratic or governmental settings, such adoption may displace the disadvantage to

> another group. Speakers of varieties different from both the national and the regional standard [of the minority language] become, in effect, double minorities."

Similarly Blommaert pointedly problematizes LHR's pursuit of

> "ethnolinguistic pluralism, in which language groups would be given institutional muscle for their language: standardization and scholarship, media, politics, literature and an education system. … Even just creating a written standard, for instance (and all standardization efforts require literacy), would raise and exacerbate the issue of resources …: everyone would be able to speak it, but not everyone would be able to read or write the language. Inequality among language groups would be reduced, but inequality within languages would be increased." (Blommaert, 2001, pp. 136–137; cf. Mufwene, 2017, pp. 204–205; Odugu, 2015, p. 150)

Corker (2000, pp. 449—450) in the context of Deaf education highlights similar potential for new inequalities: "any entry of the minority language into the mainstream leads to … class varieties of that language which were not observable before.… The failure to acknowledge this is also one way in which a "minority" politics of resistance becomes hierarchically organised in terms of its own language standards."

Pre-existing dialects of a newly standardized minority language may in turn feel new pressures upon them, both normative (from schooling and other officialdom) and social (from speakers of the standard variety). That language may gradually end up feeling somewhat diluted, divorced from the vibrancy and dynamism of the vernacular (see e.g., Jones, 1994, on wistful reflections in the case of Welsh; and Gibson, 2016, p. 38, on comparable distaste in Kenya for publishing in Sheng: "you're destroying our language"). As Blommaert (2017) argues, upon such transformation this is no longer really the "home language" but an identifiably distinct "school language."

1.2 | Oversimplification of language groups

Organizing people into "mother tongue" groups for policymaking purposes is inevitably a bureaucratic matter. That might be straightforward in small close-knit communities; but at a national level it soon becomes unwieldy and prone to error. Lim (2009) recounts the way children in Singapore are simply assigned a mother tongue based on their officially recognized ethnicity (itself often an abstraction). This is at best clumsy, at worst racially insensitive; and it results in some strikingly incoherent outcomes, for example, "the Peranakans, a group who are classified as Chinese and thus are assigned Mandarin as their official Mother Tongue, but in fact once had Baba Malay … as their vernacular, and now for all intents and purposes also have English as a mother tongue" (2009, p. 57). This is clearly at odds with the LHR goal of learning through the vernacular, even if officially they are in their "mother tongue."

A relatable problem arises in New Zealand, less from heavy-handed bureaucracy, more from a kind of wishful thinking. Rata and Tamati (2013) describe contemporary Māori communities where proficiency in Māori is sometimes strong, but frequently dominated by mixed Māori-English forms, and often more or less subsumed entirely by English as a home vernacular. This leads to a "pedagogical dilemma" of teaching in Māori, "when that language is actually the weaker, second language" (p. 269).

1.3 | Wider social segregation arising after separate mother tongue education

As above, AEMP and some other cases show that additive approaches can be done sensitively and inclusively. But unintended social segregation is widely reported in a range of empirical studies elsewhere, for example, in Catalonia (Paulston, 2003), former Yugoslavia (Filipović et al., 2007; Pupavac, 2012), Singapore (Lim, 2009), Wales

(Selleck, 2013), the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Kenya (Gibson, 2016, p. 15). Negative effects of unintended segregation are not necessarily foreseen by plans that focus foremost on language, nor is the wider potential for fuelling existing tensions between groups. As Wee concludes, “the focus on language rights tends to work against the […] shared sense of community, and instead encourages social fragmentation along ethnic lines” (2010, p. 96). Corker relatedly argues: ‘It is thus hard to see how this approach to language planning … reflects the ideology of inclusion unless inclusion is equated with sharing the same *physical* space, rather than the same *social* and *linguistic* space (2000, p. 455—original emphases).

A small but illustrative example of all this comes, unintentionally, from Person (2005, pp. 159–160), who helped the Bisu people of Thailand produce the first ever book in their language. They were very proud of it, especially when it happened to be presented to Thai royalty; they went on to joke that neighboring language groups had no such book. For Person (2005, p. 160) this is simply an amusing quirk of the tale; but it does show a germinal stage of Wee's macro concern cited above: elevating minoritized languages above others does not inherently counter hierarchies overall; it may simply add new ones, engendering new contests and superiorities. The studies listed above give further empirical detail of larger societal segregations fuelling divisive frictions.

1.4 | New locally adapted varieties of dominant majority languages

Wee (2010, p. 20) portrays language rights as “the protection of an inherited ethnic identity.” A corresponding emphasis on traditional heritage languages leads to some oversights, indicated by cases like the Peranakans and Māoris noted above. In both these cases, a formerly imposed colonial language (English) has become sociolinguistically adapted in locally distinctive ways. Can that distinctive variety now serve as a symbol of minority identity? Should it be embraced as a mother tongue?

Ofori and Albakry (2012) relate some striking remarks from Ghanaian respondents about locally appropriated English, not least the article's eponymous interview quote, “I own this language that everybody speaks” (p. 173). But globally dominant languages, so tainted with the stench of colonial injustice, seem irredeemably barred from prevailing discourses of LHR, even in these localized varieties (Mufwene, 2017, pp. 205–206). As Odugu (2015, p. 150) puts it: “A centralized rationale for social justice that meets the interests of both indigenous language preservation and the protection of rights to choose English is problematic.” LHR seems incompatible with the duality that “English symbolizes both oppression and liberation” (Odugu, 2015, p. 151).

1.5 | Multilingual contact-based vernaculars

Worldwide, migration and other population movements bring erstwhile distinct peoples together, along with their languages, which often leads to new, structurally distinct vernaculars. Nouchi in Ethiopia, Tsotsitaal in South Africa, and many more besides are springing up in a process of linguistic genesis as old as spoken language itself. But because these nascent proto-varieties are so new, their speaker bases so diffuse, and their ethnic heritage inherently blurry, they do not fit the LHR model (for examples and critical discussion see Blommaert, 2001, p. 137; De Schutter, 2007, p. 15; Gibson, 2016, p. 17; Habermas, 1998, p. 22; Kircher & Fox, 2018, p. 847; Mufwene, 2017, p. 209; Odugu, 2015, pp. 144–147; Pennycook, 1998, p. 80; Sayers, 2015; Weber & Horner, 2012, pp. 127–128). Like older heritage minoritized languages, these newer contact-based vernaculars are minoritized, spoken nowhere else on earth, and associated with various forms of marginalization and injustice. But they lack heritage, tradition, or an obvious politically identifiable community. There is a basic mismatch between the inherently group-based approach of public policy, and the dynamic fluidity represented here.

Wickström et al. (2018, p. 9), seeking pragmatism, notionally concede “the fiction of languages being discrete phenomena and groups of speakers being located in defined regions,” but then immediately embrace this as “both a sensible and a fruitful abstraction, which allows us to develop implementable … language policy and planning." They have a point though; public policy is just not suited to spiralling diversity and emerging contact-based vernaculars (cf., ibid., p.46).

1.6 | Class, structural inequality, and the cultural turn

Political theorist Iris Marion Young (2011) is credited with refining and popularizing the theory of "structural injustice," not least in her posthumous monograph. Her basic thesis is that oppression in society operates at many intersecting levels and cannot be addressed by fixing any one of them in particular. This is a highly influential pillar of contemporary political theory; but in language policy, the emphasis on "inherited ethnic identity" (Wee, 2010, p. 20) linked to a particular language has dimmed attention to those wider barriers. LHR (as its name suggests) has tended to foreground language as a principal concern. But that may not align with other intersecting disadvantages; as Odugu notes: "Communities united by linguistic practices are often fractured by diverging social, political, cultural, and/or economic interests" (2015, p. 151). Or as Brutt-Griffler (2002, p. 225) puts it (see also Alcalde, 2018, p. 80):

> "If you make ethnicity, nationality, and minority status the unit of analysis, you can conclude that people … have in their interest to maintain their mother tongue. If, on the contrary, you take class as the unit of analysis, their interests might dictate emphasis on access to "dominant languages"."

So, whether the intention of a language policy intervention is to create prestige in minoritized languages, or raise proficiency in already prestigious majority languages, or both, any such language-centric focus would still ignore Young's warning, and risk eliding the myriad other structural injustices besetting minoritized people which may or may not have anything to do with language. Such policy would also steer hazardously toward the segregating and disenfranchising unintended consequences discussed earlier. All this resonates with a wider debate in the social sciences about the so-called "cultural turn," wherein inequalities are increasingly seen through the lens of culture, stealing attention away from social class and other structural barriers (Crompton, 2008, pp. 43–44).

An analysis that foregrounds broader structural issues, placing no a priori importance on language, may lead to quite different solutions than valorizing heritage languages as such. It may be less instinctively unsettled by the materials benefits which—rightly or wrongly—may be afforded by proficiency in majority languages (Brutt-Griffler, 2002, p. 225; Gazzola, 2016; Hahm & Gazzola, 2022); or by the possibility that sociolinguistically localized forms of erstwhile colonial languages, and new contact-based vernaculars, may have more relevance than historically and ethnically defined heritage languages—especially those transformed by standardization (see Weber & Horner, 2012, pp. 126–127). But in any case, such an analysis would treat language as just one among a series of intersecting priorities to increase well-being and capabilities, not as something with any inherent significance.

Taken together, the above six critical issues suggest that the laudable goals of LHR can be hard to grasp for policymakers, especially when combined with other ideological imperatives to essentialize race and ethnicity. All these critiques are magnified in areas of rapid migratory flows, where formerly distinct language groups are suddenly thrust together. Wright (2007, p. 211) problematizes building fixed policy around the "constantly shifting landscape of idiolects." Gupta (2002, p. 295) cautions that "groups do not remain discrete, but merge …. Migration, language shift, and intermarriage are long established human practices. They have not stopped. It is dangerous to solidify this fluidity into policy". Odugu (2015, p. 146) provides similar insights, adding a further critical reminder: "It is noteworthy that the names of languages and societies, including ethnicities, of colonized people were as much European coinages as post-colonial geopolitical maps. This colonial inventory helped and continues to help in facilitating the political management of colonized peoples."

With all the above in mind, any conceivable measure of language affiliation is not remotely as binary or linear as some policies may suggest. As discussed in some recent approaches to language endangerment (e.g., Bradley &

Bradley, 2019), natural ongoing linguistic and non-linguistic processes make the sociolinguistic reality into a dynamic and beautiful, but fluid and ultimately unknowable kaleidoscope of possibilities, ill at ease with policies that require categorization, standardization, and quantifiable measures of proficiency and use.

Over the years, a great many researchers and activists have caught the LHR scent, and inhaled deeply. Their unswerving conviction comes from a good place; but, as reviewed above, the devil is in the detail.

2 | EXISTING MODELS OF LANGUAGE POLICY AND PLANNING, AND THE CURRENT CONTRIBUTION

Having just explored debate in language rights, the current section reviews existing theoretical models of language policy overall, which categorize the various aims and outcomes of plans to influence language use. In this I hope to further clarify my original contribution.

I begin with the "territoriality vs. personality" principles, first outlined by McRae (1975). These concern whether a given language policy equates a language with either a historically defined geographical hinterland (territoriality) or a definable group of people and their ancestry (personality). Myhill (1999) shows how these two can work against each other, "so that in supporting one principle or the other, explicitly or implicitly, particular linguists are in effect choosing which minority groups to support and which minority groups to hurt" (p. 35). This can lead to "researchers making ideological statements which contradict both each other and their own intended policy goals" (ibid., p. 46). This relates to the concerns discussed earlier about new hierarchies and inequalities, and to related critiques about inattention to unintended consequences leading on from a primary focus on language. In what follows I contribute to this line of thinking by further drawing out opposing and sometimes contradictory ideologies.

Next, Haugen (1966) outlines four language planning goals—*selection* and *codification* of linguistic form; *acceptance* and *elaboration* of social function—which can equip a language to operate in official contexts and elsewhere. Building on earlier work by Charles Ferguson and Joshua Fishman, his account is nuanced and cognizant of the differences between planning goals and sociolinguistic reality, for example, the irreverence of ongoing linguistic variation and change in the face of a putatively stable standard, "since even the most stable of norms inevitably changes as generations come and go" (p. 931). Haugen's is ultimately though an abstract discussion of the language itself, interested in people's well-being only insofar as a "developed" language standard might serve "the needs of the much larger society of the nation" (ibid.). Hornberger (2006) expands Haugen's framework, and integrates certain other models, to advance an "integrative framework" of language planning goals. The principal division here is between "policy planning (on form)" and "cultivation planning (on function)." Similarly to Haugen, this relates actions required for each goal, for example, standardization of the corpus (form) for the purposes of modernization (function)—an important clarification of means and ends. My addition to Haugen and Hornberger is to centrally highlight human well-being and outcomes.

Grin (2003, pp. 81–85; cf. Patten, 2009) outlines three broad rationales or "pillars" in minority language planning:

- "negative rights" – the most basic provisions for existing speakers, like court translation and lifting outright prohibitions on minority language use;
- "positive rights" – promoting a minority language beyond such basic necessities, but still mostly among existing speakers, in the interests of full social inclusion;
- a "third pillar", promoting the language as its own end, pursuing only "effective minority language use".

The first two (leading on from e.g., Marcía, 1979, pp. 88–89) relate to wider debates in human rights—what Vizard calls the "tripartite relationship between freedoms, rights and obligations that characterises many ethical and political theories" (2005, p. 18). They concern existing speakers who face stigma and marginalization. But the third pillar, language promotion as its own end, ultimately centres on "proficiency" and "competence" in minoritized languages (Grin, 2003, pp. 172–173). Grin states this "cannot be understood strictly in terms of rights" (2003, p. 84); and indeed, this marks a departure from those wider debates, especially in respect of "freedom restricting conditions" (Vizard, 2005). Grin is relatively quiet about whether anyone's freedoms were constrained by lacking such proficiency or would benefit from gaining it; or even whether disadvantage is a particular motivation at all for this third pillar. That makes sense in his analytical context, Europe, where the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages explicitly prioritises languages in and of themselves; but Grin ultimately leaves space for a more targeted discussion of capabilities.

Grin contributes to a broader emerging synthesis of language policy and political philosophy. Kymlicka and Patten's (2003a) edited volume draws together a range of perspectives here. The book is a quite the political 'big tent,' a diversity of viewpoints: from Laitin and Reich (2003) emphasizing that language is simply a means to an end, to May (2003) who takes aim squarely at that chapter and argues for the inherent importance of language. Subsequently, Wee (2010) attempts to unite some tenets of May's thinking with other principles of deliberative democracy to enable open structures of civic engagement and language policymaking in multilingual societies. This emerging cross-disciplinary vein of research has, however, attracted critics, who note a shortage of theoretical structure (Edwards, 2010, p. 1) or "ideological clarification" (Kroskrity, 2009). Barry (2001) has a longer standing and quite eviscerating stance against Kymlicka's wider political thinking; he brings this to the question of language, arguing that promoting minoritized languages can obfuscate access to majority languages, restricting capabilities. A rejoinder to this specific point of Barry's comes later from May (2005): "cries of discrimination [against English] are … spurious, … based on … the … wish of majority language speakers to remain monolingual" (2005, p. 336). But this exchange highlights precisely the shortage of structure and clarity identified by Edwards and Kroskrity. Barry was not talking about English, nor monolingualism, but about "choice sets," one's stock of opportunities and freedoms in life, correlating with proficiency in widely used languages (for statistical analysis of this correlation, see also Gazzola, 2016; Hahm & Gazzola, 2022). May extends his rebuttal of Barry by urging teaching of minoritized languages alongside majority languages; but Barry would likely have no qualm with a program that includes majority languages (cf. Dalmazzone, 1999, p. 79). May's rebuttal then extends further to include promoting minoritized languages which have no native speakers, and no such utilitarian basis, while celebrating other, identity-related functions of language—effectively conflating all minority language promotion as inherently emancipatory, thereby further obstructing dialogue with Barry. Overall, the shortage of structure in this emerging field has led to some mismatches and crossed purposes (see also Donskoi, 2006). My main hope in what follows is to help better locate particular ideological positions and goals in language policy, to prevent distractions and misunderstandings, and sharpen the focus on how and why language policy can improve material well-being and capabilities.

De Schutter (2007) further develops the synthesis of language policy and political philosophy, outlining three overarching ideologies that can be read into any language policy: *instrumental* (language is just a means to an end); *constitutive* (promoting language can bolster a sense of identity); and *intrinsic* (languages should be promoted for their own sake, as independently valuable entities). He deftly clarifies the different stances noted above, and he somewhat reconciles Barry and May: "Once instrumentalism is understood in this way, … instrumentalist [vs.] constitutivist … is no longer a disagreement over the identity value of language but … the normative conclusions to be drawn from it" (De Schutter, 2007, p. 10; cf. Odugu, 2015, p. 142). I am continuing very much in this spirit now, aiming to contribute further structure and ideological clarification to this burgeoning field.

3 | NEW SPEAKERS, CAPABILITIES

LHR, and mother tongue education, center on supporting existing speakers of marginalized languages, not introducing anyone new to the language. But a growing body of research and policy has an additional concern, "new speakers": these are "individuals with little or no home or community exposure to a minoritized language but who instead acquire it through immersion or bilingual education programs, revitalization projects or as adult language learners" (O'Rourke et al., 2015, p. 1). This distinct concern departs from the intergenerational tenets of LHR. Highlighting that distinction was actually a major recent advance in the field—it had long been elided by the standard scales used to measure the vitality of a given language (for a review see Bradley & Bradley, 2019, pp. 14—27), none of which explicitly counts new speakers as a metric. Quite the contrary: the "most heavily weighted is … usual[ly] intergenerational transmission" (ibid., p.23). (Bradley & Bradley, 2019, p. 28, do touch on critiques of this, though they do not go on to discuss new speakers specifically.) To wit, Wee (2010, p. 84) describes language planning efforts like Welsh and Catalan as "home language" or "mother tongue" programs; but these two, and others like them, are heavily concerned with creating new speakers (see Boix-Fuster & Sanz, 2008; Coupland & Aldridge, 2009, p. 6; Edwards & Newcombe, 2005, p. 137). This oversight has consequences for understanding motivations at play, which I hope to open out.

Capabilities have been discussed above. This is a way to measure a person's ability to control and improve their own life circumstances (their freedoms, per Vizard above). Speakers of minoritized languages are often palpably marginalized, especially if they lack proficiency in valorized majority languages (or their standard varieties). Policy interventions may aim to ease that burden, whether by facilitating access to a majority language or raising the profile of the minoritized language, or both. Buzási and Földvári (2018, p. 294) assess language policy in sub-Saharan Africa according to "three proxy variables of human capital: literacy, average years of education, and life expectancy at birth." Evaluating fundamental basics of life and self-determination can be a transparent measure of the social good of a given policy intervention. But additional concerns to attract new speakers, beyond those whose relatives speak or spoke the language, mark an important moral and ideological departure.

Recalling the debates reviewed above, there is a clear link from LHR to Grin's "negative rights": lifting a ban on someone's language will unarguably increase their capabilities (see Roche, 2019). A similar link obtains to "positive rights," though perhaps less immediate: promoting a language beyond basic necessity could potentially raise capabilities, but it would depend on factors like inter-group mobility. Finally, there is a notably fainter link from LHR to the "third pillar," if the only goal is "effective minority language use." The third pillar relates the most clearly to new speakers: if language itself becomes prioritized, then it matters less and less who is speaking it; of greater concern is simply how many speakers there are. These links I am drawing between Grin's three pillars and LHR can be presented in a simple table (see Table 1).

As discussed earlier, there is no clear and unproblematic definition of whether a person does or does not speak a minoritized language (or one of its varieties). There are, for example, liminal situations of interrupted transmission—partial or fragmentary knowledge of a language whose intergenerational continuity was disrupted by the same processes of marginalization faced by fluent speakers of minoritized languages (see McCarty & Wyman, 2009, and contributions to that special issue). I return to this matter toward the end, and I draw out the importance of embracing such partial usage as an overlooked opportunity within prevailing approaches to language policy that are based on measuring and quantifying proficiency and use.

4 | USING LANGUAGE TO HELP PEOPLE, OR USING PEOPLE TO HELP LANGUAGE? A FRAMEWORK OF IDEOLOGIES IN LANGUAGE POLICY

In what follows, I expand the distinctions in Table 1 into a scale of motivations for language policy interventions. But I need to make two things clear at the outset:

TABLE 1 Grin's three pillars in relation to new speakers and linguistic human rights

Three pillars	New speakers	Linguistic human rights
Negative rights	No	Yes
Positive rights	Maybe	Partly
Third pillar	Yes	?

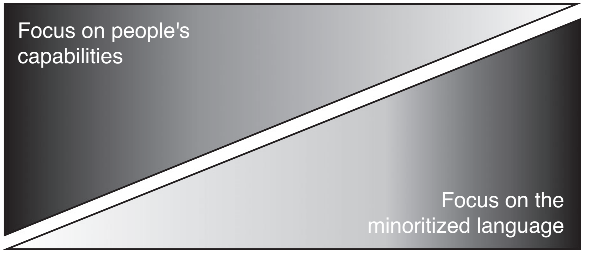

FIGURE 1 A framework of ideologies in language policy.

First, language policies and related activist movements are highly complex, with diverse goals and outcomes. In what follows, I compare a range of cases around the world, but it is not even remotely my intention to squeeze whole language movements into a particular point on this scale, nor to suggest they are exclusively pursuing this or that goal in terms of new speakers. I have precisely the opposite intention: to show how contemporary language movements play host to divergent and competing goals in respect of capabilities and new speakers. I do not give comparative demographic information about speakers in each case, and I do not routinely mention census data—partly to avoid essentializing language movements, partly also because of inherent problems in comparing census data even within language areas (e.g., Higgs et al., 2004, p. 190). Indeed, the only time I do mention a census below, I show that it obscures more than it reveals.

Second, I am also not saying anything at all about the popularity or otherwise of any language policies. This is a discussion of moral orientations, not civic consensus. And as we know from politics more broadly, there is seldom a clear correlation between public good and public sentiment.

Figure 1 sets out my proposed framework, a scale of ideologies. At the left end, the focus is entirely on capabilities; at the right, language (and correspondingly, new speakers). That is to say, an exclusive focus on capabilities entails no interest in new speakers, and vice versa. But, as I show below, these two extreme positions are rarely found alone. Usually in a given language policy or movement, they coincide with ideologies elsewhere on the scale; and it is that balance, not the extremes, which is of most interest here. The purpose of all this is to help identify different ideologies at play in a given policy, and to add structure and clarification to ongoing debate about purposes and moral foundations.

4.1 | Point 1: Focusing on rights and capabilities, not language as such

We start at the left-hand end of the scale: all about capabilities, no specific interest in the minoritized language in and of itself. We have already met an example of this: the Academic English Mastery Program (AEMP). Its sole concentration on capabilities is thrown into clear relief by the 2005 PBS documentary “Do you speak American?” (transcribed at www.pbs.org/speak/transcripts/3.html), specifically in an interview with AEMP Director Noma LeMoine, in which she focuses on a particular class where African American English is the primary home language:

> “Perhaps the biggest misunderstanding is the idea that we are somehow teaching African American language. We don’t need to teach African American language. They already know it. Our task is to help move them towards mastery of the language of school in its oral and written form; but to do that in a way that they are not devalued or where they feel denigrated in any way by virtue of their cultural and linguistic differences.”

Helpfully for the current discussion, she spells out that their focus is not to “teach” African American English—that is, not to create any new speakers—but rather to equip these children with the linguistic tools to mitigate the unfair disadvantages they face. As discussed above, there is an important debate about whether transition toward prestigious majority languages (or standard varieties) simply panders to pre-existing prejudice of a dominant language hierarchy (e.g., Odugu, 2015, pp. 138, 140, 149) and neglects wider facets of structural injustice. Teaching people to climb a ladder is one thing, but if the ladder remains in place, then many more will remain at the bottom. This point is forcefully made by Corker in the context of Deaf education in the United Kingdom:

> "linguistic minorities, like other minorities, are defined within the dominant legislative framework by reference to *their lack of power*, which is seen to be the 'natural outcome' of their generalised low position within the cultural division of labour. Consequently, education will inevitably be promoted as a means whereby the minority is functionally integrated into the system of production without presenting any threat to state domination." (Corker, 2000, p. 457—original emphasis)

AEMP is in many ways a very modest compromise representing no ultimate threat to larger hierarchies. But it is still a real and tangible advance for capabilities. LeMoine's assertion "that they are not devalued or … denigrated" is a nod to the more traditional corrective approach which very explicitly devalued and denigrated minoritized languages and varieties. That is progress. And the pedagogical aim to equip minoritized people within existing structures of opportunity, without necessarily challenging it, demonstrably fulfils those aims:

> "at the end of the school year, the AEMP group had made significantly greater gains than the control group on the writing measure ($p < .001$) … and … linguistic awareness and literacy strategies…" (Pearson et al., 2013, p. 40).

A video of the interview with LeMoine is available at: https://web.archive.org/web/20221020045406/https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xX1-FgkfWo8. In the video, LeMoine comes across as a patient and careful civil servant, as well as a sagacious African American woman deftly attending to some exceptionally finely balanced political sensibilities surrounding this fractious issue. Her tone is cautious, almost defensive, eminently aware that even this small step is treading a thin line in the wake of such long-standing antagonism (Rickford, 2002).

Such transitional models are often less sensitively articulated via a "deficit framework" (Ricento, 2005, p. 361), seeing the minoritized language as a burden (cf. Baker, 2003, p. 97, on "weak bilingual education"; see also Hinton, 2003, p. 46). This can come across as paternalistic (Odugu, 2015, p. 142) or even coercive (Cummins, 2017b; Petrovic, 2005, p. 399); but if it comes alongside "dialogism" (May, 2003, p. 110), endorsing plurality, then it can fulfil the "additive, not subtractive" principle in LHR (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2002). AEMP is a step up from what went before, even if it ultimately reifies a raciolinguistic ideology that minoritized languages and varieties are not "appropriate" for academic and working life (Flores & Rosa, 2015). It attends to the closest freedom-restricting conditions, raising the most immediately accessible capabilities, and increasing life options. As Labov points out in his poignant essay *Unendangered Dialects, Endangered People*, defense of African American English feels less compelling than countering the segregation and discrimination faced by its speakers: "If some forces in American society … were to make a major impact on residential segregation, then we would expect African American Vernacular English to shift … towards other dialects …. But … the loss of a dialect is *a lesser evil than the current condition of an endangered people*" (Labov, 2008, p. 235, emphasis added).

AEMP has subsequently informed similar contrastive transitional programs in the United States (Pearson et al., 2013). And as noted earlier, AEMP has very similar goals and outcomes to transitional programs in other countries for minoritized languages that are more genealogically distinct from their respective standard languages–see for example, Cummins (2017a); Ramachandran (2017). In Thailand, Premsrirat (2018, p. 39) notes such similar goals and improved outcomes:

> "Comparing the test scores of learners of the Patani Malay pilot bilingual classes with the scores of learners belonging to control groups, it was found that the students in the pilot classes had higher composite academic scores (avg. 72.14%) than those belonging to the comparison groups (41.91%)."

Indeed, as a range of international examples demonstrate, beginning education in a child's home language is substantively and significantly beneficial to their educational outcomes (Dutcher, 2001). Further comparable examples include "familiar language" instruction in Zambia, grades 1–4, transitioning to English as a medium of instruction in grades 5+ (Sampa, 2016, pp. 30—38); and the Saafi literacy programs in certain Senegalese communities, transitioning to French (Trudell, 2009, p. 78). This can come with positive overtones about the minoritized language, but the ultimate focus is not the minoritized language in and of itself, but capabilities that are demonstrably accessible within existing structures of opportunity.

If raising proficiency in prestigious languages and varieties is the most immediately achievable action, then it is the strongest pursuit of capabilities. "What is deemed possible in a given socio-political context is the result of overarching fiscal limitations, and of policymaking discourses that contour the distribution of resources" (Sayers et al., 2017, p. 391). A single-minded pursuit of the most accessible capabilities, not prioritizing language in and of itself, leads to schemes like these. It can of course happen alongside other, wider campaigns against structural injustice. I return to that in §5 and §6. My point is simply that the motivations behind transitional programs are to reach for those most achievable capabilities in their sociopolitical context.

4.2 | Point 2: Using a minoritized language as a vehicle for capabilities

Let us move rightward along Figure 1 now, a little to the right, say about a fifth of the way. (I am being intentionally vague; as I cautioned, these are not strict categories.) This point on the scale describes situations where very few people speak the majority language(s); but, instead of transitioning to a majority language, literacy and development are conducted in the minoritized language. This may signal a certain ideological investment in the minoritized language itself, but mostly just a perfunctory pragmatic understanding of its instrumental value compared to the majority language. The priority is still mostly capabilities.

Examples include the "local literacy" programs described by Street (1984), similar to the transitional programs reviewed above but without aiming for transition to a majority language. Comparable goals can be seen in parts of South America, bypassing Spanish (Hornberger & King, 1996); and some uses of Gujarati in Gujarat, bypassing English (Ramanathan, 2005). These cases do not arise from an urge to promote the minority language per se, nor to increase its use as such. Rather, because everyone speaks the minority language already, and because these people's contact with majority language speakers is negligible, it simply makes more sense to use only the minority language. All this is illustrated clearly by one of Ramanathan's respondents, a coordinator and trainer of peripatetic community workers in remote communities (Ramanathan, 2005, p. 96):

> "many of them will not be able to do the community work if they did not know Gujarati. Some of them have even told me they are not as crazy about English anymore. Suddenly they are realizing that they can be self-reliant with their mother-tongue. …"

Another respondent adds: "Gujarati, the way I see it, empowers … English does not do that here" (ibid., p.97). Here we can see the beginnings of an interest in the language itself; but really, Gujarati is simply being deployed as a functional medium in places where English is seldom encountered.

Similarly in Nairobi, in cases where language planning focuses on Sheng—not the more prestigious Swahili or English—Sheng itself "is not the goal, but is used as a tool to attract youth to digest stories that speak into their lives" (Gibson, 2016, p. 37). The guiding ideology at this point in the scale is still to raise capabilities; the only change is that the minoritized language is used instead of a majority language. That nudges us a little way along the scale, but not that far. The minoritized language as such is not an explicit priority; capabilities remain the dominant goal.

Somewhat in parentheses, there is also a nice historical comparison to the way English was used in 17th century England, gradually bypassing Latin as a language of literacy, governance, and commerce—motivated by practicality, not prestige (Jones, 2006, p. 8). The same rationale can be read into many such historical contexts—especially interesting when discussing the lowly history of some of today's dominant languages.

I have so far stopped at two points on the scale: the left end; and a little way along to the right. Thinking back to Table 1, these first two points are closest to "negative rights": using a minoritized language only among its existing speakers and only to raise basic freedoms, not increase its use. And note that I am discussing only *some* uses of these languages, in specific contexts and locations. As cautioned above, it is not at all my intention to claim that all language planning involving Gujarati, Sheng, Patani Malay, etc. proceeds on this basis.

Moreover, remember that this scale is designed to characterize goals within language movements, not whole language movements. Indeed, as we progress further along the scale, we will meet a number of language movements more than once. Some actually span across most of the scale. Take Welsh in Wales. We will meet Welsh again later in the scale, but its first appearance comes here at this second point in the scale: using the minoritized language solely in the interests of capabilities. Although the UK census records no monolingual Welsh speakers, this overlooks preschool-age children in principally Welsh-speaking homes who have yet to encounter much English. They very much need access to things like healthcare in Welsh. But even for bilingual adults, at times of distress or mental incapacity, one's first language can quickly outperform one's second language—for example, counselling patients discussing traumatic events, or elderly people suffering mental decline (see e.g., Misell, 2000, for some compelling examples—cf. Pavlenko, 2005). In these contexts, even if everyone is officially bilingual, providing Welsh-medium services has a very real link to capabilities. If you are just too stressed or ill to use anything but your first language, suddenly the moral landscape shifts. For the purposes of a moral debate like this, their "bilingualism" recorded in the census temporarily disappears. And again, in these specific instances, providing those services is not intended to transition people away from the minoritized language, nor to increase the number of people speaking it. These specific instances simply attend to the capabilities of existing speakers, and so they belong on this point in the scale. As I just noted, Welsh is mostly discussed at later points in the scale, but in some specific instances it belongs here too.

4.3 | Point 3: Mid-way along the scale

Onward to the middle of the scale. Here, attention to capabilities and new speakers are equally balanced. What does language policy look like here? Principally, it pertains to people who are equally proficient in minority and majority language(s), and to locations where bi/multilingualism is naturally maintained between generations, not succumbing to language shift. Here, the minoritized language is used not only to attend to basic capabilities; it is proactively included in all stages of education, civic life, and cultural affairs. Examples include bilingual education programs in situations of pre-existing stable minority–majority bilingualism, as in parts of Catalonia (Hoffmann, 2000) and parts of Wales (Gathercole et al., 2005, p. 838). Note the "parts of" here; both these places have significant variation within them, hence their appearance elsewhere on the scale as well.

If someone is equally proficient in the minority and majority language, and not currently under some temporary stress or permanent incapacity skewing that balance (as just discussed under Point 2 above), they will not see the same benefits to their everyday capabilities and basic freedoms as we see at Points 1 and 2 (see also Wickström et al., 2018, p. 44). But there is still a kind of connection here to capabilities. Müller et al. (2020, p. 1050) show that when minority–majority bilingual families maintain both their languages, they enjoy better "subjective wellbeing" or "perceived levels of life satisfaction" (ibid.). Importantly, the authors distinguish this from "objective well-being [which] relates to … psychological and physical health, security, access to education and employment" (ibid.)—factors more centrally connected to capabilities. So, this kind of provision may not relate fully to capabilities in terms of basic freedoms, but it has some partial relevance.

As to new speakers, at Points 1 and 2 on the scale, minoritized languages are instrumentalized either as a route toward majority languages or as a functional medium where majority languages are little used. At Point 3, where the majority language is widely used, bilinguals are likely to live alongside at least some people who use the minoritized language less or not at all, so there is likely to be some incidental effect on them, even if this is not the primary aim. One could also interpret attempts to secure existing stable bilingualism as a pre-emptive maneuver to prevent future abandonment of the language; again, that is not about new speakers per se, but it is ideologically related. And as a by-product, raising or securing the status of a widely used minoritized language can persuade current residents and new in-migrants to learn it, even if that is not the primary aim. As with capabilities, then, Point 3 on the scale represents a partial, tangential interest in new speakers, and a partial, tangential interest in capabilities; equally close and distant to both, and so at the mid-point on the scale.

With all this, I must re-emphasize I am only talking about those particular contexts of balanced majority-minority bilingualism. That may be something of an abstraction, or at least a very small-scale discussion of individual communities, or even individual people within those communities. Above I mentioned Catalonia and Wales. Large parts of Catalonia and Wales have variable or low levels of Catalan and Welsh use; and even within the strongly Catalan- and Welsh-speaking areas there is notable variation (see e.g., Coupland et al., 2005). Wales and Catalonia come up again further along the scale, and that is precisely my purpose: to distinguish different ideologies operating in the same places at the same times. Again, my aim is not to categorize whole language movements, but to identify the myriad and diverging ideologies within them.

4.4 | Point 4: The first explicit interest in new speakers

So far, we have been discussing people who already speak the minoritized language, latterly (Point 3 on the scale) alongside the majority language. Along the way, capabilities went from sole concern to level pegging with new speakers, and new speakers received a kind of incidental interest by virtue of their location. Now we move incrementally along the scale, a little to the right of the mid-point, where the interest in new speakers becomes explicit; and in the process, concerns over capabilities begin their demotion.

Consider a family where both parents speak the majority language but only one speaks the minoritized language (or perhaps only the grandparents). Often in these situations intergenerational transmission stops, over time leading to language decline and death. Perhaps an intervention occurs to try and arrest that decline, to positively encourage intergenerational transmission. The majority language is already dominant; the material benefits of knowing the minoritized language are less clear; and the aim is to stem the loss of the minoritized language. Children in these contexts are not quite *new speakers*; the plan is for them to learn the minoritized language by intergenerational transmission. But, if their parents are indifferent to it, they would likely not learn the minoritized language otherwise. Point 4 represents a precipice, where the concept of new speakers begins to emerge in outline, in the sense of introducing proficiency to those who would not have it otherwise.

Examples include Māori "language nests" in New Zealand, actively facilitating transmission by remaining elderly speakers who would otherwise be less likely to do so (Spolsky, 2003, p. 561); and the original design of the "Twf" ("growth") project in Wales in the early 2000s (Edwards & Newcombe, 2005), encouraging reluctant bilingual parents to speak Welsh to their children. (Later iterations of Twf focused more purposefully on new speakers.) At this point in the scale, the focus on capabilities begins to fade further, while themes like heritage and identity begin to come to the fore. Consider a leaflet circulated as part of the original Twf project, "8 good reasons to introduce Welsh from birth" (Welsh Language Board, n.d.):

> "Did you know that introducing your baby to Welsh right from the start…
>
> 1. Lays firm foundations for your child to become bilingual
> 2. Gives your child a head start when learning to read and count
> 3. Enriches the child's Welsh identity
> 4. Extends their social activities and friendship groups

5. Gives them a better chance of gaining employment when older
6. Improves communication skills and makes it easier to learn other languages
7. Increases their appreciation of Wales' languages and cultures
8. Increases their appreciation of other cultures and languages"

Reasons 1, 2, 6, and 8 relate to capabilities; but these would apply to any second language, not just Welsh. Only reason 5 unambiguously links Welsh to capabilities—and to be sure, Welsh speakers are on average significantly more employable in Wales (Blackaby et al., 2006, p. 84); but is this comparable to, for example, training African American young people in Standard American English? Yes and no. Yes, Welsh in Wales now carries comparable career value. But in the African American case, the plan is to equip students within a pre-existing hierarchy. In the Welsh case, the benefit of speaking Welsh is not so pre-existing; it is itself a product of the same overarching language policy endeavor to increase the prestige of Welsh. So, reason 5 in the leaflet is more circuitous than it might seem (I return to this quandary in §5 below). That leaves reasons 3, 4, and 7, which, as noted above, relate principally to heritage and identity, not capabilities. At this point in the scale, then, the link to capabilities is becoming weaker, though not invisible.

To repeat my earlier caution, it is not at all my contention that Māori or Welsh language policy in their entirety have such limited relevance to capabilities. I am focusing on specific contexts where reluctant or indifferent bilinguals are encouraged to keep using and transmitting the minoritized language, as happened in these two cases. Relative to the examples reviewed earlier in the scale, the emphasis on capabilities is notably lighter, while attention to new speakers begins to emerge—in the sense of reinvigorating intergenerational links. And to repeat another caution I raised earlier: I am also saying nothing about the popularity of such measures. Parental choice over Welsh-medium education or Māori language nests, for example, attract diverging views and civic debate; that is a separate matter to underlying moral orientations and ideologies.

4.5 | Point 5: Mostly focused on new speakers, slight remaining concern with capabilities

Now we move rightward again, around four fifths along the scale. Point 3 earlier focused on majority–minority bilinguals who were unlikely to abandon the minoritized language. Point 4 moved on to those who may abandon it, but the focus was still those existing speakers. Point 5 covers policy goals that more explicitly target the creation of new speakers, though still in the context of some existing speakers of the minoritized language. Points 4 and 5 are perhaps conceptually the most likely to coincide, since existing speakers and new speakers do often live in proximity, for example, in parts of the Basque Country (Conversi, 1990), New Zealand (Spolsky, 2003, p. 560), and Wales (Robert, 2009). The aim here at Point 5 is to encourage new speakers who will use the language with those existing speakers. This still allows a kind of connection to capabilities, for remaining first-language speakers who gain opportunities to use the language of their choice. As noted earlier, this can improve "subjective wellbeing" (Müller et al., 2020, p. 1050), which may have some partial connection to capabilities.

The relative prioritizing of new speakers is magnified by the option of a state education entirely through the minoritized language, where majority languages are secondary subjects, including for children who do not have the minoritized language as a home or ancestral language. Examples arise in the Basque Country (Zalbide & Cenoz, 2008, p. 11) and Wales (WAG, 2007). This prioritizing of the minoritized language is made clearer in the case of in-migrants to a bilingual area, who speak neither majority nor minority language, yet are supported to learn the minority language instead of the majority language. That specific outcome is reported in the Basque Country (Bréton & Ruiz 2008, p. 34), in Catalonia (Hoffmann, 2000, pp. 434–435), and in parts of Wales, Valencia, and Grisons (Tunger et al., 2009).

If these in-migrants were learning both minority and majority languages, they would belong further left on the scale; but if the state sees fit to support acquisition of the lesser-used language alone, then this demonstrates greater attention to new speakers and to the language than to capabilities in a broader sense. Scrutiny of that drift away from capabilities is amplified in Canada, where French is a minority language. In the French-dominant province of Québec, immigrant families have brought legal challenges after their children have been assigned to French-medium schools and denied education in English (Canada East, 2009). In 2022, the Québec legislature passed a contentious law, Bill 96, which strictly requires, for example, doctors "to address their patients in French, even [if they] would better understand each other in another language" (Hopper, 2022), even constraining the use of interpreters for this purpose (Ventrella, 2022). Protests and petitions from medical professionals and wider society are underway; but this law throws into sharp relief the elevation of new speakers and language use over and above capabilities—including in access to healthcare, one of the most basic freedoms. Comparable litigious tensions are reported in Catalonia (Atkinson, 2000, p. 190; cf. Hoffmann, 2000). In such cases, the impact on capabilities is recognized by individuals, and challenged; but the priority of new speakers is reasserted by the state, demonstrating and clarifying their relative ideological weighting.

Point 5 may include some apparently extreme cases, but again, the purpose of my scale is not to characterize whole language movements, only ideologies within them. At Point 5, the emphasis clearly lies on new speakers and the language, even to the point of knowingly working against capabilities in the face of protest.

4.6 | Point 6: A sole focus on new speakers, no remaining recourse to capabilities

We move now to the right-hand end of the scale, the opposite to where we began. Here, the exclusive goal is to train and retain new speakers. Broadly this applies in two contexts: first, if there are no intergenerational speakers (e.g., reawakening a dead language); second, the more common scenario, if there are existing speakers but the new speakers are unlikely to ever meet them. If they do meet, we are back to Point 5. But at this final point on the scale, if new speakers are detached, spatially, socially, or temporally from existing speakers, then the language group is being extended into new spaces.

This final point on the scale seldom happens on its own. Usually, it happens as part of larger language movements which simultaneously span further left across the scale. Ireland, for example, does have many existing speakers of Irish, but "the majority of the population … are a post-language shift speech community, people whose forebears spoke Irish but for whom it is now an additional language" (Ó hIfearnáin, 2009). In the Basque Country, Fishman notes the sheer effort to use Basque for many speakers: "even those who do speak it mostly do so … in very regulated, programmed and engineered situations" (cited in Cenoz & Perales, 2009, p. 269; cf. Zalbide & Cenoz, 2008, p. 6). King describes adult learners of Māori "typically involved with the teaching profession [who] have children … they are raising in a Māori speaking environment" (King, 2009, p. 97; see also Spolsky, 2003, p. 560). The "Tlingit language immersion retreats" in Alaska reported by Mitchell (2005) mostly involve new speakers, as do attempts with Quechua to "extend indigenous language and literacy instruction to new speakers" (Hornberger & King, 1996, p. 427) including "Peruvian government officials and former students who now teach Quechua in Europe and the United States" (Hornberger, 1997, p. 223). In these specific instances, the exclusive emphasis on new speakers, separate from existing speakers, marks a full departure from capabilities.

As above, Point 6 on the scale can happen entirely on its own amid reconstruction and reawakening of long dead languages (Hinton, 2001, p. 414). This necessarily involves nothing but new speakers, at least to begin with; for example, Cornish, which was "extinct for about a century" (Krauss, 2007, p. 7) without even many written remains. Its gradual reconstruction into something that others could learn (Davies-Deacon & Sayers, forthcoming; Sayers & Renkó-Michelsén, 2015) enabled the gradual growth of adult learners during the 20th century, all of them by definition new speakers. Some Cornish families are attempting to raise their children with reconstructed Cornish as a home language (Renkó-Michelsén, in prep.). Such children would not be "new speakers" but rather "neo-natives" (McLeod, 2008). And so, although Cornish currently fits entirely at this final point on the scale, if neo-native speakers were to grow and gradually bring forth a Cornish language community with significant integenerational transmission, that balance of rationales may conceivably change.

Such new speakers may have a claim to a sense of belonging and ownership. But this is distinct from capabilities, improving one's life circumstances and opportunities. At this final point on the scale, in these particular contexts, new speakers are the only goal, and if they only meet other new speakers, capabilities as such have faded from view altogether.

At this point then, we are looking at attempts to grow the language, to secure its future as an end in itself. This emphasis is reflected in the wording of certain policy texts which explicitly spell out the priority to fortify the language, and to use new speakers for that purpose. Scotland's Culture Minister argues that "a new generation of Gaelic speakers must be created to safeguard the future of the language" (cited in Kerr & Ross, 2009, emphasis added). Meanwhile the Welsh Government (2017, p. 6) sets an "ambition for the Welsh language to be used more extensively and for the number who speak it to grow" (see also Musk, 2010, pp. 50–54). In these and other cases, the language is discursively positioned as a separate entity, a beneficiary of the policy separate from any human beneficiaries. The aim is to recruit new speakers to secure the language itself. Again, these are not the only motivations in Wales, Scotland, or other relatable contexts, but these ideologies are clearly detectable here. (For a fuller analysis of these relative priorities in the Welsh case, and for a methodology to interpret this discursive positioning, see Sayers, 2016; 2021).

At Point 5 above, some instances of controversy were noted, for example, in Québec as language policymakers unambiguously curtail capabilities in the wider pursuit of promoting French. This tension does not necessarily get worse at Point 6. The absence of capabilities at this final point on the scale is simply because capabilities only relate directly to existing speakers, as discussed at length so far. If there are only new speakers, capabilities have no direct logical connection at all. To reprise the overarching binary, this completes the ideological journey from using language to help people, to using people to help language.

5 | DISCUSSION

Looking back at the scale overall, we can see it covers quite a lot of ground. The left end of the scale is about structured transition to the majority language. The policy element here is to explicitly recognize and include the minoritized language or variety in that transition, not simply ignore or flatly ban it; but the only end goal is to raise proficiency in the majority language, ultimately indifferent to the minoritized language itself. Larger structural inequalities and language hierarchies may remain in place here, but the purpose is to attend to the most feasibly accessible capabilities in the sociopolitical context. Meanwhile over at the right end of the scale, the minoritized language comes fully to the fore, logically detached from capabilities. As the scale progresses from left to right, emphasis grows on sustaining—and then growing—the minoritized language by creating new speakers, while the emphasis on capabilities fades further and further from view.

Returning to the interdisciplinary political thinking reviewed earlier, as we move rightward on the scale we move further away from a principle in liberal theory to "respect … differences concerning attachment to a language" (Kymlicka & Patten, 2003b, p. 16; see also Maher, 2005, pp. 98–99). As Habermas has it, "the only traditions … that can sustain themselves are those that *bind* their members, while … leaving later generations the *option* of … converting and setting out for other shores" (Habermas, 1998, p. 22, original emphases; see also Sen, 2005, p. 155). Or for Teschl and Derobert: "equally important for a person's capability will be that … a person shares some interests with some other, without being or becoming exactly the other. It implies that one finds out about who one is thanks to the equality as well as difference in relation to the other" (2008, p. 152). Such *choice* of which language to use poses a threat to minoritized languages, as Williams (2008, p. 47) argues: "allow[ing] individuals to determine group membership for themselves … dilutes the geographical concentration of ethnic groups and renders many of them vulnerable within a multicultural framework …". That ideological tension is crucially important in understanding attempts to create new speakers that may work against some capabilities.

And so back to the overarching point: there are different goals at play, between *using language to help people*—favoring whichever language delivers maximum available freedoms at minimum immediate cost—and *using people to* *help language*—holding the language as a separate priority, and guiding proficiency to that end. These goals are not mutually exclusive; they frequently coincide. My aim has simply been to identify them clearly, and to contrast their differing balance in various contexts.

To reprise a potential counterpoint to my framework: where an officially supported minority language is becoming more prestigious, learning that language may increase one's capabilities; and anyway, the privileged position of dominant languages is ultimately also the result of government policies that reify iniquitous language hierarchies. But closer inspection reveals wrinkles in that moral logic. First, the dominance of majority languages precedes present-day government policy. Policies might reinforce that dominance, and indeed may be further motivated by other nationalist imperatives; but fundamentally they are attending to an existing structure of opportunities. Mufwene invites "us to reframe some of the language revitalization discourse in terms of actual costs and benefits to the relevant populations, such as the ability to participate in the current socioeconomic world order as opposed to being marginalized from it" (Mufwene, 2017, p. 202). On the case of Welsh in Wales, Barry makes the following characteristically irreverent swipe:

> "The labour market advantages of … an educational qualification in the Welsh language have been boosted by policies … that require knowledge of Welsh as a condition of employment. … Creating an artificially protected labour market in order to motivate acceptance of compulsory instruction in Welsh in the schools is simply to compound one abuse of state power by another." (Barry, 2001, p. 107)

He rather overdoes this for effect (Barry's style generally hovers somewhere between critique and satire); but, taking a calmer tone, as I noted earlier, there is a basic normative difference between facilitating access to an already dominant language, and promoting a lesser-used minoritized language whose career value arose from that same policy (see also Wickström et al., 2018, pp. 19–20). There are further important empirical critiques in the Welsh case in terms of unintended consequences for capabilities. Welsh-medium education is a product of policies aiming to promote the Welsh language, but such education has created unintended disparities in literacy for students whose home language is in fact not Welsh (Rhys & Thomas, 2013, p. 636). That should not be a surprise given the evidence, reviewed earlier, about difficulties children face when not taught in their home language. Partly as a result, Welsh-medium schools nationally end up with lower average grades than English-medium schools (Jerrim & Shure, 2016, p. 120), despite receiving on average equal or higher funding (Welsh Assembly, 2013). These kinds of obstacles to capabilities may not be insurmountable in the end; but they are still a product of a policy that discursively foregrounds language over other intersecting issues (for detail of that discursive foregrounding, see Sayers, 2016; 2021). When policies aim to fortify the position of historically downtrodden minorities, it is easy to miss new inequalities and disparities arising. But that question of who wins and who loses is crucial and pressing for the future of language policy.

Supporting capabilities is not as simple as just securing access to majority languages. They have stark inequalities within them, based on access to literate forms, standard varieties, or other markers of prestige; and policies foregrounding majority languages may well exacerbate these (Blommaert, 2001, pp. 135–136; Ricento, 2015). But again, that is an existing structure of power and opportunity, not a new one. The power and prestige come before any policy being developed in the present. For attempts to create prestige in previously non-prestigious minoritized languages, that relationship is inverted. As such, they embody a very different orientation to capabilities, and require a different standard of evidence. For language policy to have recourse to capabilities as a guiding motivation, it must first demonstrate that no currently existing capabilities are actually weakened in the process.

Another counterpoint to my argument so far is that redressing historical injustice toward endangered minoritized languages carries its own moral impetus. As Odugu puts it, prevailing models of language planning "portray language discrimination as social injustice, thus making its sole remedy a corresponding social justice" (Odugu, 2015, p. 138). This is a compelling and moving argument which has attracted many followers; but it rests on a critically loose premise. What has gone before can be regretted, but not undone. To pursue an opposite action in the present is not to undo that past action but to do something new, with and to people who did not personally endure that historical oppression. Educating new speakers into a minoritized language may feel reparatory, but it heals no past wounds. It cannot remedy the past deeds and trials of the dead. The historical redress argument is problematized in the Catalan context by Gifra (2014, p. 213):

> "Despite the power of this argument, it … cannot be taken far … since it attributes to the Castilian-speaking community … the role of contributors to a historical injustice. Given that a majority of the Castilian-speaking community … is … of the second and third generations, they would be reticent to accept the positive discrimination argument ad infinitum."

A counter to that is the matter of intergenerational trauma, and the potential benefits to well-being of creating new speakers among communities whose forebears suffered oppression; for example, in a Canadian aboriginal program creating new speakers, Hallett et al. (2007, p. 392) note that "youth suicide rates effectively dropped to zero in those few communities in which at least half … reported a conversational knowledge of their own "Native" language." A comparable argument is made by Whalen et al. (2016) in a native American context. These resonate with a wider literature on the healing potential of empowering current generations (see e.g., Heberle et al., 2020). But closer analysis of this evidence demonstrates that language—and culture more generally—are insufficient without other measures that deliver material empowerment, that raise capabilities. This reprises the earlier discussion of structural injustice and its focus on intersectionality, privileging no specific factor (Young, 2011). Lalonde later clarifies exactly this point (2014, p. 375):

> "When communities succeed in promoting their cultural heritage and in securing control of their own collective future … the positive effects reverberate across many measures of youth health and well-being. Suicide rates fall, fewer children are taken into care, school completion rates rise, and rates of intentional and unintentional injury decrease." (see also Chandler & Lalonde, 1998)

That inter-dependency of factors is further substantiated in a systematic review of relevant clinical literature involving multi-factorial analysis, which concludes that, "while culture is important, it is the integration of social, family, education and training, job creation and other elements that bring cohesion to a community. Indigenous youth suicide must be addressed as a community by forming community cohesion" (Harder et al., 2014, p. 398). As these systematically reviewed clinical studies demonstrate, placing a primary focus on language is not enough. Taking an even wider view, Pickett and Wilkinson's (2010) comprehensive review of thirty years of policy and sociological data demonstrate the striking futility of policy interventions addressing specific social ills in isolation, and the correspondingly greater power of broader societal approaches. Any coherent theory of justice must confront intersecting structural facets of oppression, or it is no theory of justice at all.

A possible obstacle to any such integrated approach to capabilities is the recurrent recourse to "communities" and "minorities" as conceptually static and singular entities, counterposed with the wider society—Premsrirat, for example, espouses an approach "sensitive to the distinct needs and context of *each individual language community*" (Premsrirat, 2018, p. 31, emphasis added). This may neglect differences within them, as problematized by Bird (2020, p. 3509): "It is possible that the parties in a collaboration may view its artefacts differently. A feature of decolonizing approaches is to embrace multiple perspectives" (after Dourish & Mainwaring, 2012, p. 140; cf. Odugu, 2015, p. 151; Wee, 2010, p. 143). Even if some people's capabilities will increase, it is untenable to assume a group will benefit as one (Laitin & Reich, 2003, p. 90; Wright, 2007, pp. 204–205). This too is crucial in understanding intersecting structural injustice. The clinical studies noted above demonstrate the need for a far more granular focus on minoritized individuals: on their capabilities, their life chances, and their death chances. A clinically rigorous focus on intersecting material outcomes, which does not principally prioritize the language in and of itself or view the community as a singular entity, has the clearest claim to capabilities.

6 | CONCLUSION

I sincerely hope that this scale of mine is not read as a big arrow pointing to transitional education into majority languages (Point 1) as a moral pinnacle of all we might achieve. As I showed in Point 2, one can pursue a very close proximity to capabilities by focusing entirely on the minoritized language, in cases where the majority language has limited utility. If prevailing unequal structures of colonial capitalist hegemonic language dominance were turned upside down tomorrow, then that close proximity would turn into direct equivalence. English and other dominant languages have no absolute link to capabilities. They are simply conduits to existing hierarchies—themselves unequal and riddled with inconsistencies, but still the most immediately accessible routes to new freedoms. That is absolutely unfair, and we should strive to undo those iniquities as a longer-term goal; but at the same time, we can recognize that language policy, like politics more broadly, is the art of the possible.

Learning a minoritized language as a new speaker can be immensely rewarding, regardless of whether that improves your access to literacy, healthcare, employment, or other capabilities. But in the interests of a coherently structured debate, it is crucial to clarify how and whether a given intervention actually raises capabilities within existing structures of opportunity (Wickström et al., 2018, p. 24), whether it attends to other intersecting issues (Young, 2011), and indeed whether certain capabilities are sacrificed (knowingly or otherwise) in the name of the language itself. As Ricento has it: "in order to advocate specific policies or policy direction, scholars need to demonstrate *empirically*—as well as conceptually—the societal benefits, and costs, of such policies" (Ricento, 2006, p. 11, original emphasis). My proposed scale is designed to help with that. But scale or no scale, the debate on language rights would benefit greatly from a clear conceptual and empirical focus on capabilities and intersectionality.

Foregrounding capabilities may ultimately mean less interest in language learning per se—in the Western colonial sense of quantifiable mastery of codified standard language norms. As Bird (2020, p. 3508) highlights, in a sensitive discussion of indigenous empowerment in Australia, such formalized measures of proficiency may not best serve capabilities: "Here is a place where linguists may have a blind spot, criticising the prescriptivism of laypeople while indulging in it themselves." A more flexible embrace of the symbolic value of language, without the normative high bar of assessment and correctness, could help a broader range of people simply feel happier and better about their own identity (ibid.), ancestral or newly acquired. This resonates with research in other contexts about how people value language: for example, Coupland et al. (2005, p. 16) on Welsh in Wales, showing "systematically higher" commitment to its iconic, symbolic value than to its use in everyday interaction; or Maher's (2005, p. 83) playful yet powerful account of "metroethnicity" in Japan, "skeptical of heroic ethnicity and bored with sentimentalism about ethnic language." Jaffe (2019) in Corsica demonstrates how creativity and linguistic heterogeneity can be positively embraced even within formal education. Genuinely engaging with people's multiple, creative, often conflicting feelings about language may lead in quite different directions than a linear pursuit of increased proficiency, usage, and domains.

I will recite my recurrent caveat one last time. My purpose has not been to squeeze whole language movements into single points on my proposed scale. Language movements are highly diverse; and as they change over time they may gradually move, expand, or contract around the scale. The scale helps identify motivations for, and effects of, language policy and planning on specific people at a given moment; nothing else. To reprise my title, some language policies use language to help people, some use people to help language; but for the most part the action is somewhere in between, with a fascinating mix of rationales.

The discussion so far suggests some conceptual and empirical changes are needed to better ground language policy in capabilities, and in wider contemporary theories of political philosophy and human rights. High among these is to move away from minorities as discrete groups, toward individuals—or at least to locally attuned, sociologically sensitive proxy sub-groups—and the complex, structural, intersecting issues that limit their freedoms. Training our sights on capabilities will enable that finer attention to perennial differences of opportunity, benefit, and loss. Our challenge, empirically and conceptually, is to concern ourselves less with languages in and of themselves, and more with the material well-being of the people who speak them.

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This article took over 14 years to complete. With fewer distractions, I might have completed it in 13.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analyzed during the current study.

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