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## Book review:

### **The Palgrave Handbook of Minority Languages and Communities**

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The Palgrave Handbook of Minority Languages and Communities

Edited by Gabrielle Hogan-Brun and Bernadette O'Rourke (2019),  
Palgrave Macmillan, 612 pp.

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As the title of this volume suggests, the focus of this Palgrave Handbook is wide in terms of scope. Indeed, minority languages from an academic standpoint are of interest to a broad array of disciplines and can involve thousands of empirical case studies across the globe. This ambitious volume packs 22 chapters into 7 parts, covering a wide range of topics, disciplines and language settings. It draws upon many of the prominent scholars who have previously written on minority studies/language, summarising and updating the various subfields and disciplines that have grown particularly in the past couple of decades. In their introduction, Hogan-

Brun and O'Rourke recognise the breadth of the topic and the difficulty of definition, highlighting that increasing globalisation also brings into question how far the scope of minority language protection extends.

The first part of this volume features three chapters looking at legal aspects of minority rights and governance, opening with an in-depth supranational level analysis rights by de Varennes and Kuzborska on the history and current state of international law concerning minority rights. Their chapter includes an extensive focus on legal instruments such as the Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities and what these have contributed to minority language rights in particular. The following chapter (three) has a more concentrated geographic focus, with Bowring examining the history of minority language rights in the Russian Federation. Chapter four involves a collaboration of two Celtic language experts, Williams and Walsh, providing examples of Irish and Welsh in the context of minority language governance agencies, language commissioners and acts.

Part II builds upon the previous legal approach with four contributions on the topics of 'Recognition, Self-determination and Autonomy'. First off, chapter five sees Giordano contrast a German and French model of linguistic diversity, incorporating an historical overview followed by a case examination of Malaysia in the context of consociation. Chapter six also has a non-Eurocentric focus, with McDermott and Nic Craith considering empirical examples which include Guatemala, Rwanda and South Africa, in their analysis of linguistic recognition in divided societies, alongside the European examples of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Northern Ireland and Ukraine. Their conclusions suggest that language recognition can aid with intercultural understanding and be an important step in peace-building. A comparative approach is also taken in chapter seven, which concentrates on Russia, Estonia, Hungary and Serbia in the context of national cultural autonomy. The authors, Prina, Smith and Sansum discuss the theory and practice of this alternative form of diversity management, concluding that the four countries in question provide only limited cultural autonomy to minority communities and their institutions often remain under-resourced and restricted in terms of influence. De Meulder, Krausneker, Turner and Conama discuss sign language communities in the final chapter (eight) of part II, providing an overview of the field that includes legal aspects, threats and opportunities, and the research to date in sign linguistics and deaf studies.

After the largely law-focused first two parts of this volume, parts III and IV begin to bring in a wider disciplinary scope. Part III contains two chapters on 'Migration, Settlement,

Mobility’, with chapter nine discussing the sociolinguistic concepts of language maintenance and language shift. Pauwels examines this in the context of increasing mobility and the challenges this presents to the foundations of language maintenance and shift. Patrick then examines the effect of globalisation on indigenous languages in the Arctic area of Canada in chapter ten. The author provides a detailed overview of the social and political background, including how regional and national developments have influenced indigenous language use and concluding with reasons for optimism despite the challenges.

Part IV features three chapters under the topic ‘Economics, Markets, Commodification’, opening with Pietikäinen, Kelly-Holmes and Rieder discussing minority languages and markets. Using the examples of Sámi and Irish multilingual settings, the authors analyse how minority languages can be commodified in a number of economic areas including tourism and advertising/branding. In their discussion on future trends, the authors suggest that exclusivity and authenticity could be key factors in converting minority languages into economic capital. Chapter twelve has a broad pan-African perspective with Kamwangamalu analysing the prestige planning of minoritised indigenous languages which were historically suppressed by the forced dominance of colonial languages. The author provides a valuable historic overview of the colonial language policies and the legacy these had left upon African countries’ contemporary policy-making. Kamwangamalu concludes that for the most part African countries have been unsuccessful in their efforts to raise the prestige of indigenous languages and that a lack of consideration with regard to the economic returns for speakers is a significant factor. In the final chapter of part IV, LeBlanc focuses on the role of translation for minority languages and demonstrates, through the case of French in Canada, the complexities that accompany technological advancement.

The three chapters in part V then switch the emphasis to ‘Education, Literacy, Access’ and feature further empirical examples from beyond Europe. Chapter fourteen concerns the language practices of indigenous children in Australia, with Disbray & Wigglesworth discussing several different examples of indigenous groups where English is not the mother-tongue of the children nor the surrounding community. Their work covers language use both inside and outside of school and they give several examples of how English is used by children alongside and interchangeably with indigenous languages. In Chapter fifteen, Sercombe concentrates on Southeast Asia to analyse language education policy in indigenous minorities across eleven countries and a collective population of over 700 million. Much of the chapter remains at a broad level across the region, but the author provides a case study of the Penan

people on the island of Borneo and the lack of teaching available in their language. Finally, chapter sixteen also focuses on several non-European language settings, with Robinson looking at issues of literacy faced by the non-dominant languages in Cameroon, Senegal and Papa New Guinea.

The penultimate part (VI) is centred around ‘Media, Public Usage, Visibility’ and begins with an overview chapter (seventeen) by Moring on the development of minority language media as an area of academic study. Moring outlines the key literature which began to emerge in the last decades of the twentieth century, discusses the main international legal instruments of relevance to minority language media, and highlights the need for further efforts in the contemporary challenges of digitalisation and social media on the usage of minority languages in the public sphere. This last aspect links to Cunliffe’s following chapter (eighteen) which concentrates on social media and its role in language maintenance and language revitalisation. The author predominantly uses the example of Welsh in an in-depth analysis which covers aspects of language behaviour and change, as well as highlighting how this plays out on different social media networks/platforms. Gorter et al. switch the focus to the representation or visibility of language in public space, with chapter nineteen outlining the concept of linguistic landscapes and signage in particular. Such situations include roads, shops and packaging, and the authors demonstrate their arguments through the case studies of Israel, Quebec, and Brussels, plus the Basque Country and Friesland. Their conclusions suggest that signs can be a measurement of language status and thus be of empirical use to the field of minority language studies.

Part VII contains the final three chapters of this edited volume, under the subtitle ‘Endangerment, Ecosystems, Resilience’. Chapter twenty sees Bradley outline common reasons for language decline, before attempting to answer whether this can be reversed. This also entails a subchapter on different types of language reclamation, touching upon many empirical examples which include Inuit, Maori, Modern Hebrew, Rumantsch and Cornish amongst others. Chapter twenty-one is centred around the concept of linguistic ecology, whereby Nash uses the examples of Pitcairn and Norfolk to discuss the debate over whether the two are seen as languages or varieties of English before moving on to show that either way the two are ecologically embedded in their small island contexts. Finally, in chapter twenty-two, Katz is concerned with the revivalism of Yiddish and the issues of differing groups with contrasting needs and aims for the language. The author includes a summary of Yiddish across the past 1,000 years and concludes with lessons to be learned for the other linguistic

communities with language revitalisation as an aim.

The breadth of this volume ensures that it caters for anyone interested in the academic study of minority languages, from a variety of disciplines. It seemingly therefore has a relatively wide target audience and is thus a must for any institutional library concerned with the broader field. The volume features many well-known and prominent authors writing on familiar settings to the European audience, but it also makes a serious attempt to include lesser-known topics beyond the Eurocentric focus which has largely dominated the study of minority languages previously. Whilst the number of example cases from Asia, Africa, North America and Oceania are certainly very valuable, there is a striking lack of Latin American context – especially when considering the vast number of indigenous languages present there. Nonetheless, it is an important contribution to the field which will no doubt be seen as a key scholarly collection amongst the growing body of literature on minority languages.