

Pluricentric linguistic justice in Quebec: a normative approach to linguistic authority and legitimacy in French

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Of the many debates on language in Quebec, one of the most enduring concerns the question of linguistic authority and legitimacy in French. Should Quebecers be guided by a standard defined externally, in France (exonorm)? Or are there good reasons to promote a local standard reflecting socially acceptable usage as determined by Quebecers themselves (endonorm)? Of relevance for speakers of all pluricentric languages, such questions take on particular significance for speakers of French, owing to the strong monocentric ideology that continues to associate the language with France and especially Paris.

After a brief history of the ‘question of the norm’ in Quebec as evidenced in public debates and language attitude research, the paper demonstrates the contribution that can be made by a normative perspective grounded in political philosophy/theory. Extending the notion of linguistic justice to the case of pluricentric languages specifically, it proposes the distinct notion of ‘pluricentric linguistic justice’ as a framework for evaluating the ethics of local norm setting and enforcement in such languages. The paper provides a reflection on pluricentric linguistic justice in the Quebec context by weighing up a series of arguments related to the instrumental and identity functions of language. It concludes by briefly considering how the notion of pluricentric linguistic justice might be measured empirically, namely through a reconceptualisation of language attitudes as expressions of how speakers of a pluricentric language position themselves ethically in questions of norm production and enforcement.