

REVIEW

LANGUAGE AND CONFLICT IN NORTHERN IRELAND
AND CANADA: A SILENT WAR.

Hampshire, England: Macmillan, Palgrave Studies in Minority Languages and Communities Series. xiii + 281 pages. ISBN 978-1-4039-3732-2

Janet Muller, 2010.

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Language Policy and Planning (LPP) in the north of Ireland has some interesting years ahead. In this book, Janet Muller considers the language question in the north, including its history, demographics, and current challenges. The book is meticulously referenced with primary sources, and provides all relevant detail for anyone seeking a factual understanding. The book does not dwell upon historical rights and wrongs, but rather focuses upon the current use of, and demand for, the language.

While Muller's primary concern in this book is the Irish language in the north of Ireland, her scope is much broader. Her scope includes a theoretical framework which is required in order to approach the language question consistently. Muller provides this through general discussion of the principles of Language Policy and Planning (LPP) and their relationship to Conflict Resolution (CR). She applies these principles to the French language in Canada, as well as the Irish language in the north of Ireland. Her treatment of the Canadian experience is thorough, insightful and readable. The

Canadian experience provides not only a foil for the experience in the north of Ireland, but concurrently deepens the reader's appreciation of the principles in themselves. Muller finds that, in both experiences, "the practice of Conflict Resolution (CR) by hegemonic states tends to reinforce its own dominant position, and that these goals influence the formulation of Language Policy and Planning (LPP)." In this regard, policy makers in Canada have as much to learn from this book as their northern Irish counterparts.

The book is particularly timely. The peace matrix in the north of Ireland has reached the critical point where the Irish language question must be addressed without further delay. An Irish language Act was unequivocally promised by the government of the United Kingdom in an international agreement in 2006 (St Andrew's Agreement)¹

The book gives significant discussion to the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages, Irish language broadcasting, and legal impediments to the Irish language, including the 1737 Administration of Justice Act which remains in effect in the north of Ireland. The Public Consultation conducted by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (2006 – 2007) is analyzed, revealing overwhelmingly positive reaction to the prospect of language legislation. The analysis also reveals, however, the existence of influential segments of the population that "oppose the use of Irish as a political weapon"². The interpretation of "political use" is extended to "speaking in Irish, writing in Irish, erecting street signs in Irish..."

This book is highly readable, and is recommended to anyone wishing to educate themselves on language issues in the north. Muller avoids the

¹ "The Government will introduce an Irish Language Act reflecting on the experience of Wales and Ireland and work with the incoming Executive to enhance and protect the development of the Irish Language" (Saint Andrews Agreement, UK and Irish Governments, 13th October 2006).

² Submission by the Grand Orange Lodge to the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, 2007, during the Public Consultation regarding Irish language legislation.

emotional reaction to the Irish language as an icon, and instead offers a well considered assembly of facts that can assist readers in reaching their own conclusions.

