

Multilingual Selfhood and the Political Ethics of a Linguistic In-Betweenness

Dr. Yael Peled, McGill University

Yael.peled@mcgill.ca

Abstract: language, and more specifically the experience of a language barrier, plays a crucial yet often under-theorised role in the everyday lived experience of migrants, immigrants and refugees. This is evident in more overt forms of linguistic difference, as in the case of newcomers who belong to linguistic minorities. But it is also embedded more covertly in newcomers' feelings of isolation and disorientation, which arise from more general experiences of language fatigue and even language nausea. The latter in particular constitutes one of the key challenges to a more equitable inclusion of migrants, immigrants and refugees in the social and political life of democratic polities, in public institutions (e.g. the legal, healthcare and education systems) as well as in civic life. This form of linguistic exclusion, whether intentional or not, calls into question the democratic commitment of host societies to the idea of equal linguistic dignity.

The paper examines the challenge of a complex multilingual selfhood to contemporary democratic societies where prevailing linguistic beliefs, practices, culture and tradition often operate on the basis of monolingual premises. The paper examines the critical imperative of developing a more language-aware civic and institutional framework for contemporary democratic societies, in order to better deliver on their commitment to democratic liberty, equality, inclusivity and solidarity, in the face of irreducibly complex linguistic diversity and especially linguistic alterity. While this challenge to democratic life and institutional and civic practices is supposedly evident, the paper argues that a more language-aware understanding of a multilingual selfhood, and the phenomenology of a linguistic "in-betweenness" that underpins it, can in fact enhance the working of democratic public institutions and civic life rather than jeopardise it.

(The submission seems particularly suitable for Day 1 of the conference, but I would be equally happy for it to be considered for Day 2. I hope to be able to attend both parts of the event).

Author bio: Yael Peled is a research associate at the Institute for Health and Social Policy at McGill University. She specializes in language ethics, and more specifically in the moral and political philosophy of language and linguistic alterity. Her work has been published in numerous journals in philosophy, political science and linguistics, and her work is marked by a strong commitment to interdisciplinarity that draws equally on normative and empirical bodies of work. She holds a Doctor of Philosophy in political science (political theory) from Nuffield College, the University of Oxford, and a Bachelor of Arts in political science (political theory) and general linguistics from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Her edited volume (co-edited with Daniel Weinstock) *Language Ethics* is forthcoming from McGill-Queen's University Press in early 2020.