

## PhD on “Linguistic Justice, Policy and Conflict” – Ulster University, Belfast

### Topic description

Most societies are multilingual, even in countries with only one official language. This is due to the presence of indigenous/traditional linguistic minorities, and recently immigrated people. Language policy is unavoidable because the government must choose at least one language to deliver language-related publicly provided goods and services. The choice of which languages to use, however, is not a neutral act insofar as the resident population speaks different native languages. Languages fulfil both practical and symbolic functions for individuals, and language policy can influence them. Language policy can promote integration and national cohesion, but it may have opposite goals which result in inequalities that generate political and ethnic tensions, and potentially conflict. This can happen, for example, when governments deny rights to minorities by imposing the use of the majority language. At the opposite extreme, however, governments may grant very broad rights to minorities, who ultimately may have little incentive to learn and use the majority language; this can foster the emergence of parallel societies within a country, which can undermine national cohesion and political stability. While a situation of absolute equality between all the languages spoken in a country is difficult to achieve (if only for practical reasons), a well-designed and fair language policy can reduce practical and symbolic inequalities to politically acceptable levels with an affordable use of resources. Evidence shows a relationship between the implementation of fair language policies and the prevention or reduction of ethnic conflict (see for example the guidelines of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities). The theme of fairness in language policy is sometimes called ‘linguistic justice’. Little is known about how to empirically evaluate the fairness of language policies from a comparative perspective. In recent years, however, three indices for assessing linguistic justice have been published or are in the process of being published (see bibliography below). The topic of the PhD thesis is the analysis of the relationship between linguistic justice and conflict from both theoretical and empirical perspectives. Applicants are encouraged to exploit existing indices (or a mix of them) and/or develop new indicators to empirically study the relationship between conflict and linguistic justice, drawing public policy recommendations from their theoretical and empirical analysis. This is an interdisciplinary topic of study spanning political science, political philosophy, sociolinguistics, and economics. Applications are encouraged and welcome from all these fields.

### Bibliography

- Dubinsky, Stanley, Michael Gavin, Gareth Rees-White, Shana Scucchi, Harvey Starr, “The Language Freedom Index: A metric for policy evaluation”. *Language and Public Policy* (2025 to appear)
- Gazzola, Michele, Bengt-Arne Wickstöm and Mark Fettes, “Towards an Index of Linguistic Justice”, *Politics, Philosophy & Economics*, vol. 22, n. 3, pp. 243–270 (2023).
- Gialdini, Cecilia, “Language-based capabilities to conceptualise linguistic justice”. *Language Problems & Language Planning*, 48:1 pp. 26–47 (2024).
- Ulasiuk, Iryn, Laurențiu Hadîrcă, and William Romans (eds.) (2018) *Language policy and conflict prevention*. Leiden-Boston: Brill Nijhoff.

### Application process

Applications should include a CV, a copy of diplomas (including a record of marks), and a letter of presentation explaining how that candidate intends to address the topic of the project. Applications should be sent to Dr Michele Gazzola ([m.gazzola@ulster.ac.uk](mailto:m.gazzola@ulster.ac.uk)) and Dr Máire Braniff ([m.braniff@ulster.ac.uk](mailto:m.braniff@ulster.ac.uk)) by 5 pm UTC on the 13<sup>th</sup> December 2024. The best applicant will then work with the supervisory team to prepare an enhanced formal application to be submitted to the annual competition of [Northern Ireland and Northeast Doctoral Training Partnership \("NINE DTP"\)](#) in January 2025. The PhD programme includes an integrated 3-month placement for all students (with new staff support to facilitate placements); an extension of the standard PhD-only offer from 3 years to 3.5 years (with a continuation of options for an extra 6 or 12 months depending on a student’s prior master’s-level training); increased Research Training and Support Grant (RTSG) funding; ring-fenced studentships in research projects and training programmes that cross the remits of research councils, involve advanced quantitative methods or deal with large data sets. A very useful pre-recorded webinar for prospective students is available here: <https://www.ninedtp.ac.uk/the-application-process/>