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Language Policy

Linguistics : Asian Languages

Powell, Richard

Language Choice in Postcolonial Law

Lessons from Malaysia's Bilingual Legal System

- Addresses the widespread but under-researched problem of language-based disadvantage in polities whose law is administered in an elite medium that most citizens lack proficiency in
- Applies language-planning, analytical tools more usually targeted at educational systems than at the legal domain
- Presents an in-depth case study of a single jurisdiction while inviting comparisons with other postcolonial legal systems
- Draws on data from questionnaires and focus groups with 500 law students, interviews with 60 lawyers, and nationwide observations of courtroom hearings and law lectures

This book discusses multilingual postcolonial common law, focusing on Malaysia's efforts to shift the language of law from English to Malay, and weighing the pros and cons of planned language shift as a solution to language-based disadvantage before the law in jurisdictions where the majority of citizens lack proficiency in the traditional legal medium. Through analysis of legislation and policy documents, interviews with lawyers, law students and law lecturers, and observations of court proceedings and law lectures, the book reflects on what is entailed in changing the language of the law. It reviews the implications of societal bilingualism for postcolonial justice systems, and raises an important question for language planners to consider: if the language of the law is changed, what else about the law changes?

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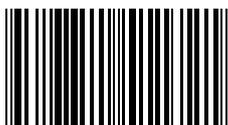
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