Véronique Bertile's book is the published version of her PhD thesis written under the supervision of Professor Ferdinand Mélin-Soucramanien (Université de Bordeaux III, France, 2004). In the introduction, Véronique Bertile presents her work as the first French-speaking book establishing a complete description of the regional or minority languages’ constitutional status in France, Italy and Spain. Bertile chooses to compare these three States because of their high similarities from a linguistic perspective – they all have several languages spoken on their territory – as well as from an institutional standpoint – these States all being unitarian, indivisible and regional.  

Véronique Bertile therefore considers two ways of ensuring the constitutional protection of regional and/or minority languages, either by means of regionalization (Part I) or by recognition of linguistic rights (Part II). As the book is based on a French PhD thesis, it is very typically divided and sub-divided into two. Although the book is entitled Regional or Minority Languages and Constitution, its first part goes beyond the constitutional status of regional or minority languages. Indeed, in order to analyze how the State’s form was historically used to protect regional or minority languages, Bertile traces the historical evolution of the linguistic issue in each of the three States, from the legal recognition of the official language to that of regional or minority languages. This is particularly true concerning the first chapter on France as its first section deals with the legal status of the French language, and its second section with the legal status of regional languages. Following on from a discussion of the legal status of the French language during three key periods (Monarchy, Revolution, Third Republic), the author explains that the constitutionalization of French only happened in 1992 when legal measures were adopted to protect the French language and identity from both the English language and the European construction. Bertile does not focus solely on the French Constitution but broadens her study to the laws which directly or indirectly govern the regional languages’ status. She shows their lack of coherence due to the law-makers’ unwillingness to create a coherent legal framework. This is particularly important as this second section was written before the last constitutional modification of 2008; which, for the first time, introduced the regional languages into the constitutional text. In a recent article, Véronique Bertile further explains what the next step should be: passing a law providing a coherent legal status for the regional languages. Still, her explanation of how the

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1) The author considers France as a whole, i.e., including its overseas territories, and not only its metropolitan territory.
regional languages are regulated by general and specific laws in a piecemeal way still applies.

The second chapter deals with the Italian and Spanish examples. Italy and Spain are discussed in the same chapter because of their very similar history: they both unified during the 19th century, while France unified much earlier; they both suffered from dictatorship during the 20th century (contrary to France). The present Italian and Spanish constitutional regimes are the very direct consequences of this recent history. In both cases, Bertile analyzes the general linguistic legal status from an historical perspective, focusing particularly on the official language’s legal status, and subsequently assesses how regional or minority languages are protected in different regions, thereby demonstrating that linguistic pluralism is mainly the result of the Constitutional Courts’ action.

The second part of Véronique Bertile’s book, clearly shorter but above all less original and interesting than the first part, deals with regional or minority languages’ protection by means of human rights law. This part is thematically structured. The first chapter deals in a first section with the principle of equality – fundamental in human rights law – and in a second section with its corollary, the right to non-discrimination. Although a constitutional principle in the three countries at stake, the equality principle can still be conceived in two different ways, either from a formal or a substantive point of view. Both ways entail different legal consequences. Formal equality prevails in France while Italy and Spain also uphold substantive equality. Yet, Bertile carefully demonstrates that the French constitutional jurisprudence has implicitly recognized substantive equality. The second section deals with the link between language and non-discrimination. The author first studies the content of the right to non-discrimination related to language before exploring the French, Italian and Spanish constitutional jurisprudence on access to public employment.

In the second chapter concerning the link between linguistic rights and human rights, the author raises the question whether linguistic rights are specific rights or universal human rights applied to a particular situation (freedom of expression, right to education, etc.). She therefore analyzes the relevant international and European legislation as well as the French, Italian and Spanish constitutional jurisprudence in order to determine the legal nature of linguistic rights. In a second section, she addresses whether linguistic rights are collective or individual rights and deals with the issue of identifying linguistic groups as well as the concept of belonging.

The second part of Véronique Bertile’s book may prove less interesting to minority rights specialists, but may still be helpful to those constitutionalists who are not familiar with the subject matter. The first part of the book is definitely the most original and interesting one since no other French-speaking book has ever focused on the legal status of languages in Italy and Spain. Bertile concludes her book with two considerations. First, she explains that the institutional protection