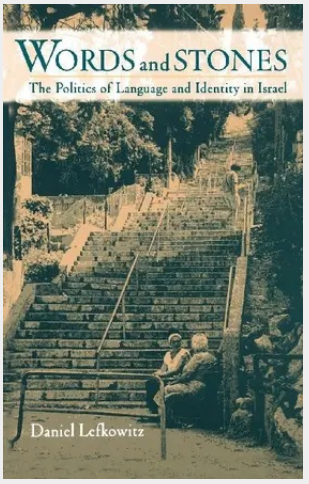
Lefkowitz

Words and Stones

The Politics of Language and Identity in Israel



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Social and ethnic identity are nowhere more enmeshed with language than in Israel. Words and Stones explores the politics of identity in Israel through an analysis of the social life of language. By examining the social choices Israelis make when they speak, and the social meanings such choices produce, Daniel Lefkowitz reveals how Israeli identities are negotiated through language. Lefkowitz studies three major languages and their role in the social lives of Israelis: Hebrew, the dominant language, Arabic, and English. He reveals their complex interrelationship by showing how the language a speaker chooses to use is as important as the language they choose not to use - in the same way that a claim to an Israeli identity is simultaneously a claim against other, opposing identities. The result is a compelling analysis of how the identity of "Israeliness" is linguistically negotiated in the three-way struggle among Ashkenazi (Jewish), Mizrahi (Jewish), and Palestinian (Arab) Israelis. Lefkowitz's ethnography of language-use is both thoroughly anthropological and thoroughly linguistic, and provides a comprehensive view of the role language plays in Israeli society. His work will appeal to students and scholars of sociolinguistics, anthropology, and linguistic anthropology, as well as students and scholars of Israel and the Middle East.

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