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## **Living together as equals: Linguistic justice and sharing the public sphere in multilingual settings**

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### **Abstract**

It is usually thought that a *shared public sphere* is a prerequisite of any democratic regime, where citizens can deliberate and act according to their duty to carry out justice. This prerequisite, however, can be complicated due to linguistic diversity. Until recently, the literature on linguistic justice has primarily focused on how to achieve just linguistic regimes in compound (i.e. federal) multilingual states, granting some kind of linguistic and political autonomy through the territorial division of the state. But what actually happens inside the territories? This paper deals with linguistic diversity and the establishment and maintenance of a *shared public sphere* in political communities in which territorial divisions are not possible because the linguistic communities are intermingled. I argue that linguistic justice, with the aim of creating the conditions that maximize the incentives to share the public sphere, would be achieved if, and only if, two principles were reached: (1) the equal recognition of all the host language groups of the political community and (2) the non-segregation of people for reasons of language. Although the relation between the principles can be problematic, I argue that they can be fitted into a linguistic theory of justice named 'Multilingual Convergence'.

### **Keywords**

Linguistic justice, equal recognition, non-segregation, shared public sphere, multilingual convergence.

## **Introduction**

Any democracy is grounded in the assumption that a people exists; a sovereign *demos* delegates its power to a government and, at the same time, is ruled by this government. This circularity of influence is grounded, however, in the belief that a ‘unique’ *demos* exists, one whose people act collectively, discussing their different conceptions of the good and arriving at agreements (or not) about how to manage the common concerns of society. In some sense, this requires a degree of unity, of being one. In practice, this could mean that it is necessary to discuss common concerns in spaces shared by everyone (a *shared public sphere*) and about shared topics, despite the fact that opinions could (and should) be varied. As John Stuart Mill argued, almost 150 years ago, some kind of united public opinion is ‘necessary to the working of representative government’ (Mill, 1998 [1861]: 428). It was precisely Mill who defended the idea that this shared public opinion cannot exist in a country in which citizens ‘read and speak different languages’ because this would lead people to be engaged in different debates, about different topics, reading different newspapers and so forth.

We could say that linguistic diversity is usually seen as an obstacle, both theoretically and empirically, to ensuring one of the necessary conditions for democracy: a *shared public sphere* (SPS). However, some scholars have recently offered proposals that aim to ensure democracy and just linguistic regimes in compound (i.e. federal) multilingual states, granting some kind of linguistic and political autonomy through the territorial division of the state (Kymlicka, 1995; Van Parijs, 2011). But what happens when linguistic communities are intermingled within a given territory (either sub-state or state)? In compound states, the public spheres can be linguistically

separated and re-joined through federal arrangements (combinations of shared-rule and self-rule), but in intermingled linguistic communities this becomes a difficult (and perhaps undesirable) task.

This paper deals with linguistic diversity and the establishment and maintenance of an SPS in political communities in which territorial divisions are not possible because linguistic communities are intermingled.<sup>1</sup> That is, it deals with language policies as an indispensable tool in situations of possible conflict. As Yael Peled states: ‘language policy as a human practice emerges from what is, perhaps, the most fundamental characteristic of the linguistic human condition: the inescapable tension between linguistic diversity on one hand, and societal interdependence on the other’ (Peled, 2014: 301–302). My goal is to establish the principles for a just linguistic policy, one that allows for the existence of an SPS, understanding this to be a fundamental precondition for democracy and for the establishment of principles of justice. I will suggest two principles to achieve such a just linguistic regime: (1) the equal recognition of all the host language groups of the political community<sup>2</sup>; and (2) the non-segregation of people for reasons of language. Together these form the core of a linguistic theory of justice referred to here as ‘Multilingual Convergence’ and centered on the notion of ‘multilingual virtue’.

Before explaining how I will proceed, it is important to clarify that I am dealing with a normative discussion, that is, with questions concerning ‘the just state involvement with languages and language diversity’ (De Schutter and Boyden, 2008: 2). I want to only deal with the just response to language diversity, not with empirical questions regarding language policies or linguistic diversity. Apart from that, it is important to note that the view I consider is institutional. That is, I focus on the principles of justice that should guide the design and action of the basic structure of institutions (Rawls, 1999 [1971]: Section 2). However, despite this focus

on institutions as the subject or site of justice, I will partially tackle another dimension of justice, the dimension linked with relational linguistic justice (the just linguistic relations among people ruled by just basic institutions). I briefly outline this second dimension of justice at the end of the article.

In section two I tackle the relevance of democracy for carrying out principles of justice, and within this, the crucial importance of maintaining an SPS. In section three I analyze the role of language in the public sphere and the inadequacy of existing models of linguistic justice for achieving a just language regime in order to maintain an SPS. In section four, I establish an alternative model featuring two fundamental principles of justice: equal recognition of all autochthonous language groups and non-segregation of people for reasons of language. Finally, in section five, I deepen the main limits of my proposal and attempt to address some of the critiques that it could receive.

### **Democracy and the public sphere**

Any understanding of democratic citizenship should have the construction and maintenance of an SPS as a primary aim. This is so because it is the space of citizen participation, the common ground of dialogue where people deliberate and deal with social and political conflicts. It is the place where they decide how to organize their society in common despite the existence of competing values and conceptions of the good life, in order to establish (in Rawlsian words) the fair principles of social cooperation (Rawls, 1999 [1971]). Without these spaces, I would argue, it becomes difficult to ensure democratic politics. Citizens, thus, should discuss in order to

convince the others of their own claims, transforming them during the communicative process, and trying to adopt principles of justice (Young, 2000: 51).

This common ground for dialogue is usually termed the ‘public sphere’. Bruce Robbins (1993) defines the public sphere as a phantom, a concept difficult to define, sometimes vague and diffuse. However, democratic theories usually accept this concept as fundamental for understanding democracy. For Habermas, the public sphere is ‘a forum in which the private people come together to form a public, readied themselves to compel public authority to legitimate itself before public opinion’ (Habermas, 1989b: 25–26). It is a forum where private people discuss public issues of a so-called ‘communicative community’. The public sphere is neither the state nor the market. Its relations are driven through dialogue, not through a rule/power logic nor a supply/demand one. It is a space in between the private sphere and the state, which works for the common good by influencing the decision-making processes of political institutions through dialogue and discussion. In a way, the public sphere assumes what Habermas (2001: 97–98) calls the ‘ideal speech situation’, when a ‘symmetrical distribution of the opportunities for all participants to choose and perform speech acts’ is presupposed. The public sphere is, therefore, a prerequisite for the democratic legitimacy of states because it should allow ‘public information, participation and debate on national policies and enable citizens to influence and hold accountable political decision makers, turning public opinion into political power’ (Sinardet, 2011: 311).

Sometimes it is difficult to know which elements can be included in the concept. However, if we understand it as a ‘public space of social interaction’ (Gagnon and Iacovino, 2005: 31) or some kind of ‘social forum’, we can say that, theoretically, an SPS is within the boundaries of a political community, shaped by institutions and includes, among others, their mass media and

their citizenship associations, organizations and mobilizations. To sum up, it is formed by civil society, which was defined by Michael Walzer as ‘the space of uncoerced human association and also the set of relational networks – formed for the sake of family, faith, interest and ideology – that fill their space’ (Walzer, 1995: 7) whose role is ‘promoting social justice’ and democracy (Young, 2000: 158–159).

Which principles, then, should the public sphere follow in order for it to be a space of social and political dialogue that influences the decision-making processes? Following Habermas (1989a, 1989b), Young (2000) and Fraser (1993), I identify three guiding principles: *public deliberation*, *political equality* and *togetherness*.

1. The *public deliberation* principle states that if the public sphere is the social forum for influencing the decision-making processes, deliberation should be the guiding method for dealing with conflicts in order to achieve the common good. Deliberation implies a discussion that takes into account criteria related to the common good, helping to depurate arguments and reasons through everyone’s critique (Ovejero et al., 2004: 29). Individuals can modify their points of view and preferences through a respectful means (deliberation) with their individual freedom. The point here is to enlarge people’s own preferences to include the others in a shared common space through an open and inclusive discussion (Ovejero et al., 2004: 39). Conflict should be assumed as natural in a diverse society and, then, each person or group should defend their own preferences, trying to convince the others and modifying their opinions in order to reach an agreement. This conception of the public sphere understands, thus, that this is the proper site of political struggle (Young, 2000: 178).

2. *Political equality*, or equal influence over the decision-making process, is indispensable if we want to take all people's interests into account. Then, domination (arbitrary dependence) has to be avoided.<sup>3</sup> It is not possible to discuss as 'peers' if 'discursive arenas are situated in a large societal context that is pervaded by structural relations of dominance and subordination' (Fraser, 1993: 12). Following Philip Pettit's 'eyeball test,' people should be able to look each other in the eye without feeling inferior in status (Pettit, 2012: 84). Only in this way, would all opinions be equally recognized and accommodated within the public sphere.
3. The principle of *togetherness* tries to fit two distinct conceptions of the public sphere: first, the public sphere as one common space required for democratic politics (Jürgen Habermas); and, second, the public sphere as divided between different competing publics (Nancy Fraser). Following Young (2000), I argue that the two theories can be made compatible. A public sphere should be shared by all the publics without allowing isolation across, for example, language groups. At the same time, everyone has to defend their opinions across lines of difference, especially in issues that concern them all (Fraser, 1993: 18). Hence, despite diversity, some sense of togetherness within the competitive and conflicting public sphere is also needed. In a way, I am implicitly accepting that sharing a space of dialogue would allow people to perceive the others as something 'more than sheer curiosities or trade partners', but as equal participants who require my explanations and reasons (Van Parijs, 2011: 26). To my mind, I am arguing for an understanding of togetherness in which all citizens should be included in what Van Parijs calls a 'justificatory community'.

Having established what a public sphere is, and having established what principles should guide it, there still seems to be something missing (which is commonly missed in debates over democratic theory): the issue of language. One thing is clear: without communication there is no SPS. Hence, the question becomes, how can we deal justly with linguistic diversity within democracies that are multilingual and mixed?

### **Language in the public sphere: the inadequacy of the existing linguistic models**

Until now, there have been two main proposals for solving the explained tension between multilingualism and dialogue: the *Nation-Building model* and the *Linguistic Pluralism model*. I set aside a third model that argues that the state should not interfere in language issues because state neutrality is a requirement of justice. A liberal state, they would argue, should not interfere in reasonable conceptions of the good life in which people are freely engaged. Nevertheless, almost all scholars agree with the fact that this is empirically impossible: any state needs language to function. Without language, how could their bureaucracy, or education system work? Therefore, I am going to take into account only the other two models.

The *Nation-Building model* has been the most common since the birth of the modern nation-state. The expansion of industrialization (Gellner, 2001) and democracy and the creation of popular armies have all led to nation-states promoting homogenizing linguistic policies in order to enable communication. Additionally, the learning of the national language was seen as a commitment to the common fate of the nation, not only as a tool for communication. Recently, scholars like Brian Barry (2001) and Thomas Pogge (2003) have defended this necessity of converging on one unique language as a tool to walk towards non-identity goals like equal

opportunity or democracy. From the perspective of political philosophy, these proposals are usually grounded in a concrete understanding of liberalism (liberalism 1)<sup>4</sup> which states that: (1) language is just a tool to achieve other socially valuable objectives (mobility, freedom or equality); and, thus (2) language assimilation (respecting language rights in the private sphere) is desirable in order to achieve those ends.<sup>5</sup>

By contrast, the *Linguistic Pluralism model* is based on the equal treatment of language groups, grounding its proposal in another conception of liberalism (liberalism 2). This second conception, based on Kymlicka's leading work (1995), defends people's right to be members of a 'context of choice' (culture) that enables them to be autonomous. Therefore, in this model, language is not only a tool for accomplishing non-identity claims, it is also a tool for accomplishing identity goals. In this regard, equal recognition becomes relevant to making these valuable contexts of choice possible. However, the way in which this model can be institutionalized is not always easy to establish. One way is through the linguistic personality principle, that is, a principle which establishes that linguistic rights can be exercised by people independently of where they live in the political community (De Schutter, 2011). The second way is through the territoriality principle, a principle which states that languages should be territorially maintained, because language rights depend on the territory in which one lives and on the linguistic majority of this territory and not on people's choices. The most strict (and common) understanding of this principle says that each particular territorial unit should give public support to only one particular language group (Van Parijs, 2011). In what concerns us, that is, political communities where territorial divisions are difficult to draw because linguistic communities are mixed, territoriality would lead to a situation similar to the *Nation-Building model* (despite the

fact that the reasons for defending it are different). Therefore, my ‘personality’ understanding of the *Linguistic Pluralism model* is based on ‘freedom of choice’ among the different recognized languages of the political community.

Regarding what concerns us, that is, the maintenance of an SPS as an important democratic tool for carrying out principles of justice, I would argue that none of these models fulfills all of the needed principles. As I show in Table 1, both models are inadequate for achieving all of the principles required for guiding a public sphere.

**Table 1.** Language models’ relation to the fulfilment of public sphere principles.

Shared Public Sphere principles			
General Linguistic model	Public deliberation	Political equality	Togetherness
Nation-Building model	YES	NO	NO
Linguistic Pluralism model	NO	YES	NO

The *Nation-Building model* can fulfill the principle of public deliberation because everybody would be capable of deliberating in the same language. However, political equality and togetherness would not be accomplished, especially during the period of transition towards the time when everyone will speak the same language. Political equality cannot exist if there are relations of domination. That is, following Philip Pettit’s ‘eyeball test’, people should be able to look each other in the eye without feeling inferior in status (Pettit, 2012: 84). Outside of this condition, people cannot discuss as peers, as equals whose (linguistic) interests are equally

treated. If my linguistic interests are not treated equally, then, there would be a violation of my dignity, a fact that can affect another important principle: togetherness. In such a case, the bases of self-respect (as a relevant Rawlsian primary good) could be diminished. When societies fail to recognize all of their members as equal citizens, social cooperation could be undermined and the phenomenon could lead to some people being regarded as inferior. In such cases, togetherness is almost impossible precisely because some people could feel displaced due to reasons of self-respect (dignity). I will tackle the dignity arguments in the next section.

The *Linguistic Pluralism model* (the personality one) is capable of getting political equality, but it is not capable of getting either communication (public deliberation), because there are not enough incentives to understand the language of the other, or togetherness. Of course, personality allows one to learn all of the recognized languages, but it is up to the people to do so. Political equality would be fulfilled because everyone's (linguistic) interests would be recognized, then, domination would be institutionally avoided and discussion as peers would be made possible. However, despite the fact that equality would be fulfilled, the fact that people would be allowed to choose among all the recognized languages could lead to a segregated public sphere, where people engage and share spaces (schools, hospitals, associations...) only with people that speak their language (their communicative community). This could diminish the possibility of togetherness (precisely because there would exist different public spheres inside the political community) and also common deliberation. In that sense, the political system could lead to a segregation of the public sphere which, in turn, may imply many risks: each sphere could create a shared collective imaginary, with the possibility of strengthening common fears and diminishing mutual understanding. One might reply saying that the existence of a few multilingual individuals

(journalists, politicians or civil society activists) might allow for a reasonable degree of debate across linguistic communities. So deliberation and togetherness could fit to a certain extent within this model. I would answer using two reasons. First, even accepting this argument, a ‘perverse’ mechanism might remain: the so-called ‘linguistic bowing’. I will explain this concept later, but the point is that minorities would have a lot of incentives for learning the majority language anyway regardless of whether their language is publicly recognized, but not the other way around. Second, I think this kind of rationale might distort the notion of an SPS I am arguing for. To my mind, an SPS includes the possibility of general participation and deliberation. An SPS is not endorsing some kind of minimal democracy in which only a small minority of multilingual individuals can really deliberate. So, wide communication is presupposed as something necessary to allow broad participation. Therefore, the *Linguistic Pluralism model* does not ensure such a thing.

It might be suggested that, in spite of the existence of a pluralist, free-choice regime, we could foster a policy in which a neutral lingua franca provides the language of communication (for example, Esperanto or a foreign language without native speakers inside the given multilingual political community). For a defender of this position, such a proposal could accomplish all the principles of an SPS. I would rule it out for two basic reasons. First, for an opportunity-cost reason. Why should one spend her time learning a lingua franca instead of learning the language of (some of) her co-citizens? I do not see any reason for so doing unless this lingua franca is useful beyond one’s context (worldwide, for example). But still, there is little reason to think that people would have bigger incentives to learn the new language rather than the language of (some of) their co-citizens. Host languages are the ones used daily by their neighbors.

They listen to them on TV, radios, streets, in school or shops. Even learning these ones can offer a wider expectancy of economic success in the short term than learning the lingua franca. For example, think about South Tyrol or the Basque Country. Probably one has more chances for getting a job through learning German or Basque in these contexts rather than learning, say, English.

Second, for a dignity-based reason. On one hand, it would suppose a 'status problem'. As Van Parijs (2011) rightly points out, it would undermine parity of esteem between the locals (both majority and minority language groups) and the native speakers of the lingua franca. On the other, this might lead to a more than likely linguistic substituting process. The lingua franca would acquire a new public status, creating incentives to use it in the public sphere and promoting diglossic attitudes ('I use my own language in the private sphere, but the new lingua franca in the public one'). In the mid-term, this 'secluding' process of local languages in the private sphere might lead to a complete linguistic substitution.<sup>6</sup> It is important to remark that this 'lingua franca' argument is assuming an institutional perspective. It is the political community that adopts (and promotes) English (or any lingua franca) as a public language of intercommunication rather than being a pragmatic decision spontaneously chosen by individuals.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, it is this policy which, in the mid-term, would change individual dynamics, favouring the new high-status language. As Stephen May (2015: 134) suggests, 'history shows us that diglossic contexts do little, if anything, to mitigate existing linguistic hierarchies and their deleterious effect over time on lower status "local" languages'.

### **The Multilingual Convergence: the first steps towards a new model**

If the existing normative models are inadequate, we might have to seek another grounding for a linguistic theory of justice capable of fitting with the guiding principles of an SPS. As I will explain, the normative solution is to politically organize our democracies in a way that maximizes the incentives to share a public sphere in which people engage in debates together, despite all the (undeniable and necessary) diversity of society.

I argue that linguistic justice, with the aim of creating the conditions that maximize the incentives to share the public sphere, would be achieved if, and only if, two principles were reached: (1) the equal recognition of all the host language groups of the political community; and (2) the non-segregation of people for reasons of language. Although the relation between the principles can be problematic, I argue that they can be fitted into a linguistic theory of justice named ‘Multilingual Convergence’, focused on the notion of ‘multilingual virtue’.

#### *The equal recognition principle*

A principle advancing equal recognition should lead to institutional arrangements in which all languages are equally accommodated. However, what does recognition mean? And how should equality be understood?

Recognition, as such, is not an easy concept to deal with. Charles Taylor, using Hegel, argues for an understanding of recognition in which people ‘flourish only to the extent that they are recognized. Each consciousness seeks recognition in another [...]’ (Taylor, 1992: 50). Recognition is based on a reciprocal relation among human beings; it is the ground floor that allows people to see the others as equals, as people worthy of respect and esteem (Taylor, 1992).

Without this requirement, I might perceive others as unworthy of respect, and they might perceive themselves the same way. When institutions fail to recognize all people as equal members of society, social cooperation is undermined, leading to some people being regarded as inferior. Self-respect, as a primary Rawlsian good, is sustained when institutional conditions allow each citizen to recognize and respond to others as equal citizens. Without this self-respect, people's moral strength could be undermined (Rawls, 1999: Section 82).<sup>8</sup> Thomas Ricento, who deals with linguistic exclusion from both a theoretical and empirical point of view states that, when assimilation (which implies lack of recognition) takes place, 'very often their loss of linguistic legitimacy contributes to their diminished social and economic status' (Ricento, 2014: 361).

Furthermore, Alan Patten (2014: 158) defines recognition 'as a customized form of accommodation of an identity-related component of a conception of the good. [...] the objects of recognition are preferences that are informed by, or expressions of, an identification with some group or community.' Expressions and preferences, I would argue, that require recognition in order to create the conditions for people's freedom in society. However, this 'identity-related' component of recognition is difficult to determine. What is a reasonable expression and/or preference related to our identity? This is a tremendously difficult question to answer. However, our focus is on language, which is less problematic because there is no way to function without it.

Once 'recognition' has been defined, let us see what equality implies for our conception of equal recognition. In general, Alan Patten defines equality as when a 'comparable form of customized assistance is extended to each of them. The same kind of rules, facilities and resources that are offered to assist one are also offered to assist the other(s)' (Patten, 2014: 161). Although

Patten's conception of equality seems to be a good starting point, a strict application of this form of equality could lead to injustices. Let us see a linguistic example to clarify that. As a consequence of Patten's way of understanding equality, he proposes a 'prorated official multilingualism', where 'two or more languages enjoy equal recognition from public institutions when those institutions extend roughly comparable forms of assistance to each on a prorated bases' (Patten, 2014: 200). This prorated base intends to take into account the number of people demanding services in each recognized language, 'offering the same per capita level of assistance to the different languages those individuals speak' (Patten, 2014: 200). Yet, this form of equality could lead to very unjust outcomes, especially if the starting point is itself unjust (for example, in cases of historical or economic injustices<sup>9</sup>). But, even without unfair background conditions, treating equally what is clearly unequal would not be a good idea even if we believe in a procedural understanding of justice (and not in outcomes). If language A is spoken by 70% and language B by 30%, prorated equal recognition could lead to the disappearance of language B. As Van Parijs (2011) explains, in multilingual communities people met and talked in everyday life, creating a linguistic dynamic that reinforced the strongest languages. That is a consequence of the maxi-min dynamics, defined as 'the mutual reinforcement of probability-sensitive language learning and the systematic use, in everyday communication, of the language best known by the speech partner who speaks it least well' (Van Parijs, 2011: 54). Such dynamics often negatively affect the weakest linguistic groups, paying only them the linguistic burdens of living together. It is what Van Parijs calls the 'linguistic bowing', in which one part of the citizenship always has to change its language in order to communicate with the other. That means that these citizens have to learn the strongest language, but not the other way around, imposing all the cooperation costs

of living in society on some groups but not to others. Following Pettit's (1997) understanding of domination, the mentioned problem is at the core of what domination implies in the linguistic domain. When there is a group taking on board the (legitimate) linguistic interests of their co-citizens in using their own language publicly via learning their languages (and being able to understand them), but it is never the other way around, there is a relation of linguistic domination at stake.<sup>10</sup> The reason is because one group is always forcing the others to 'linguistically bow' in front of them. Following Stephen May's (2014) question, we could ask, why do some people have to renounce their language in the public sphere while others do not? Is that fair? This, apart from being unfair in cooperative terms, can affect: (1) the self-respect of people; and also (2) lead to the progressive disappearance of the weakest languages. Doing the contrary, I would argue, might promote unjustifiable relations of linguistic dependency only acceptable if some conditions, which I will consider in the last section of the paper, arise.

Justice requires that 'we let cultures defend themselves, within reasonable bounds' (Taylor, 1992: 64) because language has some significance to people's dignity, to their 'horizon of meaning' (Taylor, 1992: 72–73). A different understanding of equality, then, holds that it is desirable to eliminate 'linguistic bowing', a bowing usually occasioned by an unchosen inequality. Therefore, instead of this prorated equality, I would endorse a *preferential* understanding of equality, that is, a way to maximize the less-privileged language groups without hurting (or hurting as little as possible) the strongest ones through a strong promotion of the weakest languages. This is a way to eliminate 'subordinating patterns' and exchange them for institutional norms that treat citizens as peers (Fraser, 2007). In language issues that is possible because we can learn a new language without losing skills in the other ones.

However, how can we equally recognize autochthonous language groups in such a *preferential* way – in a way in which minority groups are bound to learn the dominant language, but also in which the strongest group are bound to learn the language of their co-citizens? On that point, it becomes necessary to turn to my second principle.

### *The non-segregation principle*

Our diverse societies usually deal with the issue of segregation as a risk to be avoided. Yet, at the same time, they do not want to harm the legitimate cultural and linguistic aspirations of people. Segregation could be caused by many factors (linguistic and not linguistic), but we can identify two (linguistic) reasons: (1) voluntary self-segregation as a consequence of not being recognized; and/or (2) lack of promotion of mutual understanding in equal terms among all languages (even when there is recognition). Moreover, it is important to understand the real dimension of segregation, because ‘social relationships defined by location that have consequences for democracy and justice are not only metaphorical’. The public sphere is not just an abstraction, because ‘space itself matters’. In that sense, ‘most salient for issues of democracy, segregation impedes communication among the segregated groups’ (Young, 2000: 196). This not only makes communication more difficult, but also creates the conditions for the development of segregated collective imaginaries inside a multilingual political community.<sup>11</sup>

Seeing the potential harms that segregation can cause in any society, it becomes necessary to explore normative ideals to struggle against social fragmentation. Thus it seems to me that what is necessary for institutions is to encourage people to share spaces in public life, and, at the same time, enable linguistic diversity. Normatively speaking, I would endorse a non-segregation principle due to linguistic reasons. That is, people should not be separated for linguistic reasons

in spaces under the rule of public institutions, especially not in schools. Thomas Ricento (2014: 359) defends the ‘awareness on citizenship rights and responsibilities’, focused on ‘educating the citizenry on the importance of recognizing the validity and value of all languages/language varieties existent in their communities’ in a way that helps the creation of bridges between linguistic communities and making it more sympathetic for them to learn a fellow-citizen’s language (May, 2014: 389). Such a community of communication, can be more cohesive, precisely through sharing spaces, despite the fact that people speak different languages.

How can this principle be established without harming equal recognition? It depends, and I do not want to make absolutist statements on how to apply it in all spheres under the state’s rule. However, there is one sphere that I consider to be crucial for my endeavor: compulsory education. Systems of compulsory education should promote full competence in all the recognized languages. That is, teaching all languages in a unique educative line<sup>12</sup> and, in order to achieve equality, giving priority to learning the weakest languages. For example, in a case of two recognized languages (A with 65% of speakers and B with 35%), it would be necessary to give more classes in language B than in language A.

As I have said, the goal of this policy is to enable common communication in a multilingual SPS. Only in that way, can we see others as peers and ourselves as full members of the political community. However, someone could argue that such a proposal is too demanding because it is telling people how they should live their lives, especially in relation to compulsory education. Why can I not choose the language in which my children are going to be educated? The state has nothing to do with the language in which I want to live, especially my children’s language. Equal recognition (and the *Linguistic Pluralism model* per se) could be acceptable for

these people, but not the non-segregation principle. To overcome this criticism I develop what I have called the ‘multilingual virtue’ argument, deeply rooted in Michael Sandel’s (2009) understanding of justice and at the core of the ‘Multilingual Convergence’ proposal. The argument implies two dimensions: first, a practical one aiming to promote multilingual competency together with the duty to understand fellow citizens who are not native co-linguals; second, to promote *multilingual awareness* as a sort of ethos in which learning the others’ language is a way of both respecting and deeply understanding them. In a way, this is what Sue Wright (2015) names ‘linguaging’. That is, the skill (developed when someone learns a second language) of being able to negotiate and co-construct meaning with non-native co-linguals during dialogue. This multilingual awareness makes it easier to understand the others’ perspective and to be especially respectful with one’s non-co-lingual citizens. So, multilingual virtue is not only about being competent and understanding the other host languages, but also about developing a sort of ethos as a way to engage with one’s co-citizens.

As I said, to overcome the already espoused criticism, I make use of this multilingual virtue because, I think, it is more morally compelling than the ‘freedom of choice’ option. I would suggest two justifications to support this belief. Firstly, any multilingual person can choose to live entirely within only one of the recognized languages if she wants. The rest of society, in principle, would be able to understand her precisely because there has been a fostering of the ‘multilingual virtue’. Secondly, to choose just one language would suppose an unjust share of duties: whereas I have to learn your language to understand you, you are not making any effort to do so with my language. That attitude presupposes an unacceptable dominant behavior.

In my opinion, the ‘multilingual virtue’ is not a freedom-constraining argument, but rather an emancipatory argument because it promotes (linguistic) freedom as non-domination for everyone. Expand people’s ‘context of choice’, keep their identity-related dignity, allow a major mobility and enable a multilingual community to communicate amongst themselves as equal peers. In that sense, despite the fact that I cannot avoid its outcome-oriented base, it creates the best background conditions for justice, making people more free and enabling them to pursue their own valuable ends both without domination and without harming (dominating) the others.

Someone could argue that, although I may be right, why not allow free-choice language education but rather make it mandatory to learn the other languages as second languages? That is the system implemented in Finland, where you can go either to a Finnish or a Swedish school, but at the end of the compulsory education period all people need to achieve a determinate competence of the second language. I would offer two arguments to defend my proposal: First, the Finnish model does not sufficiently incentivize an environment which can promote the weaker languages. Even making it mandatory to learn the second language, the majority group would not receive enough pressure to develop their skills in the weak language. If your environment, especially at school, is monolingual, the incentives to learn a weak language would be less strong than if you shared the class with people from the other groups. Children would lack what Sue Wright (2015: 124) names ‘the two prerequisites for successful language acquisition: the need to learn and the opportunity to practice’. Second, I would offer a non-linguistic argument based on the value of being together. If the objective is to share the public sphere, why separate people during one of the most fundamental periods of life, that is, during their school days? Moreover, we usually consider schools to be the best place to create equal opportunities for people,

independently of whether they are sons of a banker or a waiter. That is so, not only because education is important in itself, but also because it is relevant for children to share spaces and to live and develop their skills together, independently of their class origin. There is something morally valuable, then, in keeping children together.<sup>13</sup> In my opinion, it is segregation that ought to be justified and not the other way around.<sup>14</sup>

My conclusion would be, then, that a linguistic theory of justice for multilingual and mixed political communities should adopt a ‘Multilingual Convergence’ model embodied by my two principles. The implementation of such a model would require, I suggest, a generalized immersion education program, defined by May (2010: 293) as ‘a form of bilingual education, where L1 majority language students are taught predominantly through an L2, usually a minority language, in order to become bilingual and biliterate in that language as well as the majority language’. This immersion model should be shaped as a two-way program, in which speakers of the different languages would share the same classrooms in order to develop their bilingual skills, rather than a one-way immersion model – where only speakers of the majority language are included in immersion schools in order to learn the minority language (May, 2010: 296).<sup>15</sup> Even a three-way model should be considered if it is required, as in Luxembourg. A practical example of this proposal would be to implement a two-way immersion education model in Brussels, mixing in schools the francophone majority with the Dutch-speaking minority and teaching almost all classes in Dutch in primary schools over several years. The amount of hours taught in each language or the amount of years that this model should last might change from place to place. In this vein, it is not my aim to approach a very detailed proposal, but to outline a ‘Multilingual

Convergence’ approach with the aim of creating the conditions in which everyone should have the right to use their own language in the public sphere and, at the same time, have the duty to understand the language of their fellow-citizens. I have the intuitive conviction that the suggested guiding principles of linguistic justice would lead to this kind of relational behavior among people, removing (or diminishing at least) status disparities through the fostering of the ‘multilingual virtue’.<sup>16</sup>

I think that this proposal could guide linguistic policies in multilingual political communities in order to achieve a more just society. This model of ‘Multilingual Convergence’ could be a middle point between the Language Protection model based in territoriality, defended by Philippe Van Parijs (2011) and the Equal Recognition Pluralist Model based in personality, advocated by, among others, Alan Patten (2014) or Helder De Schutter (2011). It provides a middle point between the assimilationist model (Nation-Building) and the pluralist one.

### **Limits and criticisms**

All normative proposals, although guided by universal aims, have their limitations, and that is the case with my linguistic theory as well. Probably the most decisive criticisms are the following: the ‘Infinite regress argument’, which argues that this policy goes too far in protecting languages, and the ‘Language protectionist’ objection, which argues that this proposal falls too short of protecting languages.

Firstly, the ‘Infinite regress argument’ states that while following proposals such as mine might be fair, it is usually unfeasible. What happens with societies with four autochthonous language groups? Even worse, what happens if some of these languages are seldom used? Of

course, both the number of languages at stake and the number of speakers are relevant. It seems difficult to apply such a proposal to a political community with four autochthonous language, two of which are spoken by 2–3% of the population. In such a case, the application of my principles should be flexible. My answer would align with Stephen May's (2014: 386–388) 'when the numbers warrant' argument. That is, any linguistic proposal should be flexible depending on numbers, depending on context (Carens, 2000: 12). Language is a participatory good, which means that it needs enough critical mass to carry on without problems (Réaume, 1991: 51). On that point, equal recognition and non-segregation can be applied only to languages whose number of speakers is significant within a political community. Although it is not my aim to establish a threshold, it is also true that, in case of infrequently spoken languages, equal recognition would have to be adapted to the circumstances (for example, with a high degree of language protection but, at the same time, making their speakers competent in a bigger one). At the same time, in cases of extremely multilingual communities (not so common in western liberal democracies), I would propose that equal recognition require both a high grade of accommodation and protection and, at the same time, ensure that these speakers learn another 'bigger' language if their own language cannot provide them enough 'context of choice'.<sup>17</sup> Apart from that, it is important to point out some empirical research done on multilingualism in traditional societies.<sup>18</sup> Such studies explain how, in some traditional societies, it was normal to learn and have good competence in, at least, five languages (Diamond, 2015: 429). If that was so, it is not clear why we today are so reluctant about multilingualism, especially attacking it with arguments of unfeasibility. Of course, multilingual regimes are more difficult to structure than monolingual ones, but our world is very

diverse and, if we really believe in democracy and justice, we have to take into account and accommodate such diversity.

Secondly, the ‘Language protectionist’ objection might state that my proposal falls too short of protecting languages. Van Parijs (2011) would say that my proposal could drive weak languages to disappear, leading to an injustice. The maxi-min dynamics (and the Laponce Law<sup>19</sup>), as a socio-linguistic factor that naturally occurs, would modify language patterns, making people ‘need to adjust to other’s way of doing things, or others need to adjust to theirs’ (Patten, 2014: 222). This kind of process usually leads to reinforcing the strongest languages. In this case, the solution to this problem is territoriality, that is, understanding that each territory needs a ‘queen’ language.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, the fact that you, as a minority language speaker, are fully competent in a majority language, makes it less dramatic for you to lose your own language, because you already have access to a big context of choice. This can create some incentives, therefore, to abandon weaker languages. Against these arguments, I would say: (1) If everybody would indeed be multilingual the preconditions of the Laponce Law would not necessary apply.<sup>21</sup> The ‘Multilingual Convergence’ proposal would change the background conditions of domination and, hence, there would be no specific necessity for the weaker language speakers to change their language; (2) What is really important for a justice-related perspective is to ensure fair background conditions that avoid domination between language groups. Thereafter, it is people’s responsibility to maintain their languages. If, in spite of the existence of fair background conditions (equal recognition and non-segregation), people decided to abandon their language, we can consider them to be adopting a ‘fair resignation’ position (De Schutter, 2011). This loss might be regarded as a shame, but it is not an injustice; (3) Territoriality, as I have said, can harm

the dignity of non-recognized members and, then, make them more reluctant to participate in the community-wide debate. This non-recognition could even push this people to adopt a very unfriendly position towards the promoted language; (4) We are heading towards a more interdependent world, where the access to bigger contexts of choice would depend on the learning of big languages. Hence, the debate should not be about how we avoid the learning of these languages, but how we can learn them if we want to and, at the same time, guarantee the existence of the weaker ones.

To conclude, I think that despite the limitations of my proposal (especially the complexity of adapting it to a given context), I would argue that it satisfies all the principles that should guide an SPS: public deliberation, political equality and togetherness. It satisfies public deliberation because it makes the public sphere more open and because everyone could be understood using their own language. The possibility of using any recognized language and being understood, makes deliberation absolutely affordable. It also satisfies political equality because it takes into account all the (linguistic) interests of people (also during the transition period towards a fully realization of the model), allowing a discussion as peers without relations of domination along linguistic lines. Finally, it satisfies togetherness because it allows the accommodation of the different linguistic groups (equality), while, at the same time, the different existing ‘publics’ can interact among themselves in a more-or-less shared debate in the public sphere. The proposal allows ‘interpublic’ discussion, which shares the public space instead of keeping groups separated in their different linguistic communities. Moreover, as I have said, such a proposal could also be useful for dealing with other important values that are at stake in the linguistic justice debate such as the promotion of mobility or individual autonomy. Even some complex identity issues usually

linked with language diversity and inclusion could be accommodated, making room for complex ethnicities or bi-national attachments. Languages do not necessarily have to be understood as conflicting among them, but also as a joining tool, as a way to live together without leaving behind who we are (Ricento, 2014: 366).

## **Conclusion**

Throughout this paper I have intended to establish the principles for a just linguistic policy that allows for the existence of an SPS. I have done it trying to show: (1) how democracy is an indispensable tool carrying out principles of justice in any political community; (2) how an SPS is a central element for democracy and which principles should guide this institution; (3) the central role that language plays in such a sphere and how the existing normative linguistic models are not completely appropriate for maintaining an SPS in multilingual and mixed settings; and (4) the principles that should guide a linguistic regime in order to maintain a multilingual SPS. In that sense, I proposed two fundamental guiding principles to achieve linguistic justice and satisfy the three principles of an SPS. Both, equal recognition and the non-segregation principle, are indispensable for endorsing people's linguistic cooperation in a multilingual setting. In this sense, this paper is just an attempt to seek a 'morally justifiable pathway towards such cooperation' (Peled et al., 2014: 298). A pathway that wants to understand both the broad complexity around language issues and the inherent necessity of fair cooperation and communication. Because without fair (linguistic) cooperation, 'democratic politics is likely to be compromised' (Van Parijs, 2011: 28–31). Here, I have tried to defend a modest 'common sense' pathway towards such cooperation, a pathway of multilingual convergence.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> I will be focused on western liberal democracies due to their more developed institutional and democratic conditions, but also because of their linguistic situation. Some cases such as Spain (Catalonia, Galicia, Valencia, the Basque Country, Navarra and the Balearic Islands), the United Kingdom (Wales), Belgium (Brussels), Finland (the Swedish minority), Italy (South Tyrol) or Latvia (the Russian minority) are good examples of multilingual settings where linguistic communities are intermingled. Outside western democracies there are regions in Africa or South-east Asia that embrace thousands of languages. In such places, many of them with a colonial past, the normative proposals dealing with language diversity probably would be different than in western countries, where linguistic diversity is lower. Despite that, I will briefly address that issue at the end of the article.

<sup>2</sup> By host or autochthonous language groups, I understand ‘historic language groups’ whose language is spoken in a given territory and is ‘historically rooted’ in it (De Schutter, 2011: 201). I will use the term ‘historically rooted’ as languages talked usually and publicly by established and long-term integrated peoples. In that sense, I leave aside languages of immigrant groups. This does not mean that immigrant languages are not morally important. They are very important and a relevant source of conflict in some contexts. However, as Kymlicka (1995) explains, we need to analytically distinguish between immigrant claims of recognition and accommodation and host minority claims. In relation to migrant languages, I would defend a different kind of accommodation (for instance, to facilitate the learning of their own languages) and, at the same time, their duty to learn the languages of the welcoming society.

<sup>3</sup> Philip Pettit understands ‘non-domination’ as being free from arbitrary interferences (Pettit, 1997: chapter 2). That is, as not being dependent on another’s will without consent.

<sup>4</sup> As Michael Walzer (1992) argues, there are two kinds of liberalism: liberalism 1 and liberalism 2. On the one hand, liberalism 1 defends a ‘neutralist’ or ‘benign neglect’ position towards culture, where any culture should be promoted by the state and all citizens should have the same rights and same freedom to choose

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their own ends and sense of the good life. On the other hand, liberalism 2 understands culture as a prerequisite of freedom and individual autonomy.

<sup>5</sup> It might be better to call this model ‘Unilingual nation-building.’ That is so because there have been processes of nation-building that were (and are) in fact multilingual, the Swiss case for instance (Dardanelli and Stojanović, 2011). However, the *Nation-Building model* refers only to a monolingual way to construct the political community. A multilingual nation-building fits better in the *Linguistic Pluralism model* (applying the territoriality principle, as I will explain later).

<sup>6</sup> This is Van Parijs’ (2011) fear when he suggests to protect local languages in front of English applying the linguistic territoriality principle. In fact, he basically defends both to promote English as a global lingua franca in order to facilitate the conditions for attaining social justice worldwide and, at the same time, to endorse a territoriality principle for local languages in order to solve the ‘parity of esteem’ injustices produced by the expansion of English.

<sup>7</sup> I thank an anonymous reviewer for raising this point.

<sup>8</sup> It is important to admit that self-respect is not only achieved through ‘identity recognition’. Other factors such as socio-economic status can be decisive. However, we can agree that identity recognition is a necessary (but not sufficient) condition for self-respect.

<sup>9</sup> Alan Patten (2014: 213) defends these reasons to partly depart from prorated equal recognition and for giving priority to the language groups affected by them. Nonetheless, my main concern is that, empirically speaking, it is difficult to find situations without any kind of historical or economic injustices.

<sup>10</sup> I am assuming here that both ‘host’ majority and minority language speakers have a legitimate interest in using their languages publicly. Does this ‘legitimacy’ apply to non-host languages? If it is so, domination is at stake as well. On the one hand, though, I do think that migrants are not usually making such claims. On the other, I would say that, for instrumental reasons, such linguistic domination is almost inevitable. For instance, democratic deliberation requires not too many common languages to properly work. At the

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same time, though, I do think that some degree of linguistic recognition should be granted to migrants (for example, to facilitate the learning of their own languages if it is feasible), but not at the same level as host languages. It would not be feasible, even not desirable.

<sup>11</sup> I am making this non-segregation argument for multilingual political communities where the different linguistic groups are mixed and live together. It is not my intention to extend it beyond this scope, for example, questioning territorial self-government inside multinational states. I do not want to address the difficult question of ‘who is the *demos*’ but, rather take the multilingual and mixed *demos* as a given, focusing on looking at principles that should be applied to achieve a just linguistic regime (independently of whether the *demos* is a nation-state or a sub-unit of a nation-state).

<sup>12</sup> We could add more relevant examples, such as public media or the language of the public administration, but we do not have enough space to address the whole regulation.

<sup>13</sup> For a good argumentation against segregation (in general, but also in relation to children) see Trappenburg (2003).

<sup>14</sup> Although I am arguing against linguistic segregation, there are other kinds of segregation that are not going to be addressed. That does not mean that they are insignificant. They are relevant, but they go beyond the scope of my research.

<sup>15</sup> Stephen May (2010: 297–298) espouses several data and empirical works about how successful these kind of one- or two-way immersion models are in comparison with non-immersion ones.

<sup>16</sup> I start with the presumption that any normative proposal focused on institutions has the goal of influencing attitudes, trying to make people behave according to the proposed principles of justice.

<sup>17</sup> It is also true that, in extremely multilingual societies, not all the linguistic groups share the same concrete territory. Hence, a possible solution could be territorially dividing the political community. That is, dividing the country in such a way that several territories would contain only a small number of autochthonous

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languages. However, in those cases it probably would be necessary to spread a lingua franca across all the territories.

<sup>18</sup> Diamond defines a ‘traditional society’ as a small group of people who subsist on hunting, agriculture and herding. For a complete definition of ‘traditional society’ see Diamond (2015: 21).

<sup>19</sup> Also named the ‘Kindness-driven agony’. That is, ‘the nicer people are with one another, the nastiest languages are with each other’ (Van Parijs, 2000: 219).

<sup>20</sup> As I already explained in the third section of the paper, there are also some arguments pointing in a similar direction but coming from a more ‘nationalist’ perspective (see May, 2012: chapter 2; Wright, 2000). Those arguments set out the necessity of matching linguistic borders with political borders, especially through promoting linguistic homogenization policies based on instrumental (non-identity) reasons.

<sup>21</sup> There is some empirical evidence supporting that claim, especially based on the Catalan experience. Applying a non-segregated bilingual system (with a strong preferential treatment towards Catalan), Catalans have been successful in reversing language shift (Fishman, 1991). Vergés Gifra goes in the same direction. He shows useful linguistic data about Catalonia and argues that the Catalan model used to be a ‘reference in sociolinguistics and *language* politics’ (2012: 2–3; my emphasis).