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‘Struggling with language’

Indigenous movements for linguistic security and the politics of local community

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ABSTRACT In this article, I explore the relationship between linguistic diversity and political power. Specifically, I outline some of the ways that linguistic diversity has served as a barrier to the centralization of power, thus constraining, for example, the political practice of empire-formation. A brief historical example of this dynamic is presented in the case of Spanish colonialism of the 16th-century. The article proceeds then to demonstrate how linguistic diversity remains tied to struggles against forms of domination. I argue that in contemporary indigenous movements for linguistic security, the languages themselves are not merely conceived of as the object of the political struggle, but also as the means to preserve a space for local action and deliberation – a ‘politics of local community’. I show that linguistic diversity and the devolution of political power to the local level are in a mutually reinforcing relationship. Finally, I consider the implications of this thesis for liberal theorizing on language rights, arguing that such theory cannot fully come to terms with this political-strategic dimension of language struggles.

KEYWORDS imperialism ● indigenous peoples ● liberal political theory ● linguistic diversity

We are struggling with language.
We are engaged in a struggle with language.
L. Wittgenstein (1980: 11)

A HISTORICAL PORTRAIT OF LANGUAGE AND EMPIRE

When the masterpiece of the Castilian language, written by noted humanist scholar Antonio de Nebrija, was presented to Spain’s Queen Isabella in

1492, it could not have been known how prophetic its words would be. Nebrija had penned his thoughts not only on the structure of Castilian, but also on the concept of linguistic unification and the practice of empire-building. Nebrija had the recent unification of Spain in mind, not the colonization of America. Nevertheless, as word of the 'discovery' of the 'New World' soon spread, Nebrija's words took on new significance. The *Gramática Castellana* 'crystallized the Castilian queen's approach and set forth a principle which succeeding Spanish monarchs were to try to adopt in their official language policies at home and in Spain's colonies' (Heath, 1972: 6). Nebrija's work was the 'new guide, the new model of domination for the emerging empire'¹ of Europe (Ruán, 2002: 37). In summing up his thoughts, Nebrija (1980: 97) reminded the Queen that 'language has always been the companion of empire'.²

Despite the experience that the Spanish Crown had in implementing a unified language policy as an instrument of empire, it took a further 80 years before the practice itself could be perfected in the colonial setting. At first, it seemed the Spanish had learned nothing from their domestic experience with language and politics. Columbus, for example, simply refused to acknowledge that the indigenous peoples he encountered spoke different languages at all. In his journal, he noted that his right to claim the land for the Spanish Crown was secure, since the indigenous peoples did not contradict him when he stated it so, ignoring of course that they did not understand him. Columbus repeatedly failed to comprehend the fact of linguistic diversity at all. As Todorov has written:

Columbus's failure to recognize the diversity of languages permits him, when he confronts a foreign tongue, only two possible, and complementary, forms of behavior: to acknowledge it as a language but refuse to believe it is different; or to acknowledge its difference but refuse to admit it is a language. (Todorov, 1999: 30)

This policy of willful ignorance allowed Columbus, and those who immediately followed him, superficial control. The archetypal example of this is the 'Requirement', a document of lawful possession, drafted in 1513 at the request of King Ferdinand. The 'Requirement' derived from a papal bull issued by Pope Alexander II and mandated that the Indians submit to the authority of the Catholic Church and allow the Spanish to preach the Christian faith to them. If the Indians did not accept these terms, the conquistadors were legally justified in conquest and violence. The Spanish would, in this event, be mandated to 'do all the harm and damage that we can' (text of the 'Requirement', quoted in Hanke, 1949: 33).

Of course, in order for the 'Requirement' to be anything other than a conceptual absurdity, translation would have been necessary. The indigenous peoples of the Americas, at the very least, would have had to have been capable of understanding the text itself in order to have properly agreed (or

disagreed) with its content. In the early stage of conquest, however, comprehension was not in the interest of the Spanish. Thus, the terms of the 'Requirement' – and the meagre measures of restraint it did impose on the conquistadores – were often ignored. Hanke details how the 'Requirement was read to trees and empty huts when no Indians were to be found. Captains muttered its theological phrases into their beards on the edge of sleeping Indian settlements, or even a league away before starting the formal attack' (Hanke, 1949: 34). The verbal act itself was all that was required; actual translation would have been a hindrance to the larger goal of colonization.

The denial characteristic of both the 'Requirement' and Columbus's policies was not, however, politically effective. In refusing to acknowledge the linguistic diversity of the Americas, the early conquistadores could not take control over it. A policy that aggressively combated the linguistic barrier would be needed if the Spanish were to conquer the indigenous nations they confronted. The first stage of this linguistic control was the use of indigenous peoples as translators. The most famous of these is Doña Marina, also known as *La Malinche*, a persona who has lived on in Mexican folklore as a complicated symbol of both *mestizo* pride and shame.³ One of the conquistadores talks about Marina's decision to join the Spanish and work with them as 'the great beginning of our conquests' (quoted in Heath, 1972: 11).

The first policy regarding translation services in colonial Mexico was that Indians were to learn Spanish; no Spaniards were to learn indigenous languages. This policy, formalized in 1550 by King Philip II, was most often carried out through a policy of kidnapping (Karttunen, 2000). However, this had an unforeseen effect. It permitted communication between the Spanish vice-royalty and the indigenous peoples, but it did nothing to reduce the linguistic diversity of the continent itself and, furthermore, it placed the power of the translator firmly in the hands of the Indians (Heath, 1972: 11; Ligorred, 1992: 54). The Spanish humanist Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, writing in 1535, noted this problem and argued that without knowledge of the indigenous languages, 'the Christians were as if muzzled, asking questions by signs; and being answered with signs, they gathered meaning only by chance' (quoted in Lerner, 2000: 283). The indigenous translators soon learned that their control over this linguistic boundary between colonizer and colonized put them in a privileged position. They grew in wealth and status during this short era, drawing the resentment of many Spaniards who were at a very real disadvantage. Historian Shirley Brice Heath writes that:

[the] *nagualtatos*, or Indian translators, learned not only the conqueror's tongue but also his deceptions. Interpreters assigned to local courts did not truthfully translate Indians' statements before judicial officials . . . Salaries of interpreters were paid by local civil officials who found it to their advantage to place no

curbs on Indian mediators who went about collecting their own salaries. (Heath, 1972: 12)

Naguatlatos were already well aware of the political power of translation, since many of them came from the Aztec elite and, in the era prior to European contact, had been instrumental in the linguistic practices of the Aztec empire over its tributaries. Indeed, it is well noted that the Aztec viewed the linguistic diversity of their tributaries as an obstacle to full political control, and they sought to replace local languages with the dominant Nahuatl.⁴ Nahuatl in 15th- and 16th-century Mexico was in a comparable position to Latin in Europe⁵ (Mignolo, 2003: 54), 'not only in its use as a lingua franca, but also in its acceptance as the standard language for science, art, and the education of the elite.' (Heath, 1972: 4–5) The Aztec, long before the Spanish, had realized the power inherent in destroying local languages, both because it facilitated actual communication between the centre and the peripheries, but also because the 'destruction of the accumulated knowledge and history of a people . . . offered the possibility of rewriting history and reinventing knowledge' (King, 1994: 37).⁶

As noted above, the original policy of employing indigenous translators had ambiguous results from the Spanish perspective. The processes of translation were still in the hands of the Indians themselves, a fact that severely hampered Spanish attempts at political control and religious conversion. As long as linguistic diversity existed in Mexico, the Spanish conquistadores, and the Aztec before them, could not gain full control over their subjects. Even if there was one dominant language, as long as there were hundreds (perhaps thousands) of others, the control over translation and education could never be effectively wielded by the Spanish Crown. Indigenous peoples themselves, from each linguistic group, would still possess a very practical and powerful tool to distance themselves from the central political power. This realization meant that the Spaniards soon began a campaign to effectively eradicate linguistic diversity amongst the indigenous populations under their control. They did this in the most efficient means possible, by appropriating the imperial system already in place, set up by the Aztec. Heath writes:

Faced with the plenitude of languages they met beyond the central valley of Mexico, the regulars insisted the number of languages in New Spain had to be reduced. They reasoned that if they continued the program begun by the Aztecs of spreading Nahuatl, use of other Indian tongues would decline. (Heath, 1972: 23)

Recognizing that 'there could never be enough polyglot missionaries to ensure the "spiritual conquest" of New Spain', Philip II came to see the diversity of languages in New Spain as 'a threat to the missionary effort and the establishment of his sovereignty on a firm Catholic basis in the colony' (Heath, 1972: 26; see also King, 1994: 43–5). Thus, by 1570, the Spanish

Crown completely reversed its previous policy (Mignolo, 2003: 56). Nahuatl was to become the official language of New Spain, and all Spaniards were obligated to master it.

Of course, the Spanish wanted in the long run to force the indigenous peoples to speak Castilian since, for them, it was the key to their religious and cultural practices. However, there was another more immediate motive, namely securing direct political control over the colonized. This required the eradication of linguistic diversity through whatever means possible, even if it didn't lead directly to the increased use of Spanish; hence the policy of enforcing Nahuatl on the population as a means to unify the country linguistically. This new policy not only served to reduce the total linguistic diversity of the region, it also shifted the power of translation into the hands of the Spanish. A new class of bilingual Spaniards, mostly members of the clergy, rose to pre-eminent positions in the vice-royalty, because 'as the linguistic barrier remained standing they were indispensable intermediaries between the Indians and the civil officer, between their Orders and the Episcopal authority. They were the lords and masters of their parishioners' (Ricard, 1966: 52). The dominance of the clergy would not be broken until as late as 1770, when the imposition of Spanish could finally be a realizable goal and thus Charles II could decree a new language policy in the Americas that no longer required the translation services of this educated elite (Lerner, 2000: 287). This was backed by the Archbishop of Mexico, Francisco Antonio Lorenzana y Buitrón, who, concerned with what he 'perceived as the multiplication of Amerindian languages in the area of Mexico, Puebla, and Oaxaca' (Mignolo, 2003: 59), argued that 'There has never been a Cultured Nation in the World, that when it extended its Conquests, did not attempt the same with its Language' (quoted in Mignolo, 2003: 59).

CENTRALIZATION AND THE STRUGGLE FOR LOCAL COMMUNITY

The brief sketch presented above is offered as a form of exemplary history that allows some key theoretical insights to rise to the fore of any discussion about the political significance of language policy and linguistic diversity. As I attempted to demonstrate through the case of Spanish colonialism (and, I think the same applies to the period of Aztec hegemony in the 15th-century), the practitioners of empire have in many cases understood the negative relationship between linguistic diversity and the centralization of political power. They have seen that 'language has always been the companion of empire'.

Despite the central place that language policy has played in the history of colonialism and state formation, it seems to have received relatively

scant normative theorizing. In this article, I hope to contribute to remedying this 'striking gap' (Kymlicka and Patten, 2003: 1) in the literature by exploring some of the explicitly political dimensions to linguistic diversity. In particular, I will be focusing on collective movements aimed at the revival, maintenance or secure use of the languages of indigenous peoples. Borrowing a term from Denise Réaume (1994), I will gather these examples under the broad heading of 'indigenous movements for linguistic security'.

My contention here is that such movements may be aimed at the preservation of a space for what Alasdair MacIntyre has called 'the politics of local community'. MacIntyre defines this as action and reflection 'upon local political structures, as these have developed through some particular social and cultural tradition'. Such a politics allows for the opening of space in which the local community 'embodies and gives expression to an ordering of different human goods and therefore also embodies and gives expression to some particular conception of the human good' (MacIntyre, 1998: 246–7). In the space given to me below, I will explore how linguistic diversity may help to preserve this kind of politics and to demonstrate that in indigenous movements for linguistic security, the languages themselves are not merely conceived of as the *ends* of the political struggle, but is also the *means* to preserve such a space for local action and deliberation – for self-determination conceived of in this broad sense. I will attempt to show that linguistic diversity and the devolution of political power to the local level are in a mutually reinforcing relationship. As power is local, so local languages may flourish; as local languages flourish, so will there be pressure to devolve power.

The work of James C. Scott is also helpful in bringing to light some of the more important theoretical concepts at work in the relationship between linguistic diversity and the politics of local community. Scott (1998) has discussed the specific case of the linguistic unification in France (which was most pronounced as an official policy in the mid to late 19th-century) and its impact on local centres of political power. He writes in regards to the 'campaign of linguistic centralization' that '[o]ne can hardly imagine a more effective formula for immediately devaluing local knowledge and privileging all those who had mastered the official linguistic code. It was a gigantic shift in power' (Scott, 1998: 72). More important, however, are not the historical examples Scott provides, but rather the theoretical framework that he illuminates for us. It is perhaps ironic that Scott's thesis on 'legibility' and centralized power has not been explicitly discussed in the context of linguistic diversity. Indeed, Scott speaks of the process of rendering local communities 'legible', 'readable' and 'intelligible' in a predominantly metaphorical sense, yet the terms may take on new importance if we consider them more literally. Consider the following passage:

Historically, the relative illegibility to outsiders of some urban neighbourhoods (or of their rural analogues, such as hills, marshes, and forests) has provided a vital margin of political safety from control by outside elites. A simple way of determining whether this margin exists is to ask if an outsider would have needed a local guide (a native tracker) in order to find her way successfully. If the answer is yes, then the community or terrain in question enjoys at least a small measure of insulation from outside intrusion . . . Illegibility, then, has been and remains a reliable resource for political autonomy. (Scott, 1998: 54)

In the case of state powers seeking to comprehend the words and texts of local communities by rendering their languages obsolete, we might think in more literal terms about 'legibility' than even Scott intends. On this reading, linguistic diversity may constitute the most persistent and obvious example of such a 'resource for political autonomy', since negotiating local communities with different languages requires a *literal* translation, and a translator as a 'local guide'.⁷

I have already touched on this relationship in the historical context of Mexican colonization.⁸ But is it of relevance to contemporary indigenous movements? Surely the political practices of domination and resistance at play in 16th-century Mexico are of little assistance in illuminating 21st-century realities. I suggest otherwise. I argue instead that linguistic diversity is still intimately related to struggles for local community power. This is particularly so in the case of indigenous communities residing within dominant European-style states such as Canada, the United States, New Zealand and Australia. In contemporary settings, the general notion that linguistic diversity serves as a barrier to centralized power is still at play, though the particulars of its functioning have changed (and indeed, vary from place to place).

CONTEMPORARY STRUGGLES FOR LINGUISTIC SECURITY

The preservation of linguistic diversity may not only be desirable as a good in itself;⁹ it is also a means to the realization of a politics of local community. It therefore implicates the freedom and autonomy of indigenous peoples. This may function in numerous ways, and I make no claims to an exhaustive summary of them. Five of the more important political dynamics that I have been able to identify in contemporary language struggles are offered below.

The first way in which linguistic diversity may serve the interests of political action is through the existence of communicative barriers. The ability to exclude outsiders from conversation and knowledge sharing is an important part of wanting to preserve minority languages. Anthropologist Donna Bonner (2001: 85) quotes a 32-year-old Garifuna woman in Belize, expressing her pleasure at this ability:

Usually I say that whenever I talk [speak in Garifuna], they [members of other ethnic groups] would want to know what I'm talking about . . . But they do not know what I'm saying [Laugh]. I can gossip. I can say whatsoever I want to say, and they just keep standing. I can curse. I can say funny things, and they do not understand. They just stand there. I can say something funny about them and they don't understand [laughing]. They do not understand! All these funny words. Ah ha. But they good words. Very good words.

This 'sound power' (Bonner, 2001: 85) is an important part of the political interest at stake in the preservation of minority languages. Of course, exclusive practices such as these are employed by dominant communities all the time. As already noted, the requirement to read and write French immediately excluded minority language communities outside of Paris and allowed the French government to centralize power (May, 2001: 156–63; Scott, 1998: 72). When employed by central powers, this exclusionary practice is aimed in the long run at the reduction of linguistic diversity, since it serves the interests of those in power to institutionalize their means of communication as the only legitimate one. However, simply because it is employed by dominant ethnic and linguistic communities should not blind us to the fact that it may also be employed by minorities.

Secondly, there is a shift towards the increased autonomy of local communities through the educational and employment benefits that flow from language recognition. Stated bluntly, where indigenous languages are recognized, indigenous peoples cannot be completely removed from the larger processes of decision making surrounding their communities. Mohawk scholar Kaia'titahkhe Annette Jacobs writes that before projects to restore the Kanien'kéha (Mohawk) language were initiated, 'the only thing native in our schools was the children' (Jacobs, 1998: 117). Māori scholars have noted the same thing. What might initially be mistaken as a purely symbolic claim to 'preserve a language' is a beginning of 'a shift toward Māori taking more control over the key decision-making and organization of their own education' (Smith, 2000: 65–6; see also May, 2001: 301). Whereas previously, Māori education policy had 'almost always been developed by Pakeha [non-Māori] administrators' (Smith, 2000: 61), once the language was recognized as a political fact, this was no longer possible – it opened up space for the questioning of 'Pakeha power and control . . . exerted through selective decision-making, hegemonic influence, economic control preferences, and so on' (Smith, 2000: 62).

The full recognition of indigenous language rights implicates the substantive content of education and knowledge transfer in a community. To give a concrete example of this third political aspect, we might imagine a school where an indigenous language is being revived. Not only will there be more indigenous peoples teaching in this school, but the curriculum itself will reflect indigenous values and interests better than one set by non-indigenous peoples. Where indigenous languages exist and are affirmed

– where they are the medium of education – indigenous peoples will be involved in the setting of curriculum to a degree not required in a system dominated by an outside language. This means a reduction in the assumed superior status of non-indigenous educators (since they are simply not equipped to build indigenous-language curriculum), and a subsequent increase in the standing of indigenous educators (and elders). Thus, a change in the medium of education will transform the content (Leavitt, 1995). In the case of bilingual Navajo-English programmes developed in Arizona, the Navajo portion of the educational content was developed by people in the community: with their stories, their input, their style of learning and teaching. The TESL (teaching English as a second language) material, by contrast, formed at UCLA, was perceived as 'rigid', 'remedial' and focused on 'specific Anglo experience' and material that included almost exclusively pictures of 'a White family dressed in clothes reminiscent of illustrations in the "Dick and Jane" readers' (McCarty, 2002: 96–8). It is a simple fact that if indigenous languages are encouraged, this will implicate the substantive content of education and knowledge transfer, allowing for greater contributions from indigenous peoples themselves.

The increased local autonomy and responsibility that comes with devolving power over language-related realms of activity (especially school) may have a fourth effect. In places where linguistic diversity has been affirmed, and power over related realms has been devolved, indigenous peoples express an increased sense of empowerment and capacity to realize their own agency. Māori writer Graham Hingangaroa Smith argues:

the revolution of 1982 [the establishment of Te Kohanga Reo; independent, parent-driven, Māori language preschools] may be significant not so much as a language revitalization initiative, but as a major shift in the thinking of Māori people with respect to no longer waiting for a 'benevolent' Pakeha society to deliver on Māori aspirations. On the contrary, they assumed increased responsibility for developing the social transformation of their own lives. (Smith, 2000: 64)

This suggests that teaching in one's own language may have an important effect of empowering the teachers, as well as the students, to shed negative images of themselves by enabling them to regain control over their own lives (Dejean, 1999).¹⁰ This increased empowerment is politically relevant since it tends to 'cascade' into wider and wider realms of life. Just as Māori preschool programmes 'led to similar resistance initiatives all the way up the education ladder' (Smith, 2000: 65), so too may the developing of models of resistance move completely beyond the narrow realm of education and schooling (generally the first and most directly impacted realm of movements to revive indigenous languages). Augie Fleras (1993: 31) confirms the 'cascade effect' of the language revitalization movement in Aotearoa/New Zealand:

The social impact and policy implications have been nothing short of startling: the Kohanga Reo has resulted in (a) the politicization of aboriginal issues in a relatively unthreatening manner; (b) the legitimation of aboriginal claims as valid and necessary in a bicultural society; (c) the presentation of aboriginal demands on terms that central policy structures can relate to; and (d) the mobilization of the Māori public around the principle of Māori self-determination.

Referring again to the case of Navajo language revival, the school was seen as an epicentre for larger political transformations in relations between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples. The school, 'not only *not* an indigenous institution but a historically repressive one' was suddenly transformed into an 'agent of community empowerment' (McCarty, 2002: 99). In this same case, once Navajo community members were more directly involved in the education of their own children due to demands for Navajo-speakers, they began to question larger problems in Navajo-US relations, such as the community's 'utter dependence on government funding' (Fettes, 1992: 19, quoting Fishman, 1991). In this case, the community began to demand further resources from the Federal government, resources that were eventually cut back rather than extended, resulting in the demise of the language revival programmes (Fettes, 1992: 19).

The final way in which contemporary language claims may be seen as part of a larger process of political transformation is in the way they alter the demands placed on non-indigenous peoples exterior to the community. One of the key features of asymmetrical power relations is that the minority communities pay disproportionately the costs of intercultural exchange. The existence and recognition of linguistic diversity within colonial states may help to shift some of this burden onto the non-indigenous peoples. The best example of this lies with the implications of linguistic diversity for centralized bureaucracies. In the context of Aotearoa/New Zealand for example, the fact of official language status for Māori (established in 1987) has meant that non-Māori people working in the Ministry of Māori Development are encouraged to learn some of the indigenous language. This requires the non-Māori staff to go and live in a Māori community and be taught by Māori people. As of 2001, approximately 30,000 non-Māori people spoke the Māori language and the Government of New Zealand (2003) has recently identified increasing this number as a priority. The same situation can be found in the local bureaucracy of Nunavut, Canada, where English- or French-speaking administrators from the south are encouraged to learn some Inuktitut as a means to career advancement. Where linguistic diversity flourishes, non-indigenous peoples are pressed to learn more about indigenous peoples' communities, and to bear some of the burdens of intercultural exchange.

THEORIZING INDIGENOUS STRUGGLES

To this point, I have ventured to demonstrate two things. First, the capacity of colonized peoples to speak languages that differed from those of the colonizing forces around them has been used to subvert the logic of imperialism in very practical ways. Those in a position of dominance have tended to recognize the power implicated in linguistic barriers and have sought to remove these obstacles to render colonized peoples more legible to centralized control. This process has been aimed at facilitating the movement of knowledge, people, and power flowing between the center and the periphery. It has also been used to assimilate the colonial subject in an attempt to erase the distance between center and periphery. To this end, linguistic diversity has been attacked by colonizers. This was illustrated through the historical case of 16th-century Mexico.

Second, I asked whether movements for the use, maintenance and revival of indigenous languages in contemporary settings can be seen to exhibit some of these same dynamics. In particular, I've argued that such movements are, in part, aimed at opening up spaces for a politics of local community – that is, the spaces of self-determination centred on the most local level of politics: the school, the church, the community centre. We have seen how the space away from centralized power afforded by linguistic diversity is manifested in new ways in the contemporary setting of the liberal nation state (drawing primarily from the cases of Aotearoa/New Zealand, Canada, and the United States). These movements have challenged asymmetrical power relations in quiet ways – by giving indigenous peoples greater control over the education of their children, by excluding non-indigenous peoples from certain spaces, and by inviting non-indigenous peoples into communities on more equal grounds (to name only a few of the examples listed above). In short, movements for linguistic security have been, in central ways, movements for political change, agency and freedom.

If it is right to state that there is an inverse relationship between linguistic diversity and the centralization of power, and if it is right to claim that movements for linguistic security are aspects of larger political struggles, then the challenge now is to incorporate these themes into contemporary theorizing on language rights and language policy. To this end, I propose now to examine how contemporary political theory may, or may not, accommodate such concepts. It is my contention in this final section that much of contemporary theorizing on language in political philosophy has not been sufficiently attentive to this political aspect of linguistic survival strategies and, as a result, we run the risk of curtailing the struggles of indigenous peoples unnecessarily.

Political philosopher Alan Patten has offered 'sustained normative reflection' (2001: 692) on the nature of language policy within the broader

framework of the literature surrounding multiculturalism that has been pre-eminent in political theory for the last 20 years or so. Patten identifies two main problems that have arisen from language politics: that of public recognition and individual linguistic autonomy. He writes:

According to my terminology, a language enjoys public recognition when it is possible to access public services and/or conduct public business in that language . . . An individual enjoys linguistic autonomy, I will say, to the extent that he is free from state interference to select which language he will use in various non-public domains and which of the publicly recognized languages he will use in various public domains. (Patten, 2001: 692)

Patten then identifies three different policy models used to respond to the challenges posed by these two language-based claims. These models are, 'official multilingualism,' 'language rationalization', and 'language maintenance' (Patten, 2001: 693–4). After discussing the merits and weaknesses of the other two models, eventually Patten declares that 'the official multilingualism model . . . is the most ethically appropriate default position and thus the one to opt for except where some sufficiently strong challenge to it can be mounted', and, importantly for him, it 'embodies an attractive idea of equality that is central to much contemporary liberal thought' (Patten, 2001: 694–5). On the surface of it, this seems to encapsulate much of the political dimension of indigenous movements for linguistic security. But first we must inquire into what justifies such a multilingual model.

Following Kymlicka's work on culture, Patten identifies three primary interests in language. These include communication, symbolic affirmation and identity promotion (Patten, 2001: 695).¹¹ Patten reminds us that

[t]he first and most obvious good that is achieved through recognition of some language *L* is accommodation of the communication needs of *L*-speakers who lack fluency in any of the other languages that are used in public settings . . . In general, those who cannot, because of their linguistic capabilities, access public services or participate meaningfully in the conduct of public business will encounter more obstacles to achieving their ends and are vulnerable to having their rights and interests overlooked. (Patten, 2001: 695–6)

An obvious example of a claim based on the communication interest would be the right of minority language speakers to have court proceedings translated for them if they are on trial, where the language of the court is not intelligible to them.

Symbolic affirmation is based on the belief that '[b]eing offered a service or having some piece of public business conducted in one's language is for many a sign of consideration and respect' (Patten, 2001: 696). Here, Patten borrows from Charles Taylor's work by pointing out that '[e]njoying the consideration and respect of others, in turn, seems crucial to developing a full sense of one's own worth and an undistorted sense of one's agency and identity' (Patten, 2001: 696; Taylor, 1993, 1994).¹² He might have also added

the negative corollary to this, that misrecognition does not just show 'a lack of due respect', but may actually constitute 'a grievous wound, saddling its victims with a crippling self-hatred' (Taylor, 1994: 26). Under this heading, we might imagine a workspace with Anglophones and Francophones working together, all of whom are bilingual, but who never speak French since the Anglophones are numerically dominant. There would be no communicative interest in speaking French, since English would be intelligible to all, but there might be an interest based on symbolic affirmation.

The final interest Patten identifies, identity promotion, makes the strongest claim. Patten writes that because 'language is a central and defining feature of identity,' that members of a community may identify one another based on their language, then the promotion of language rights may be in the interests of the long-term 'survival and flourishing' of the group itself (Patten, 2001: 697). The classic example of this can again be found in Taylor, where he speaks of the Québécois aspiration to 'assuring that future generations continue to identify as French-speakers' (Taylor, 1994: 59).

If, according to Patten, these are the grounds on which language-based claims are made, where do we place indigenous movements for linguistic security? They clearly are not advanced on the basis of a 'communicative interest', since this tends towards linguistic unification, not diversification. In the case, for example, of a language claim advanced in a courtroom setting, translation may solve the problem and satisfy the claim, but a long-term policy of linguistic assimilation would solve the problem in an even more effective manner.

Furthermore, as I have tried to demonstrate above, such movements cannot be reduced to a symbolic affirmation interest, since they are often aimed at the enlargement of a space for a politics of local community *away from* the dominant state. They are about gaining autonomy from the need to derive one's agency from state affirmation at all. More will be discussed about this dynamic below.

Finally, I do not think they can be called solely 'identity promotion' movements either, since they do not aim only at 'future generations', but also at realigning power asymmetries here and now. One of the unfortunate (and undoubtedly unintended) legacies of Taylor's influence on the literature is that often minority language claims have been discussed as primarily orientated towards the *survival* of the language itself (1994: 58). What I have been trying to demonstrate, however, is that there are real and immediate political implications to language claims that cannot be reduced to such a formulation. As such, indigenous movements for linguistic diversity defy constriction within the current formulation of a typology of claims.

This is a case, one might argue, for expanding the typology, not for discarding it altogether. Perhaps we should add something like a 'political

empowerment', or 'power realignment' interest to linguistic claims. I still don't think this would be adequate, however, since the typology of rights is, prior to the breakdown of claims, already circumscribed by a larger demand that would per se rule out the kind of political dynamic to which I am trying to give theoretical voice. In order to observe this, let us return to Patten.

A typology of rights envisioned by Patten, and others, has as its larger aim the circumscribing of claims that are legitimate to liberal theory. That is to say, the overriding concern is with facilitating equality, conceived of as within the bounds of the liberal-democratic state. Patten's otherwise robust theory of language rights places limits on the degree to which these claims may extend on the grounds that they must lead to:

institutional arrangements that enhance equality of opportunity and reduce social exclusion, facilitate discussion between all citizens and make democracy more responsive to deliberation, encourage a shared political identity fostering civic virtues and dispositions, and make for a more efficient public sector, one that frees up time and resources for allocation to other priorities. (Patten, 2001: 702)

In a context whereby state language policy or minority language claims do not facilitate these kinds of institutional arrangements, these policies and claims would not be justified and, instead, we would be forced to consider 'linguistic rationalization' (read assimilation). In the end, however, Patten argues that the institutionalization of language rights does not violate these primary (liberal) principles, and thus a policy of official multilingualism and language maintenance need not be illiberal. He reassures us that '[t]he advantages associated with linguistic convergence can be secured without actual convergence if and to the extent that some or all of a number of conditions are met' (i.e. widespread translation services, institutional completeness within linguistic communities, etc.). Furthermore, he writes:

[i]t is far from clear that denying recognition to some particular language would encourage speakers of that language to integrate into a common identity with majority-language speakers. Even if nonrecognition did bring about a language shift, the identity difference may survive or even be magnified by the way in which this is done . . . Paradoxically, the best way to promote a common identity is sometimes to allow difference to flourish. (Patten, 2001: 704–5¹³)

The end goal, in each of the three interests described by Patten – indeed, in any legitimate language claim – is the promotion of a common identity and the integration of citizens within the larger state.

What I want to suggest now is that such a liberal theory of language rights is very helpful for coming to terms with certain claims, but is limited for understanding indigenous movements for linguistic security, since many such movements, as we have seen, are not aimed at the goal of further integration into the dominant society at all. In fact, in many cases, linguistic security movements facilitate the creation of a 'space away' from the

state structure. Richard Day has also commented on how 'speaking only about the inclusion of *all* groups within a *single* society' can lead to a misunderstanding of the claims of indigenous peoples and the failure 'to fully grasp the existence of relations of power that exist between disparate identities. This theory therefore cannot comprehend a situation where a group might desire greater autonomy from, rather than greater integration within, a dominant form of social life such as a white settler state' (Day, 2001: 176). This is due, in part, to the fact that, from the standpoint of the suppressed peoples, the problem of preserving linguistic diversity only comes about as a result of the historical fact of a colonizing power that takes assimilation as one of its key means of establishing domination (Tully, 2005). Only by setting linguistic claims within this historical context (as I have alluded to above) can we see the specifically political anti-imperial nature of these claims. Otherwise, the claims appear to be relatively apolitical in relation to the 'backdrop' of the colonial state. This de-politicizing of movements for linguistic security therefore serves to legitimize the original (and, too often, ongoing¹⁴) colonial practices that created the 'problem of declining diversity' in the first place. As Tove Skutnabb-Kangas (1996: 130) has argued:

[one way] of making languages disappear at the same time as the State retains its legitimacy in the eyes of most of its citizens and the international community, seems to be for a state to observe, or to be seen as observing, several of the basic human rights for all of its citizens including minorities, but to *deny the minorities* those human rights which are most central for reproducing a minority group as a distinctive group, namely, *linguistic and cultural human rights*.

The colonial state is the generator of the inequalities that lead to a decline in linguistic diversity and the more general assimilation of indigenous peoples. Only once we recognize this can we begin to see languages, as Feldman (2001: 168) argues we should see other beliefs and practices: 'as intimate parts of the struggle with the state and of cultural survival, rather than remnants of the past handed down through the generations'. In this respect, then, indigenous movements for linguistic diversity may be aimed at a much more transformative process than current liberal theory can allow, and the process of de-linking movements for linguistic security from the historical processes that create the 'crises' in the first place may itself contribute to the problem.¹⁵

I do not mean to imply that political theorists have been unaware of how language-based claims may distance minority communities from the dominant form of social life. However, because political theorists (from differing traditions) have been mostly concerned with the possibly negative implications of this, they have failed to see its important positive use in the case of indigenous peoples. The issue has been approached either from the perspective of Kymlicka's 'internal restrictions' or in the terminology of 'social mobility'. David Laitin and Rob Reich sum up the first of these:

Such measures [for language preservation] do indeed protect the ability of adult members of national minorities to exercise their freedom *within* their societal cultures. But they also require coercive restraints on the children of these same adults, for their opportunities to learn the language of some broader societal culture will be curtailed. With respect to children, then, external protections can become internal restrictions. (Laitin and Reich, 2003: 91–2)¹⁶

The fear being expressed in such a statement is that the very process of ‘distancing’, which is embedded in movements for linguistic security, may unjustly restrict the interests of children. Thus, in this formulation, the politically transformative effects of indigenous language movements may per se be inadmissible to a liberal typology of rights, since they do not necessarily further the ability of children to access the broader societal culture.

The second way this logic unfolds is via the terminology of ‘social mobility’, a formulation of the argument that attracts a surprising range of theorists. Jacob Levy argues that because communicative range matters in determining the social mobility of children, ‘then we must often admit that language preservation policies are not in children’s interests’ (Levy, 2003: 239). Joseph Carens reminds us that because, in Canada, no indigenous languages are spoken by millions of people, ‘no aboriginal person can routinely expect to communicate with doctors, lawyers, dentists, bureaucrats, television technicians, and so on in her native language, much less to find employment in that language in the economy outside the reserve’. Consequently, ‘[t]here is a deep tension, which aboriginal people experience daily, between secure access to their cultures (which are themselves threatened in various ways by the forces of modernization) and access to other primary goods like income, wealth, opportunities, and power’ (Carens, 2000: 60).¹⁷ Finally, Thomas Pogge extends and expands the logic, arguing that such a position cannot hold only for indigenous peoples and their languages, but is true of Hispanics, and possibly all minority language communities. He writes that ‘a public education in a minority language – and one that, by assumption, is endangered in the US – is not equal, because it does not give children the same opportunities to participate in the social, economic, and political life of this country’ (Pogge, 2003: 116). Later, arguing for a principle of English First,¹⁸ Pogge states that because ‘the most important linguistic competence for children now growing up in the US is the ability to communicate in English’, all educational programmes in the United States (and by the logic of the argument, one could extend the realm much further) must therefore be developed ‘by reference to the goal of effectively helping pupils develop fluency in English’ (Pogge, 2003: 118–9).¹⁹

Even coming from the perspective of democratic deliberative theory, we may hear this tone. Consider the limiting function employed in the following quote from Seyla Benhabib:

I would suggest that under principles of discourse ethics, any educational system that denies the exposure of children to the most advanced form of knowledge and inquiry available to humankind is unjustifiable . . . The obligation of the liberal-democratic state is to protect not only 'the social mobility' of its young . . . but their equal right to develop their moral and intellectual faculties as full human beings and future citizens as well. (Benhabib, 2002: 123)

What these theorists have in common, besides a generally liberal framework of thought, is their sincere desire to protect the interests of vulnerable people within minority groups; hence the concern for the social mobility of children. This concern is of great importance and the increasingly central place that children play in contemporary political theory is to be applauded. However, framing the discussion of indigenous movements for linguistic security within this terminology has the unfortunate consequence of obscuring some of the most important elements of the issue.

There are many possible objections to the 'social mobility' argument as it is deployed against movements for linguistic security.²⁰ Rather than rehearse them all, I want to focus on one problem that is central to the claims of indigenous peoples. Put simply, checking the justness of indigenous movements for linguistic security against the test of social mobility within the dominant society is inappropriate, since the colonial context in which indigenous peoples find themselves means that many of these movements – as I have attempted to demonstrate above – are specifically aimed at creating a space away from the dominant society itself. If indigenous peoples must prove how their movements facilitate the integration of their children into the dominant society around them, this has the consequence of legitimating, and even facilitating, the colonial context of oppression and domination itself. Consider again Benhabib's comments above and, in particular, her concern for the development of 'future citizens'. The question is: citizens of what community? If the dominant European-style nation state is assumed as the community, then language-based programmes must be orientated towards the development of good citizens within such a community. But, as I have demonstrated above, indigenous movements to linguistic security don't always facilitate such development. In fact, at times, they are specifically designed to disrupt such development. This is not to say that they, by necessity, restrict the development of good citizens, but often they are orientated towards the development of good *Cree*, or *Maya*, or *Navajo* citizens, and rightly so.²¹

In the case of indigenous peoples, language may be both the *object* of the practices, and the *means* – a right and a resource (Kontra et al., 1999). In other words, it may not be simply the use, preservation and revival of indigenous languages that are facilitated by such movements, but also the use, preservation and revival of local centres of self-determination, in which communities may debate and develop alternative conceptions of the common good to overlap with, complement, and at times, rival those of the

dominant society. Indigenous movements based upon these local centres of self-determination belie our attempts to fix democratic practices within a set taxonomy of rights, or along a ladder that supposedly could result in 'the end of history' (Thornberry, 2002). As long as we view language politics within these kinds of frameworks, as primarily orientated towards the development of good citizens within a single political community and a single conception of the common good, we will, I believe, fail to do justice to the claims of indigenous peoples.

TOWARDS A PRAXIS OF LISTENING

But there are language games in which the important thing is to listen, in which the rule deals with audition. Such a game is the game of the just. And in this game, one speaks only inasmuch as one listens, that is, one speaks as a listener, and not as an author. (J-F. Lyotard, 1985: 71–2)

By way of conclusion, I would like to comment on the broader relevance of the reflections presented above. If I have succeeded, albeit in a limited way, in demonstrating some of the unique aspects of indigenous movements for linguistic security, the general importance of such a demonstration may still be in question. It may be argued that the claims of indigenous peoples constitute too narrow a case to be of much relevance to theorizing on language and politics. One might say, 'that's fine for them, but what about the other 99 percent of cases?'

The placing of indigenous peoples' politics as central to theoretical discussions of linguistic security seems appropriate to me. To put it more forcefully, I think that questions of language rights, linguistic diversity and the political legacy of colonialism cannot be clearly separated from each other. Historically informed study of the relationship between language and colonialism helps us not only to understand how we arrived at the present situation, but also what may be the appropriate actions out of it. This historical political dimension of language politics is, surprisingly, rarely commented on.²² Furthermore, I think we must consider that, of the 6000 or so languages spoken today,²³ only 1.5 percent are officially recognized by nation states (May, 2001: 5). Of this 1.5 percent, only a small portion are recognized at the state level.²⁴ Given that indigenous peoples are the bearers of the vast diversity of the world's languages, and given that official recognition of these languages is so rare, it seems important that indigenous peoples themselves should be central to thinking and acting on the issue.

Finally, I think that by examining how language-based movements and the maintenance of linguistic diversity may implicate a politics of local community, we are led to consider implications beyond the realm of

indigenous peoples. For if I have made the case convincingly that linguistic diversity implicates a politics of local community, then the circle of interested and affected parties to the question is widened. Indigenous movements for linguistic security, insofar as they foster a space for local self-determination, are of importance not only to minority language speakers, but to all who live in communities struggling to maintain (or regain) the capacity to realize their conceptions of the common good. Such movements touch on all who are interested in having some effective say in the social, cultural, and political life of the community in which they live. It is, therefore, perhaps wisest for non-indigenous peoples, at least for a moment, to stop and listen to the practical experience that indigenous communities have developed through their struggles to regain a space for local self-determination. With this in mind, I end by recalling the challenge put forward by Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson for a political theory 'predicated upon a praxis of listening' (Simpson, 2000: 114).

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Notes

- 1 My translation: 'la *Gramática* de Nebrija es la nueva pauta, el nuevo modelo de dominio para el imperio naciente'.
- 2 My translation: 'siempre la lengua fue compañera del imperio'.
- 3 For a discussion of the place of Malinche in Mexican history and culture, see Pratt (1993). Paz (1959) remains a key (if also problematic) text in understanding how the myth of Malinche plays out in modern Mexican culture and politics.
- 4 For essays on pre-contact language policies in the Americas, see Boone and Mignolo (1994).
- 5 One Spanish chronicler is even quoted as having said: 'This Mexican language is the common tongue which runs through all the provinces of Spain, inasmuch as there are innumerable languages within each province, and even within sections of each village. Moreover, throughout all parts of New Spain there are interpreters who understand and speak Nahuatl, since this language is spread here just as Latin is through all the realms of Europe' (Heath, 1972: 4).
- 6 Lerner (2000: 209) has noted the use of the Quechua language served a similar function in maintaining the dominance of the Inca over their tributaries.
- 7 Though I cannot discuss it here, this may be doubly the case when considering barriers between languages that are predominantly oral, and ones that are written. Scott touches on this when he discusses idea that 'oral cultures, as opposed to written cultures, may avoid the rigidity of orthodoxy' (1998: 332).
- 8 It should be noted that the recognition that linguistic diversity stands in opposition to centralized power has been a feature of many imperial projects,

in many places, in many times. This 'linguistic imperialism' is by no means unique to European colonization of the Americas and I am not implying that there is something about American indigenous peoples that makes them particularly adept at recognizing and employing language as a political tool of resistance. Although it cannot be discussed here, this dynamic was surely a feature of European state formation and the process of 'internal colonization', as well as colonial practices elsewhere in the world. For contemporary examples of this dynamic related to the hegemonic position of English, see Pennycook (1994, 1998) and Crowley (2003).

- 9 The claim to the inherent worth of a language is a controversial one and something I will not try to pick up here. This question has been the primary focus of the 'linguistic preservationist' theorists in (predominantly) linguistics and anthropology. The claim is that each language is a unique human artifact that should be preserved for its inherent beauty and worth, and insofar as it adds to the diversity and complexity of human life. On this debate, see Crystal (1997, 2000). I am deliberately leaving this argument to the side and focusing on some of the political implications of linguistic diversity, since they seem, to my eye anyway, to have been ignored. Though I am not a linguist, it appears from my vantage point as though the debate there has at times focused on gaining clarification about what a language is, rather than on the economic and political status of its speakers. A notable exception is May (2001).
- 10 What is interesting about this case, from a political theory perspective, is that it differs in important ways from the concept of agency described in recognition theory flowing from Taylor (1994). In Taylor, the confirmation of one's agency derives from a network of recognition from others. He then moves from this Hegelian premise to the contemporary liberal state, arguing for a 'politics of recognition' that would have the state recognize the particularity of internal groups and peoples. What is not challenged in Taylor, however, is that the state should be the 'recognizer' and that the confirmation of one's agency should be dependent *at all* upon the state (especially if one takes the legitimacy of the state itself to be the site of contestation, as is the case with many indigenous peoples). This has prompted Richard Day (2001) to ask of the 'gift' of recognition, 'who is this we that gives the gift?' Elizabeth Povinelli (2002) makes a similar point in the context of Australian multiculturalism and indigenous peoples there. It seems to me that what is different about the Māori case as articulated above is that the confirmation of agency derived, in part, from ignoring the state, from going behind its back, and from a diminished need of official recognition.
- 11 For his part, Jacob Levy has placed language-based claims into two larger groups: assistance rights and symbolic rights. The right to a language as an 'assistance right' is claimed in the interest of further integration and social mobility within the dominant (Levy, 1997: 29). Language-based claims are offered as 'symbolic claims' when the language itself is important to the identity of the minority community (Levy, 1997: 46–7). In effect, then, Levy collapses Patten's distinction between an interest in 'symbolic affirmation' and 'identity promotion'.
- 12 For how this conception of agency may be problematic, see note 7.
- 13 See also Kymlicka and Patten (2003: 13).

- 14 We might recall that, at least in Canada, the last residential schools, key tools of assimilation and domination, were not closed until the mid-1980s. See Miller (1996) and Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996), especially Chapter 10.
- 15 Fleras (1993: 31) notes in a comparison between the struggles for linguistic security in Canada and Aotearoa/New Zealand that the relative failure of the Canadian case is due to a 'failure to politicize the aboriginal language crisis or to engage in issue-linkage'.
- 16 The emphasis on 'within' in the passage above is mine, and I think it relevant that Laitin and Reich would frame the interests of the adults in terms of freedom within their own societal culture and not freedom relative to the dominant one.
- 17 There are, however, indigenous languages in other countries, such as Mexico, that have a speaking community of over a million, and Carens is surprisingly silent on the question of *why* indigenous languages have so few speakers in Canada. This 'deep tension' that aboriginal peoples have to face is part of the disproportionate cost of intercultural exchange that I have tried to elucidate above. For a recent review of the state of Aboriginal languages in Canada, see Kirkness (1998).
- 18 Pogge (2003: 221) also argues that this policy will 'bring together all those who genuinely care about the children whose lives our education system will shape so profoundly.'
- 19 Rob Reich suggests that even this principle may not be sufficiently strong. For Reich, group rights 'may serve to incarcerate children within a cultural group' (2005: 338) and therefore the devolving of such rights, especially over education and schooling can only be justified when they cultivate a particular liberal citizen who will be fully capable of exercising his or her 'right to exit' the community. He goes on to argue for an education that 'does not indoctrinate, that does not systematically adapt one's preferences, and, over time, one's very character to uphold cultural norms' (Reich, 2005: 346). However, Reich is unclear how it is that liberal education does not adapt the preferences and character of children, while other kinds of education do.
- 20 The most common objection is that claims to 'social mobility' as a limit on language preservation tend to assume that parents of minority communities are not interested in the social mobility of their own children, and that bilingual learning is somehow restrictive. In fact, we now know that children of minority language communities learn the dominant language better through bilingual education (as opposed to complete immersion), thus local language initiatives, when they are orientated towards such a goal, may actually enhance, in some cases, the social integration of children into the dominant society. See May (2001). While this argument is important in some contexts, such as the situation of certain immigrant communities in Canada or the United States, it is not adequate for indigenous peoples, for the reasons explained above.
- 21 Along these lines, we may also question Taylor's insistence that '[t]he struggle for recognition can find only one satisfactory solution, and that is *a* regime of reciprocal recognition among equals' (1994: 50, my emphasis).
- 22 In a recent edited volume on language rights and political theory that is long overdue and very helpful in other ways (Kymlicka and Patten, 2003), only one

- article (Blake, 2003) takes the 'historical fact of empire' as important to understanding the politics of language rights in the contemporary setting.
- 23 Such statistics are notoriously unreliable, both because the definition of a 'language' (as distinct from a dialect) is fluid, and because many of the world's least spoken languages are those of peoples in remote communities who, for reasons discussed above, may resist being fully 'indexed' by linguists and anthropologists. For a discussion on the variability of these statistics, and the number of 6000 languages, see Crystal (2000: 2–3).
 - 24 May (2001: 293) states that Māori is the only indigenous language with official state recognition. This is not quite correct as there are others, such as Guaraní in Paraguay. As well, the languages of several indigenous nations have been recently accorded recognition at local or regional levels. Examples include Inuktitut in Nunavut (Canada) and Sámi in parts of Scandinavia. I owe these examples to the anonymous reviewers at *Ethnicities*.

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