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## When Neither the Vernacular nor Esperanto Will Do: Theorizing Language Politics

Work in Progress

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Peter Ives (University of Winnipeg)

[p.ives@uwinnipeg.ca](mailto:p.ives@uwinnipeg.ca)

### Abstract

Daniele Archibugi (2005) uses the metaphor of Esperanto to critique Will Kymlicka's liberal multiculturalism and to champion cosmopolitanism. He argues that with globalization there has been a resurgence of 'the language problem' and that Kymlicka's contention that 'democratic politics is a politics in the vernacular' cannot foster democracy. Rather, he argues, democracy 'depends on a willingness to overcome the barriers of mutual understanding, including linguistic ones' (Archibugi 2005, 537), for which Esperanto is a metaphor.

While Kymlicka never cites or discusses Archibugi's critique, his 2007, *Multicultural Odysseys*, is specifically aimed at analyzing his version of liberal multiculturalism in an international or global context, and thus, implicitly responds to Archibugi's criticisms that his 'politics in the vernacular' had been focused primarily on democracies in 'the West' and remained within the confines of individual nation-state democracies, unable to adequately address conditions often referred to with the term 'globalization'. Within this engagement, Kymlicka makes a crucial argument that the most influential version of multiculturalism, the one that he propounds, is liberal multiculturalism, which is quite distinct from conservative multiculturalism. He argues that there is little trace of the conservative version, in the multiculturalism that is having a great impact in countries across the globe as well as many international agreements and 'global civil society.'

This paper argues that when considering language and the politics of identity and sovereignty associated with it, Kymlicka is unsuccessful at distinguishing liberal from conservative multiculturalism – both require a strong and clear connection between one's language and one's political identity or consciousness. In the absence of a political theory of language, Kymlicka falls prey, to a certain degree to the opposition that Archibugi's critique relies on between Esperanto and vernacular. I argue that this opposition has roots in the European history of political thought especially how language is conceptualized by John Locke as distinct from the tradition of German Romanticism. I then turn to the writings of Antonio Gramsci to suggest a possible method of theorizing the politics of language that goes beyond these dichotomies, concluding that neither Kymlicka's vernacular nor Archibugi's Esperanto is adequate to the task of theorizing the language politics of our current historical juncture.

## Introduction

The 20<sup>th</sup> century seemed to have been inundated with various linguistic turns – Saussure, structuralism, Levi-Strauss, Wittgenstein, ordinary language philosophy, existentialism, Lacan's psychoanalysis, Derrida, post-structuralism, Foucault and discourse analysis, not to mention the Cambridge School of the history of political thought. But now, as the end of that century drifts into the past, we seem to face a curious dearth in tools and theories to grapple with the complexities of our current *politics* of language, which I would argue are increasingly important. To take just one aspect of the current politics of language, although a major one, the numbers of people who speak English (at least to some degree) have quadrupled in the last 50 years, from about 250 million in 1952, to about a billion by 1995 (Crystal, 1997). More crucially, David Graddol, has predicted that between 2010 and 2015, another 2 billion people will be learning English, that is about half the world's population will have some knowledge of English, clearly a world historical phenomenon. And yet, Graddol's study, not uncoincidentally commissioned by the British Council, is a dire warning to the English language teaching industry in Britain. Graddol points out that the hitherto for unquestioned prestige of 'native' English speakers coupled with the general prevalence of English throughout the mass media and everyday usage could crush the economy of English language teaching (Graddol 2006).

There also seems to be an important political contradiction in this incredible 'triumph of English', as it is sometimes called. That is, why at this moment in history, are anglophone governments using the state apparatus to promote or enforce English? In May, 2006, the US Senate voted favour of making English the national, if not the official, language of the US. In the last 200 years, prior to the rise of 'global English,' there was evidently no need for a national language in the US. Obviously immigration and more precisely the increase in the Spanish speaking population in the US (both new and old) is central here.

But the US is not alone in increased attention by the state being directed to language. The new citizenship test introduced in the UK in 2005, requires applicants either demonstrate a working knowledge of English or complete a lengthy language and citizenship course (Phillips 2007, p.6). In December 2006, Tony Blair stated, 'It is a matter both of social cohesion and of justice that we should set the use of English as a condition of citizenship' and he proposed that permanent residents in the UK be subject to an English test.

It is only by ignoring the connections between these two important instances of increased state intervention concerning language in the face of immigration associated with the, however problematically labeled, issues of 'globalization' and the role of language in the creation of the 'nation' half of the 'nation-state' dyad, that these issues have gone almost un-mentioned let alone explored after the widely influential contention of Benedict Anderson that modern nationalism is best thought of as the creation of 'imagined communities' significantly through the role of languages (Anderson 1991).

These are just a few instances of how language politics seems to be increasingly at the heart of responses to 'globalization' such as alterations in notions of 'citizenship' and 'social integration' which are receiving scant attention in the mountains of literature on globalization particularly those relating to political theory. My broad contention, that

I will be unable to support systematically but can gesture at symptomatically, is that the attention that language is garnering in much recent political theory is inadequate because it implicitly falls into the impasse of viewing language fundamentally either a vehicle for communication among individuals (a la John Locke) or the defining characteristic of primary political identities (such as the nation, a la Johann Gottlieb Fichte or Johann Gottfried Herder). It seems to me that the only way to explain the dearth of debates concerning language within political theory, specifically, and political science more generally, is that many are assuming one position or the other.<sup>1</sup>

This paper is part of a larger project that is trying to go some distance to rectifying the inadequacy of political theory in being useful in current debates on shifts and trends that are problematically lumped together under the term ‘globalization’. Here I focus specifically on Will Kymlicka due to his sustained focus on language, but which I argue is not sufficient.

### **Archibugi’s Critique: Esperanto versus Vernacular**

Daniele Archibugi (2005) uses the metaphor of Esperanto to critique Will Kymlicka and to champion cosmopolitanism over multiculturalism. He argues that with globalization there has been a resurgence of ‘the language problem’ and that Kymlicka’s contention that ‘democratic politics is a politics in the vernacular’ cannot foster democracy in this context of increased interdependency and broadening of individual rights. Rather, he argues, democracy ‘depends on a willingness to overcome the barriers of mutual understanding, including linguistic ones’ (Archibugi 2005, p.537). Archibugi uses case studies to illustrate his *metaphor* of Esperanto to favour the mandatory general instruction in English schools in California (along with mandatory Spanish language and culture classes), stronger support of English (alongside local languages) in India, and changing the EU’s multilingualism (currently with 23 languages) to just English and French.

While Kymlicka never cites or discusses Archibugi’s critique, his 2007, *Multicultural Odysseys*, is specifically aimed at analyzing liberal multiculturalism in an international or global context, and thus, implicitly responds to Archibugi’s criticisms that his ‘politics in the vernacular’ had been focused primarily on democracies in ‘the West’ at remained within the confines of individual nation-state democracies. Central to Kymlicka’s argument is that the most influential version of multiculturalism, the one that he propounds, is liberal multiculturalism, which is quite distinct from conservative multiculturalism. He argues that there is little trace of the conservative version in the multiculturalism that is having a great impact in countries across the globe as well as many international agreements and ‘global civil society.’

I do not want to misrepresent Kymlicka’s position as overly optimistic or triumphant concerning his brand of liberal multiculturalism. His general argument is

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<sup>1</sup> Obviously, there is a large literature within political science that deals with language policy and the political implications of language, but it is rarely connected to, or influential in, the ‘globalization’ debates, specifically debates on the nation-state, its demise or transformation, the vast literature on European integration and the growing literature on ‘global governance’ and so-called ‘global civil society.’ Instead, most of the political science literature concerning language and language policy comes out of comparative approaches and approaches that remain at the level of individual nation-states.

actually quite cautionary, illustrating many reasons why liberal multiculturalism that has been so successful, he maintains, in countries like Canada, will likely be less successful and face very different challenges in what he labels, its internationalization.

The strain of Kymlicka's argument that I want to focus on is his rebut to critics of multiculturalism especially those that argue that it exacerbates ethnic and cultural tensions by strengthening 'conservative' attachments to traditional notions of community and the argument for autonomy and sovereignty of ethnically, religiously or linguistically based communities.

A major component of Kymlicka's position requires him to highlight the liberal nature of his version of multiculturalism, which he argues is the one that has been the most influential in practice. Thus, he summarizes his assessment, '... whenever multiculturalism has been adopted and implemented within the West, it is a distinctly liberal model of multiculturalism, supported because and insofar as it is seen as consistent with, and indeed enhancing of, liberal-democratic values and human rights ideals' (Kymlicka 2007, p.108). Kymlicka is at pains to distinguish this liberal multiculturalism that he argues has been effective in many international organizations, such as the EU, NATO, and 'global civil society' from the conservative nationalism rooted in ideas of German Romanticists and specifically Herder (Kymlicka 2007, p.132, 108, 92). He is attuned to the differences among different implementations of what he calls 'actually existing multiculturalism' as well as between all of these and his own theoretical ideal, but what they all share can clearly be distinguished, he argues, from conservative multiculturalism;

In short, we see varying levels of public belief in liberal multiculturalism across the West. What we don't see, however, is any other type of non-liberal multiculturalism, whether rooted in Herderian cultural conservatism or Nietzschean post-modernism. There are Herderian and Nietzschean multiculturalists in academia, particularly in some humanities departments, but it is not this sort of multiculturalism that has shaped public policy in the West (Kymlicka 2007, p.108).

This insistence is important in that it shores up Kymlicka's credentials as a liberal and *apparently* saves him from tensions and compromises that could be seen to have characterized the liberal-communitarian debates of the 1980s and early 1990s. It allows him to continue his general insistence that group rights are a progressive development of the tradition of liberalism. To admit the more radical critiques of liberalism influence by the tradition of Herder and Nietzsche would open Kymlicka's multiculturalism to liberal critiques.

One could pursue a more systematic analysis of the public policy to which Kymlicka refers, and perhaps substantiate this absence that is so crucial to his argument. But does this tell us anything about what he calls the 'logic of multiculturalism' which is also central to his analysis? What would constitute the falsification of Kymlicka's position? Would we have to find actual citations and footnotes of Herder or Fichte? That would seem highly unlikely, just as there is an absence of citations of Kymlicka or proponents of liberal individualism whether Locke or JS Mill or any others. Instead, clearly, one would look for underlying assumptions, values and presuppositions about

what ‘multiculturalism’ is and specifically key concepts like ‘nation’ and, my focus, ‘language.’

In this context, we do not need to go to the policy documents or their implementation although I think this would be a very worthwhile project. But in Kymlicka’s own analysis, I will argue, there is little choice but to recognize his notion of language as central to political community – a collective group that has some right to govern itself, or part take in power-sharing as a collective distinct from a mere group of individuals. This is *not* an underlying assumption of most liberals, quite the contrary. Most liberals implicitly or explicitly reject this assumption. Whether we are thinking of Rawlsian liberals, or liberal defenders of cosmopolitanism such as Daniele Archibugi and David Held, or even the likes of Jürgen Habermas,<sup>2</sup> most liberal individualists accept the basic premises of John Locke’s understanding of how language is related to political community, as I will detail below. What we find in Kymlicka’s writings is a very different emphasis on the importance of language in defining or creating political community and consciousness, and thus, relating to individuals within groups. Within the history of European political thought, this position is to be found clearly (although not in a simple or consistent way) in the tradition that Kymlicka distinctly wants to distance himself from. In order to do this, Kymlicka would need to offer a theory of how language is related to political community and identity that differs substantially from the ‘conservative’ version and the ‘liberal’ version, both of which he rejects.<sup>3</sup>

While it is beyond the scope of this paper and my own ability at present, it seems to me that this is not solely an absence which Kymlicka could fill if he put his mind to it. Rather providing such a specific alternative theory of the link between language and political community would mean relinquishing, at least to some degree, his attachment to liberal individualism. As Kymlicka himself wrote in an introduction co-authored by François Grin, ‘... language turns out to be rather embarrassing for liberals [and] cannot easily be accommodated within the standard framework that liberals adopt for dealing with diversity’ (Kymlicka and Grin 2003, p.30). Originally directed at Rawlsian and mainstream liberalism hostile to any notion of group rights, I argue that this sentiment extends to the liberal multiculturalism that Kymlicka advocates. If Kymlicka rejects what he labels ‘conservative’ versions of multiculturalism and their connection between culture, political identity and language, as well as mainstream liberal individualism hostile to the group rights of multiculturalism, then the onus is clearly on him to provide a theory of language and political community that can work as alternative.<sup>4</sup>

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2 See Ives 2008 and Ives 2004c.

3 Kymlicka is quite consistent in rejecting both positions, including explicitly rejecting ‘Western’ communitarian arguments that group rights are needed to correct for the West’s excess individualism (Kymlicka 2004, 36). His position is that group rights are not a concession or at odds with liberalism, and here, I think the question of language challenges this position if it cannot be conceptualized explicitly or coherently within an individualist but also communalist approach. In a certain sense, Wilhelm von Humboldt might offer the best resource for Kymlicka, but as I will explain below, this is inadequate especially considering ‘globalization’.

4 In an early foray into this project (Kymlicka 2004), he argues that while it is unrealistic to hope for international consensus on the liberal half of his theory that calls for ‘freedom within groups,’ it is possible to separate this from the other half of his theory that calls for justice between ethnocultural groups, on which he does hope there can be international consensus. This also necessitates a separation of his liberal commitments (which he oddly describes as a personal commitment (pp.17-18) rather than theoretical argument) and his critique of modern nation-building (p.18). Oddly enough, the connection between the

In noting that Archibugi's general criticisms of Kymlicka's lack of engagement with issues of globalization are astute, I am not supporting Archibugi's position. Quite the contrary, while Archibugi correctly notes an absence in Kymlicka's analysis, his response is, in a sense, to return us to an early-modern view of language and political community, most clearly and influentially expounded by Locke.

### **Kymlicka, Language and Community**

Throughout *Multicultural Odysseys*, and indeed, all of Kymlicka's writings, language plays a key role. While under explained, language is one of the key features that define or constitute a 'nation' or 'community' (or 'minority'). 'Official language status' is usually the first or second key claim being made by minorities. In his discussion of the tensions around which his analysis of multiculturalism rests, he offers a triumvirate, "territorial autonomy, official language status, or consociational power-sharing" (e.g. Kymlicka 2007, p.246).

Of these three, language is the one that best defines the type of community that Kymlicka is referring to. Territory itself does not define the minority communities whose rights he is concerned with, since that would lead to a position of succession or federalism, not group rights. His whole point is to create a liberal framework for coping with pluralist societies, that is, societies with minority groups of various types, namely national minorities, indigenous peoples, immigrant communities and metics (the term he uses for immigrants who do not have a legal right to ever gain citizenship). If political community (or 'groups' which are to have 'group rights') were solely defined by the territory in which they lived, the specific issue that Kymlicka is addresses, justice and democracy for various forms of minority groups, would not require liberal multiculturalism. Similarly, a group or political community cannot be adequately defined by consociational power-sharing, since that would beg the question of who requires to be included within existing power arrangements (especially if they are based purely on Rawlsian liberalism hostile to group rights). So while Kymlicka is explicitly arguing that it is the combination of these elements that go into defining a 'nation' or 'minority group' (of whichever type), language would seem to play a very prominent, if not the most prominent, role. This is born out by the relatively infrequent references that Kymlicka makes to minority groups that share the dominant language and are not defined by their own distinct language (for examples blacks in the US, Irish both in Northern Ireland and as immigrant groups many places including the US, Canada, Australia, and Anglo-Indian immigrants in the UK, the US, Canada, etc...). Kymlicka interrogates his claims and his framework with examples that are much more frequently cases in which the minorities involved are 'linguistic minorities.' Even where various aboriginal peoples have adopted the dominant language, like English, for the most part, Kymlicka is quite sensitive to the claims made in favour of traditional aboriginal languages, however small the minority of people within the aboriginal communities continue to speak their traditional languages. He writes,

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communitarian aspect of language (i.e. you need a community that speaks it for you as an individual to value speaking it) and the liberal notions of freedom of speech and press, get separated.

By a societal culture, I mean a territorially-concentrated culture, centred on a shared language which is used in a wide range of societal institutions, in both public and private life (schools, media, law, economy, government, etc.). I call it a *societal* culture to emphasize that it involves a common language and social institutions, rather than common religious beliefs, family customs or personal lifestyles. (Kymlicka 2004, p.21).

This is easily explainable (although still debatable) by the fact that linguistic minorities have been much more explicit about claims to the combination of territorial autonomy, consociational power-sharing and minority rights that are associated with multicultural policies. But this just illustrates Kymlicka's assumption, correct or incorrect, that language is a key element in defining political community. My point is that the question of why language plays this crucial role cannot go unexamined.

While I am in general agreement with Kymlicka on this point, if the connection between language and political community, it is prone to criticism by liberal cosmopolitans like Daniele Archibugi and Thomas Pogge who reject this notion of language, and see it as primarily an instrument to facilitate communication among individuals (or even groups) and thus linguistic diversity is an obstacle to democracy and must be overcome (Archibugi 2005, p.246; Pogge 2003; esp. pp.118-20).

Thus, my point is that it is not sufficient to deploy language in the usual list together with a shared history and culture as those things that define a '(minority) group', nation or people. This is especially the case when we ask how we determine who shares a common history and/or a common culture, and language again seems to be one of fundamental factors, without which we are left with a purely biological and ancestral notion of 'nation' as 'race' which Kymlicka is rightly weary of. If we are to move away from, or even just create a more nuanced version of, biological ancestry as the determining factor of national groups, language is a, if not *the*, key factor.

For example, in his key argument that there is nothing 'natural' about the nation-state but rather it is a historical formation that must be actively constituted through 'nation-building' he provides a common list of what this entails and language is at the centre. Thus, he writes, "Public policies were used to promote and consolidate a common national language, national history and mythology, national heroes, national symbols, a national literature, a national education system, a national media, a national military, in some cases a national religion, and so on" (Kymlicka 2007, p.62). Here not only is a national language the first on the list, but also a constitutive element of most of the other factors noted with the *possible* exception of a military and religion which could be conducted in a multiplicity of languages.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to the ubiquity of language as one of the three constitutive elements of groups, Kymlicka explicitly focuses on the importance of language within claims made by minority groups. For example, he argues that 'Claims for minority autonomy are often defended precisely in the name of protecting communities, so as to enable group members to maintain their languages and cultural traditions, honour their gods, respect their elders and ancestors, and so on' (Kymlicka 2007, p.253).

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<sup>5</sup> Obviously, a national media could be conducted in several languages, but this would probably constitute differing national medias according to the 'logic' of Kymlicka's discussion of what constitutes a 'nation.'

Similarly, Kymlicka's first example of why Western liberals are wrong in thinking that Western democracies have renounced the need for nationalism and can operate as ethnoculturally neutral, Kymlicka uses the requirement in the US that children learn English in schools, and immigrants (under 50 or so) learn English to acquire citizenship, and applicants for government jobs speak English (Kymlicka 2004, p.20). It is then not too surprising that the words 'ethnocultural' and 'ethnolinguistic' become almost synonymous terms in much of Kymlicka's work (e.g. Kymlicka 2004, p.21....) and the linguistic component is almost always used for giving concrete examples.

Moreover, 'nation-building' – that key concept which he, correctly in my view, argues is ignored by most liberals, often centers around language too. He even defines 'nation-building' as "a process of promoting a common language, and a sense of common membership in, and equal access to, the social institutions based on that language" and then cites Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (Kymlicka 2004, p.21). Given the extensive debates about the current status and future power of the nation-state in the face of globalization, and the rise of 'global English' that I noted in my introduction, these assumptions about the connection between language and political community become even more crucial.

Even Kymlicka's caveats about the extent to which a common language defines a majority culture or community highlight the strong connection between language and the very definition of a group or community. He writes, "Obviously, the sense in which English-speaking Americans share a common 'culture' is a very thin one, since it does not preclude differences in religion, personal values, family relationships or lifestyle choices. While thin, it is far from trivial. On the contrary, as I discuss below, attempts to integrate people into such a common societal culture have often been met with serious resistance" (Kymlicka 2004, p.21).

So while in other places, he defines groups such as 'national minorities' without reference to language (e.g. Kymlicka 2004, p.24), in a sense, he seems to be assuming the linguistic aspect that binds these people together, and is thus distinguishing such 'linguistic groups' from other types such as immigrant groups.

Again, I fully concur with Kymlicka that perhaps counter-intuitively, language is on par with territorial autonomy and power-sharing, but many others, especially liberal cosmopolitans, disagree (see Archibugi 2005 for a most explicit counter-argument, but see also Patten 2001, and ....). But given such a strong and repeated contention, one that much of Kymlicka's entire paradigm rests, the fact that a major tradition within European political thought also rests on such a claim, requires further investigation. Ultimately, we must ask whether Kymlicka can maintain such a strong connection between language and political identity and community in the face of liberal rejections of it, and also reject the major adversary of that liberalism, i.e. Romantic communitarianism. My position is that he can, but that this alternative must be spelled out, and the only version I can account for is also at odds with how Kymlicka addresses questions of the 'international community', 'globalization' and global capitalism, to be discussed below.



## Competing Visions of Language and Community in the History of Political Thought

This is clearly not the place to attempt a general summary or comprehensive overview of the role of language in the history of European political thought. Instead here I will begin with a broad generalization made by John Joseph, “The leading discourses on language have likewise been limited to considering language as a vehicle of representation or communication.” (Joseph 2004, p.25). Both in everyday common sense, as well as academic specializations concerning language ranging from philosophy to linguistics, language is most often seen as an instrument for representing ‘the real world’ in language and an instrument for communication among individuals.

John Locke’s theory of language found in Part III of his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, fits this generalization quite well. As Hannah Dawson thoroughly argues, Part III, ‘Of Words’ is certainly not an after thought nor tangential aspect of Locke’s philosophy, but rather in the drafts of that work, Locke began with many of the central themes that Locke decided to locate in Part III in the final version (Dawson 2007; most explicitly pp.239-57). She also argues that while often inconsistent and profoundly troubling to Locke’s political theory, especially as expressed in the *Two Treatises of Government* (see e.g. Dawson 2007: pp.258-60 and 277-304).

So while Locke begins his analysis of language as ‘the great instrument and common tie of society’ given by God because humans were designed as ‘a sociable creature’ (Locke 1995: p.341, Bk.3.I.1, see also Dawson 2007; p.186), he repeatedly insists that language is the collection of words that ‘*are the sensible signs of his ideas who uses them.*’ (Locke p.232, Bk.3.II.2). As Dawson illustrates, Locke’s novelty and the content of his argument against the tradition of rhetoric and the grammarians of his day, lies in his sceptical version of empiricism. As she summarizes, ‘Words only make sense insofar as they coincide with the thoughts of the language user’, that is words ‘must signify the ideas of *someone*, and therefore are limited to the ideas of particular speakers.’ This is what ‘shakes the prevailing orthodoxy out of its complacency’ according to Dawson (Dawson 2007: p.188).

Thus, while Locke seems very sceptical about the ability of language to function correctly due to semantic plurality (that different individuals will attach differing ideas to words)<sup>6</sup> and the ‘abuse of words,’ its purpose is to represent ideas in the minds of humans and through them also to represent the world to facilitate communication. Much of Locke’s concern over language use is that in practice it fails to function this way. As Dawson explains, ‘By definition then, while meaning is logically prior to language, in communication language is experientially prior to meaning’ (Dawson 2007: p.241). Locke’s complex and nuanced understanding of this relationship never detracts from the underlying position that the departure in practice from the theory of how language functions as a vehicle for transmitting individual ideas from one individual to others, is a problem and accounts in large degree for the ‘abuse’ and anxiety concerning language.

Dawson and others stress the collectivist strains in Locke’s theory of language, especially in his arguments that ‘common use’ dictates the meaning of words, that it is

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<sup>6</sup> As Dawson notes, ‘Given that ideas do not occur in one generic mind but in the minds of individuals, they will vary accordingly’ and this semantic instability is what he ‘wield[s] to expose the gulf between words and the world’ (Dawson 2007, p.219).

through words that ideas become public and communal, and we should subordinate our self-interest to the good of society from a moral perspective (Dawson pp.295-8). However, Dawson herself stresses that Locke's great anxiety is that there is often no other barometer of meaning than 'common use' and that it is the essential weakness of language itself that in practice these meanings defined socially are muddled and confused and interfere with individuals' ability to think logically basing their ideas on the own experience rather than received opinion.

Even in the few places where Locke discusses the differences between different languages, his point is to emphasize that language originates not in the 'steady workmanship of nature' but as "collections [of words] made and abstracted by the mind, in order to naming, and for the convenience of communication" (Locke p.351). Such problems with translation are not for Locke indications of the importance of social culture to the identity and political consciousness of individuals, but rather proof that words a quite distant from the 'things regularly and constantly made by nature, and had a real existence in things' (Locke p.351) and thus such variations, Locke notes, are much greater the 'more abstract and compounded the ideas'. So while he is well aware that sharing a specific language is related to the ability to form a social compact, enter into political society and the creation of a legitimate government, it is because this language allows, and does so very problematically as Dawson emphasizes (p.291), contracts and compacts to be made. It is still the function of language primarily and ideally as a vehicle of the transmission of pre-constituted ideas from one mind to others, which is made problematic and muddled the more the practical recourse to 'common use' is what determines the meaning of words.

This notion of what language is and how it relates to human communities and politics is fundamentally different from the ideas stemming from 18<sup>th</sup> century German philosophy, especially Johann Gottlieb Fichte and Johann Gottfried Herder, both of whom argued that thought does not precede language and emphasized the role of language in *defining* human rationality, identities and political communities.

Contrary to the way Fichte is often characterized, especially in the English-language literature, one of the striking features of his *Addresses to the German Nation* is that it defines both a 'people' (*Volk*) and 'nation' not through recourse to ethnic or racial categories or even biological notions of descent but rather explicitly by language. Arash Abizadeh has argued, convincingly, that despite this lack of an 'unmediated ethnic character' in the *Addresses*, there does exist a 'mediated' or 'crypto-ethno nationalism' that is, in essence, smuggled back into his position through his view of language as not arbitrary or a human invention (as we shall see in Herder) but rather as a natural phenomenon (Abizadeh, pp.335-6, 342).

Among other places, this is evident in Fichte's explanation of what makes the German people different (and superior?) to other peoples of Teutonic descent (that is why the French occupation of Germany is so unjust and detrimental to the German people and culture):

Germans remained in the original dwelling places of their ancestral stock; whereas the latter [the other Teutonic peoples] emigrated to other places; the former retained and developed their original language of the ancestral stock, whereas the latter adopted foreign language and gradually reshaped

it in a way of their own. This earliest difference must be regarded as the explanation of those which came later, e.g. that the original fatherland, in accordance with Teutonic primitive custom, there continued to be a federation of states under a head with limited powers, whereas in the foreign countries the form of government was brought more in accordance with the existing Roman method, and monarchies were established, etc. It is not these later differences that explain the one first mentioned (Fichte p. 47).

Fichte stresses that it is the purity of the language (not the racial make-up) of the German people and their 'continuous communication with each other', the 'living power of speech... which has flowed down through all conditions without interruption' (p.49). It is this that for Fichte explains the German distinctiveness which is so unjustly and tragically under the foreign yoke and without its own autonomy and sovereignty.

Thus, Fichte's notion of language as defining a community, constituting a nation and political and cultural identity is very different from Locke's instrumental notion of language that allows individuals to come together to form one, and only problematically so.<sup>7</sup> But this difference must be understood as also relating to their differences on the artificial and arbitrary versus natural nature of language itself. Where Locke was clear that signs signify ideas only based on an arbitrary and artificial connection, Fichte's theory of language began from an insistence that it is natural and the meaning of individual words maintains a natural connection. Abizadeh argues, convincingly, that this connection smuggles back in an ethnic nationalism to what superficially would seem to be a merely linguistic-cultural nationalism through the explanation of the motivation of patriotism.

Herder is not as explicit about the connection between language and the identity of a people and nation, as Fichte is. F.M. Barnard has cautioned about equating Herder's notion of nationhood with the emergence of nationalism and argued that his conception of a 'people' (Volk) is importantly rooted in the Hebrew people, prefiguring Marx's concern with those in a society who are deemed not part of 'the people' (Barnard, esp. pp.30-33). Nevertheless, he agrees with Fichte, that language is a central feature in defining a 'people'.

Perhaps more importantly here, is his greater influence in arguing that thought and logic cannot be prior to, nor separable from, language (as Locke had). This is not the place to address the quite different arguments about the 'Importance of Herder' to use Taylor's title and the extent to which, as Taylor claims, he created a 'counter-thrust' to the previous tradition and pioneered a line of thinking leading to Wittgenstein and Heidegger (Taylor, pp.90-1) or whether we remained within the earlier tradition seeing language primarily as 'nomenclature', a collection of words that represented things (and constituted ideas, as opposed to representing them as Locke argued) (Herder, p.117; Losonsky, esp. pp.106-8). But most interpreters would agree that, unlike Fichte's need to provide a theory of an original (unified) language, the 'redirection of linguistic interest away from the origins of language to the mechanisms of linguistic activity is Herder's most notable achievement' (Losonsky; p.107). And this linguistic activity is inseparable

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<sup>7</sup> This contract is also evident in Locke's fear of the creative power of language as opposed to Fichte's celebration of it.

from the use of human reason (Herder p.120) and that individual languages differ based on the experiences and abstractions that their speakers create (p.159) which is then passed down to children through parents in a manner that celebrates what Locke decries as leading to the uncertainty of communication.

I have ventured only a short way down this path, and perhaps opened a can of worms far too wiggly to contain here. But my point is to illustrate that there are many complex variations in how the connection between language and political community can be theorized. Even within the European tradition that insists on a strong connection between language and political identity, the differences between, in this case Fichte and Herder (one could easily add Wilhelm von Humboldt and many others) yield very different political ramifications. However, by parting company with that the liberal stream of thought stemming from Locke which does not highlight an inherent connection between language and reason and thus plays great priority on the individualistic *ideal* of language use as a mere instrument of conveying hopefully well formed ideas, Kymlicka creates the requirement to theorize why language is such an important defining characteristic.

My stronger or more extreme contention is that it is far from obvious, perhaps incredibly difficult or impossible, for Kymlicka to provide such a theory of the connection between language and political identity without renouncing at least a degree of his commitment to the individualism at the heart of liberalism. Of course, the history of conceptions of language after Locke and German Romanticism is crucially important and introduces significant nuances. But the basic tensions that, I argue, still characterize the most salient political debate can at least be traced back to those key figures in the history of European political thought.<sup>8</sup>

### **Gramsci's Alternative Approach to Language**

Antonio Gramsci's writings on language and the politics inherent in its usage and conflict are best understood within his particular Marxist position based on a double-pronged critique on one hand of positivism that he argued had undermined much of the Marxist and Socialist movements in Italy and Europe, and on the other, of idealism, specifically that espoused by Benedetto Croce. I have argued at length elsewhere that his interest in language, both as a student of philology at the University of Turin from 1911, as well as a keen commentator on the Italian governments successive attempts to create and spread a national language to unify Italy against the fragmentation of the myriad of dialects (Ives 2004a and 2004b). The types of issues that have become familiar within discussions of modern nationalism for example, with Benedict Anderson's influential concept of 'imagined communities' were combined with Gramsci's position as a student of linguistics immersed in the debates between the neogrammarians, from which

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<sup>8</sup> For a succinct overview of 20<sup>th</sup> century developments, especially in linguistics but also sociology and social psychology, see Joseph 2004, pp.46-91. As he notes, the feminist arguments that brought theories of strong links between language usage and modes of thought into mainstream consideration, where such contentions had been marginalized as too extreme and un-scientific when cast simplistically as the 'Sapir-Whorf' hypothesis (with little actual grounding in Sapir and Whorf's positions), pp.61-3 and 53-6.

Ferdinand de Saussure emerged, and the geographical and neolinguistic school of Gramsci's professor in Turin, Matteo Bartoli (Ives 2004b).

From this context, Gramsci developed a theory of language politics that placed it central to the creation of 'common sense', the organization of worldviews and the institutions of hegemony, but did not root it in any primordial sense of 'community' or social group. Rather, Gramsci argued that language is a human institution, is shaped by and used to shape social relations among individuals and groups in society. From this perspective, he was very critical of Esperanto as well as the plan of Alessandro Manzoni for the standardization and spread of the Italian national language. Part of his criticism was that such approaches viewed language as a mechanical instrument of communication and not as connected to culture, society and economic structures (Gramsci 1918; see also Ives 2008). 'Esperanto' became for Gramsci a metaphor for positivism and scientism in general. Elsewhere I have utilized it and Gramsci's other writings on language as a critique of the Lockean view of language (Ives 2006).

In some senses, then Gramsci's approach to language would seem to share more with both Kymlicka and the Herder-Fichte tradition of connecting language to political identity and culture. Gramsci was quite explicit, "Language also means culture and philosophy (if only at the level of common sense) (Gramsci 1971: 349). Moreover, language is central to Gramsci's critique of philosophy as understood as an elitist practice, where Gramsci turns Croce's phrase that 'everyone is a philosopher' on its head giving it a democratic meaning and developing the notion of 'spontaneous philosophy' as that intellectual activity that everyone does. In this context, Gramsci defines 'spontaneous philosophy' as being constituted by "1. language itself, which is a totality of determined notions and concepts ...2. 'common sense' and 'good sense'; 3. popular religion..." and that "in 'language', there is contained a specific conception of the world." (Gramsci 1971: 323).

To give up one's language, by necessity or apparent choice, is for Gramsci to lose a culture and a sense of oneself, and one's history as the defenders of minority languages argue.<sup>9</sup> I have argued at length elsewhere that Gramsci's critique of the Fascist Education Act of 1923 is consistent with the letters he wrote in prison concerning children and language learning. For example, he pleads with his sister to speak Sardinian with her son, Franco, and not repeat the mistake made with his niece which 'harmed her intellectual development and put her imagination in a straitjacket' (Gramsci 1994: p. 89, see Ives 2009 forthcoming). So while he saw the linguistic fragmentation of Italy as helping enable the Fascists to divide and conquer (especially the peasantry from the urban working classes) and argued that Italy needed a truly popular national language (and not the one based on the Tuscan dialect that was being diffused), his awareness of the politics and power differentials in linguistic interactions made him reject any assimilationist strategy (as implicitly advocated by Archibugi and others).

Thus, Gramsci is clearly not in agreement with Fichte concerning the issue of linguistic continuity. Unlike Kymlicka, Gramsci is preoccupied with the history of

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9. This is not the place to rehearse debates about linguistic relativism, but I should note that Gramsci also developed a political conception of 'translation' and does not hold an extreme version of the so-called 'Sapir-Whorf hypothesis', see Ives 2004a: 97-133).

language change. He traces the history of Latin, its relation to the Italian vernacular and dialects, and its function as a literary and elite language.

With these broad concerns in mind, Gramsci developed two central concepts, dialectically related to each other, spontaneous (or immanent) grammar and normative grammar. He used these concepts to articulate the ways in which individual expression is always embedded within not only a social context, but in the layers of political and social conflict among diverse social groups.

### **Spontaneous and Normative Grammar**

Gramsci suggests that there are two basic forms of grammar, those that are ‘spontaneous’ or ‘immanent’ and operate more or less unconsciously, ‘by which one speaks ‘according to grammar’ without knowing it’ (Gramsci, 1985, p.180). And there is ‘normative grammar’ which is the conscious normative structure of rules that dictate how a language should be used. This is often, but not always, written, and one of the primary resources for teaching language. Gramsci expands this traditional notion of ‘normative grammar’ by defining it as being made up of ‘reciprocal monitoring, reciprocal teaching and reciprocal ‘censorship’ expressed in such questions as ‘What did you say?’, ‘What do you mean?’, ‘Make yourself clearer,’ etc. and in mimicry and teasing. This whole complex of actions and reactions come together to create a grammatical conformism, to establish ‘norms’ or judgments of correctness and incorrectness’ (Gramsci, 1985, p.180). Note here how these questions all revolve around communication, i.e. language use fulfilling its function as being a medium for two or more people to understand each other. Yet, this is the very form of the ‘normative’ imposition. And the question of who it is that gets to ask these questions, who gets to decide if communication has taken place, is the question of who has power and the extent of that power. This is not a process that can be divided into two separable dimensions, one for basic communication and another for symbolic or expressive purposes.

It almost *seems* as if Gramsci sets up a dichotomy between ‘free’ and ‘spontaneous’ grammar that is separate from power relations and those ‘normative’ grammars that are the vehicle for coercion and dominant ideologies and cultures being imposed on subaltern or oppressed classes. This would fit his critique of Manzoni and Esperanto. However, Gramsci argues, ‘One could sketch a picture of the ‘normative grammar’ that operates spontaneously in every given society, in that this society tends to become unified both territorially and culturally, in other words it has a governing class whose function is recognized and followed’ (Gramsci, 1985, p.181). The supposed ‘spontaneity’ or unconsciousness of a grammar does not free it from unequal power relations nor make it a ‘natural’ expression of one’s being as opposed to the artificial, imposition of a ‘normative’ grammar that originates from the ruling class.

Quite to the contrary, in various contexts Gramsci regards ‘spontaneity’ as being the result not of ‘free choice’ but of the fragmentary, incoherent and ultimately subjugated nature of subaltern conditions. ‘The elements of “conscious leadership” in the ‘most spontaneous’ of movements cannot be ascertained, simply because they have left no verifiable document. One may say that the element of spontaneity is therefore characteristic of the “history of the subaltern classes” and, especially, of the most marginal and peripheral elements of these classes, who have not attained a consciousness

of the class per se and who consequently do not even suspect that their history might possibly have any importance ...' (Gramsci, 1996, p.49). 'Spontaneity' for Gramsci, is not a positive characteristic associated with the ability or capacity to choose for oneself or do what one wishes or decides is best for them. Rather, it is connected with the fragmentary and episodic character of the history of subaltern social groups (Gramsci, 1971, p.54). Gramsci's advocacy for a 'normative grammar' for Italy is clearly related to his point that 'In acquiring one's conception of the world one always belongs to a particular grouping which is that of all the social elements which share the same mode of thinking and acting... When one's conception of the world is not critical and coherent but disjointed and episodic, one belongs simultaneously to a multiplicity of mass human groups' (Gramsci, 1971, p.324).

Here Gramsci is not referring to what we today might call 'diversity', cultural or social, but rather the situation of subaltern groups with 'two conceptions of the world, one affirmed in words and the other displayed by effective action...' (Gramsci, 1971, p.326) which entrenches their subordination since the linguistic conception of the world 'is not its own but is borrowed from another group' which is how philosophy becomes divorced from politics (Gramsci, 1971, p.327) allowing 'traditional' intellectuals to present themselves as above politics (Gramsci, 1971, pp.7-8). This explains, according to Gramsci, how it is that most people hold 'the widespread prejudice that philosophy is a strange and difficult thing just because it is the specific intellectual activity of a particular category of specialists' (Gramsci, 1971, p.323).

Thus, unlike the liberal tradition from Locke onwards that views language primarily as a vehicle for communication, Gramsci argued that it is central to ones organization of the world and political awareness. But unlike the German Romantic tradition, there is no inherent rooted-ness that an individual has with a particular language. Instead, Gramsci has provided an approach to language which agrees with Kymlicka that language is central to political identity in opposition to mainstream liberal individualistic accounts of language as a vehicle of communication. One could argue that Gramsci provides just the type of alternative view of language that Kymlicka assumes (or requires) in his distinction between liberal multiculturalism (that is critical of liberal individualism at odds with group rights) and 'conservative' multiculturalism with roots in Herder or Nietzsche and expressed in some versions of postmodernism. That is Gramsci provides a theorized link between language and culture, political identity, and the reasons for a linguistic constitutive element of a social group requiring power-sharing, territorial, and/or rights or treatment that differ from those granted equally and homogeneously to every citizen of a state. But he does so from within a Marxist framework consisting of a critique of individualist liberalism at the heart of the ideological support for the hegemony of capitalism.

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