

**PLURALISM IN EVERYTHING BUT COMMUNICATION?  
THE PLACE OF LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY WITHIN  
DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY**

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**ABSTRACT**

Theories of deliberative democracy, as formulated by Jürgen Habermas and others, give a central importance to mechanisms of communication and opinion-formation that bring citizens with a multiplicity of viewpoints together in a public sphere. It is often argued that such a model of democracy can be particularly beneficial to minority groups, or the marginalized, in plural societies.

Surprisingly, however, most theorists of deliberative democracy have done very little to address the question of what happens when the marginalized are *linguistic* minorities. In many conceptions of deliberative democracy, a common language is argued or assumed to be integral to democratic participation in a common public sphere. And yet multilingualism, whether official or unofficial, is a fact of life in many democracies around the world – old as well as new. The assumption of linguistic homogeneity is thus a significant gap in theories of deliberative democracy.

This paper will delve into the ways that contemporary political theory can be engaged to provide insight into my wider area of interest: political struggles over language policy in linguistically diverse states. Through an analysis of the work of Jürgen Habermas, I intend to demonstrate that the assumption of linguistic homogeneity is central to his theory. I will then examine some of the reasons – both normative and practical – why embracing linguistic diversity is crucial for a truly inclusive democracy. Finally, I will investigate and evaluate potential ways in which multilingualism could be incorporated into deliberative models of democracy.

## Introduction

During Nigeria's 1988/1989 Constituent Assembly on the formation of the 1991 constitution, the question of national language policy rose to the fore when several members of minority ethno-linguistic groups walked out of the debates in protest. The object of their anger was the assembly's decision to make Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba, the languages of the three major ethnic groups – and not any of the other hundreds of indigenous languages – official languages of the National Assembly in addition to English. The minorities saw this policy as furthering their exclusion from and lack of influence over the Nigerian state (Laitin 1992: 125; and Idem 2002: 186). Such disagreements over language policy do not only occur in Nigeria, of course; many new – and not so new – democracies face similar issues of how to deal with multilingualism in the public sphere.

In recent years, theories of democracy have shifted from largely “vote-centric” to “talk-centric” conceptions (Kymlicka & Patten 2003: 13). These theories, as formulated by Jürgen Habermas and others, give a central importance to mechanisms of communication and opinion-formation that bring citizens together in a public sphere. In addition, it is often argued that these ‘deliberative’ democracies particularly benefit minority groups, or the marginalized – those who could never win a vote in a majoritarian electoral system (Kymlicka & Patten 2003; Valadez 2001).

Such ethnic and cultural diversity, however, often comes accompanied by linguistic diversity. And, surprisingly, most theorists of deliberative democracy have done very little to address this issue in their work. A common language is almost always argued or assumed to be integral to democratic participation in a common public sphere. In light of cases such as Nigeria, where linguistic diversity exists and where many groups want their language to be included, this assumption is a serious gap in the theory. As Adeno Addis points out, “how would a theory of deliberative democracy resolve a contest when the contest is over the very means of deliberation?” (Addis 2007: 119).

This essay seeks to bring together theories of deliberative democracy and the growing theoretical literature regarding linguistic diversity. I argue that theorists cannot simply bracket the language issue, or assume it can be resolved separate from their theories. In order for a theory of deliberative democracy to be a viable theory of government for the world's innumerable multilingual states, it must grapple with and incorporate the fact of possible linguistic diversity.

In the first section of this paper, I define some key concepts, including deliberative democracy and some of its components. I then show how existing theories require a shared, common language for deliberative democracy to work. Here I will focus mostly on the work of Jürgen Habermas, as he is generally seen as “the most important contemporary influence in the development of deliberative democracy” (Valadez 2001: 25). Next, I discuss various arguments for why it is necessary to build multilingualism into theories of deliberative democracy. These include strengthening possibilities for democratic participation; the politics of recognition; and the increasing importance of minority rights in the theoretical literature. Finally, I present in the third section some possible solutions to the problem. None of these proposed solutions are perfect – although some hold more promise than others – but all represent plausible ways in which linguistic diversity might be dealt with in a deliberative democracy.

### **Deliberative Democracy and the Necessity of a Common Language**

The most basic feature of deliberative democracy is an attempt to go beyond ideas of democracy as simply a process of voting and interest aggregation. In this “aggregative majoritarianism,” voters’ interests are assumed to exist prior to and independent of the democratic process (Addis 2007: 124). However, this aggregative model has no public dimension, and therefore no way for citizens to change their opinions or try to sway others to the justice of their claims (Kymlicka & Patten 2003: 14).

Deliberative theories of democracy focus instead on “processes of deliberation and opinion formation that precede voting” (Kymlicka & Patten 2003: 14). As Habermas conceives it, deliberative politics consists of bargaining processes and different kinds of argumentation; it is based on communication (Habermas 1996: 25). It is a procedural theory – whether a policy or political decision is legitimate or not depends, not on its content, but on the way in which the decision was made (Addis 2007: 125-26). At the core of the theory, and its idea of legitimate procedures, lays the concept of public deliberation (Valadez 2001: 31). Collective decision- and policy-making occurs through this deliberation, in which citizens put forward proposals and attempt to justify them to other citizens in ways that all can understand. Both informal public opinion-formation and more institutionalized forms of government decision-making take place in this broad arena. All citizens are participants in this public sphere, and everyone has an equal voice; for deliberative democracy to work as envisioned, institutional barriers to participation need to be removed, and accessible forums for deliberation created (Valadez 2001: 31).

Deliberative democracy is considered to be advantageous for multicultural societies, and is especially beneficial to minority or marginalized groups. In a majoritarian democracy without public deliberation, minorities with interests different from the majority will have little chance of having those interests realized through the electoral system alone. By participating in the formation of public opinion, however, they stand a chance of having some influence. As Kymlicka and Patten note, regarding recent advances by some minorities:

Their empowerment has largely come about through participating in a public debate that has transformed the pre-existing assumptions held by members of the larger society about what is right and fair for these groups. If democracy is to help promote justice for these groups rather than leaving them subject to the ‘tyranny of the majority’ [...] then democracy will have to be more deliberative (Kymlicka & Patten 2003: 15).

Relatedly, Valadez argues for three additional benefits that deliberative democracy has for “culturally pluralistic societies” (Valadez 2001: 36). First, public deliberation promotes intercultural understanding; the stance of one group may be misinterpreted by another, and discussion in the public sphere would allow these misunderstandings to be explained. Secondly, it can draw attention to real-world inequalities that do not match with official principles of justice and equality. Finally, deliberative democracy increases legitimacy by including previously excluded voices, and making marginalized groups feel that the outcomes of deliberation result from procedural fairness (Valadez 2001: 36-38).

Thus, dialogue is of central importance in deliberative democracy, and promises particular benefits to the marginalized within multicultural states. However, the existing

theory seems to presuppose that, for such dialogue to occur, citizens in a deliberative democracy must share a common language in which their public sphere functions. If multicultural also means multilingual – which it often does – this shared language requirement could cause major difficulties.

Indeed, Habermas' work assumes, and explicitly argues for, this conclusion. His theory of democracy, as laid out in *Between Facts and Norms*, is very much influenced by the philosophy of language, and rests on the idea of communication (Ives 2004: 25). In the process of arguing to replace the concept of practical reason with communicative reason, he delves deep into the semantic and structural characteristics of 'natural' language. Shared linguistic norms allow mutual understanding: "what makes communicative reason possible is the linguistic medium through which interactions are woven together and forms of life are structured" (Habermas 1998: 3-4). From this idea of communicative reason, Habermas forms a theory of communicative action which is the basis for his view of democratic politics.

Ordinary, or natural, language plays an essential role within communicative action. One important function is that "ordinary language is the medium of communicative action through which the lifeworld reproduces itself" (Habermas 1998: 353). It is also the shared code through which specialized action systems can communicate with one another and with the wider society. In the same way, democratic deliberation in the public sphere cannot function without the unifying capabilities of a shared natural language. Like the lifeworld, "so, too, the public sphere is reproduced through communicative action, for which mastery of a natural language suffices; it is tailored to the *general comprehensibility* of everyday communicative practice" (Habermas 1998: 360). In addition, Habermas sees "the rules of a *shared* practice of communication" as more important to the structuring of public opinion than the diffusion of information via effective media (Habermas 1998: 362). Clearly, for this 'everyday communicative practice' to be comprehensible to, and shared by, all citizens of a democracy, they all must master the *same* natural language. He also asserts that, despite the many differentiations between various sections of the public sphere, "all the partial publics constituted by ordinary language remain porous to one another" (Habermas 1998: 374). And finally, when individuals form a democratic community, what brings and holds them together is not any sort of distinctive cultural identity, but "*in the final analysis*, the linguistic bond that holds together each communication community" (Habermas 1998: 306). Thus what emerges is a concept of a diverse democratic community, operating in a public sphere where the biggest factor binding them together is a shared – ordinary – language.

Habermas' writings have thus led some theorists, like Donald Ipperciel, to conclude that "there is no democracy without communication in a public sphere," and that

The solution seems quite clear: the bounds of this democratic state should be set wherever communication actually takes place, or – following a more stringent normative yardstick – *can* take place. And since there can be actual communication only in a common language, language becomes determinant in the setting of national borders, even proving, since it is inescapable, to be the most important criterion. (Ipperciel 2007: 400)

Nevertheless, the fact remains that, for the much of the world, language has played very little or no part in the determination of national borders. By not acknowledging this fact,

proponents of deliberative democracy leave a large gap in their theory. In the next section, I explore the benefits, other than increased real-world applicability, that multilingual politics might bring to Habermas' ideas.

### Why Incorporate Multilingualism?

Arguments about language policy, both in theory and practically, rest upon one of two ideological foundations. The first, generally attributed to Locke, sees language as simply an instrument of communication. It is “a vehicle to transmit meaning, emotions, judgments, and information among individuals” and no more than that (Ives 2004: 26). In this view, therefore, linguistic diversity is inefficient and a barrier to communication that needs to be overcome (Ives 2004: 29). This is the conception of language behind Habermas' theories: language as a communicative instrument that allows for the existence of deliberative political spaces (Ipperciel 2007: 401). Like others who share this instrumentalist view, Habermas does not feel that the particular language used matters:

In all languages and in every language community, such concepts as truth, rationality, justification, and consensus, even if interpreted differently and applied according to different criteria, play *the same grammatical role*. (Habermas 1998: 311)

Instead, what is important is that everyone in a political community shares a method of communication.

Although some critiques of the monolingual public sphere can be made from a Lockean perspective, most come from a second ideological camp, most associated with Herder and the German Romantic tradition. In this view, language is not just a means of communication, but also a repository of history and culture that is central to individual and group identity (Bauman & Briggs 2000). There is something intrinsically valuable and different about each individual language, beyond its utility as a tool of communication (Ives 2004: 29). Often, in discussions of language policy, this idea that language functions as “the soul of the people” (Ipperciel 2007: 401) is often invoked to explain why individuals remain attached to their own language even in the face of fluent bilingualism in a more ‘useful’ language, or to support arguments in favour of minority language rights. Whether or not these claims about language are universally valid, they clearly have strong currency within many communities around the globe.

Before examining the various rationales for a multilingual vision of deliberative democracy, it may be helpful to distinguish two different types of justifications. First, there are the claims that providing democratic spaces in all languages spoken within a state, not just one, is good for democracy. Therefore, incorporating multilingualism can strengthen and deepen the deliberation and participation that goes on. Secondly, it can be argued that in some states policies of multilingualism are justified on other grounds; therefore, if deliberative democracy is to exist in these kinds of states, it must be reconciled with the official multilingualism present. By ‘other grounds,’ I mean more specifically Taylor’s politics of recognition (1994), as well as the large discourse regarding minority rights (including language rights) that flows from it. These two justifications are of course intertwined, and particular arguments may often appeal to both at the same time. Nevertheless, they are distinct approaches that affect the reasons given for the importance of acknowledging linguistic diversity.

One of the strongest statements regarding the relationship between language and democratic politics comes from Will Kymlicka, and is worth quoting at length:

Simply put, democratic politics is politics in the vernacular. The average citizen only feels comfortable debating political issues in their own tongue. [...] Moreover, political communication has a large ritualistic component, and these ritualized forms of communication are typically language-specific. Even if one understands a foreign language in the technical sense, without knowledge of these ritualistic elements one may be unable to understand political debates. For these and other reasons, we can expect – as a general rule – that the more political debate is conducted in the vernacular, the more participatory it will be (Kymlicka 2001: 213-14).

Kymlicka makes this statement as part of an argument for the primacy of ‘national’ units over multinational states or supra-national entities. A more genuinely participatory democracy, along with formation of public opinion, can really only exist within linguistic nations. Thus he can be seen as supporting the thesis that a common language is necessary for a deliberative democracy. However, his words can also be used to support the opposite argument. If ‘average citizens’ can only discuss politics in their own language, a public sphere which excludes their language will exclude them. Inclusion and acceptance of arguments and opinions in all the vernaculars of a polity, not just one overarching language, is the only way in which all citizens can fully participate in a common public sphere.<sup>1</sup>

Two related arguments can be found in Iris Marion Young’s work on oppression and exclusion. First of all, Young’s account of cultural imperialism – one face of the larger problem of oppression – offers a critique of a monolingual public sphere in a multilingual democratic state. Groups and individuals experience cultural imperialism when “the dominant meanings of a society render the particular perspective of one’s own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one’s group and mark it out as the Other” (Young 1990: 58-59). Young does not specifically talk about language, but it is easy to see how such a process could occur through it. Language is one of the most obvious markers of group membership, besides skin colour and sex. If a linguistically diverse state has only one official or common language in which the public sphere operates, it is likely the language of some dominant group, who control “the means of communication and interpretation in a society” (Young 1990: 59). Inability to speak that language fluently, or an accent while speaking it, will immediately mark an individual as ‘the Other’ and put them on a lower level. Furthermore, forcing other linguistic communities to speak the dominant language in order to participate in the public sphere brings “the other groups under the measure of [the] dominant norms” (Young 1990: 59). If one follows German Romantic views of language as central to culture, minority-language speakers cannot express their cultural perspective without their language, and so they are rendered invisible in the public sphere.

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<sup>1</sup> This of course then leads to the problem of whether, if contributions in a certain language cannot be understood by some other citizens, they will be considered to the same extent as deliberations in a shared language. This will be addressed in more depth in the next section on possible solutions.

Young (1996) expands this line of reasoning in her formulation of a theory of “communicative democracy” that is more inclusive and tolerant of difference than deliberative models. She notes that:

The social power that can prevent people from being equal speakers derives not only from economic dependence or political domination [which deliberative theorists bracket out of their theories] but also from an internalized sense of the right one has to speak or not to speak, and from the devaluation of some people’s style of speech and the elevation of others. (Young 1996: 122)

This observation is very much applicable to situations where linguistic diversity exists alongside a dominant language. An individual who speaks the state’s common language as a second or third language – unless they are perfectly bilingual or a very talented language learner – may be more reluctant to speak publicly in the political sphere. In addition, the way they phrase an argument may not be as elegant or as attuned to linguistic and cultural norms as one made by a native speaker. Speech with a foreign accent, finally, is generally held in lower esteem than speech in a ‘normal’ accent. Such differences can lead other citizens to dismiss, devalue, or even completely ignore the contributions of linguistic minorities to the public sphere. Therefore, under Young’s theoretical framework, a monolingual public sphere in a multilingual democracy can be seen not only as an exclusionary practice that should be ended because of its oppressive nature; it is also inherently undemocratic, in that it prevents linguistic minorities from participating in deliberative politics to the same extent as they otherwise would.

Nor is Young the only one to argue that embracing diversity is good for democracy. Indeed, there are many reasons to believe that incorporating minority or marginalized languages will increase the democratic and deliberative dimensions of politics. There is the previously mentioned argument that people will be better able, and more willing, to participate in public sphere discussion when they can do so in their own language. Alan Patten, for example, explicitly argues that the use of multiple languages in the public sphere can actually serve people’s communication interests, by increasing its accessibility to citizens who may lack fluency in the dominant state language (Patten 2001: 696). Another reason is that attempts to institute a single common language may cause conflict instead of uniting the various groups within a state. Such processes are seen by many as “inherently exclusionary and unjust” (Kymlicka & Patten 2003: 16). Moreover, if the policy is overly forceful, it can create further ill will on behalf of minorities towards the central state, divide the population, and make future dialogue more difficult (Kymlicka & Patten: 40-41). In many different ways, then, multilingualism can help a deliberative democracy flourish.

One of the most important rationales for incorporating multilingualism into the public sphere comes from Charles Taylor’s concept of ‘the politics of recognition;’ more specifically, his discussion of the politics of difference. This kind of politics, he argues, “has come to play a bigger and bigger role” in the public sphere (Taylor 1994: 37). Therefore, it cannot be ignored in any discussion of what a particular public sphere should look like.

The first part of Taylor’s argument that is important here is the notion of authenticity in identity. The ideal of authenticity means that individuals should be true to themselves in their expressions of identity. However, the development of individual

identity is an inherently dialogical process. It is created “through interaction with others who matter to us” – through our friends, our family, and the wider community (Taylor 1994: 32). Being recognized by others has become so important because our “inwardly generated identity” depends upon relations with others (Taylor 1994: 34). Language, in this conception, is crucial to both one’s own identity, and to the community in which that identity evolved. If a language is not recognized in the public sphere, then members of that linguistic community can never *authentically* express themselves in that forum. By ignoring their language, the state is ignoring their “distinctness” and “unique identity” and discriminating against them (Taylor 1994: 38, 42).

However, many claims made on the grounds of ‘equal recognition’ have as a goal not just respect for current differences, but also the survival and flourishing of those differences into the future. Taylor gives the example of Quebec and Canada, where bringing French into the public sphere and public life has been a successful strategy to further their goal of the survival of the language – and the culture seen to belong with it (Taylor 1994: 52-53). Recognizing a language publicly, and incorporating it into the public sphere, can be a crucial form of support to ensure the continued relevance of a language, as well as the community of speakers it defines.<sup>2</sup>

Following Taylor, Alan Patten (2001) identifies two different interests, besides communication, that are served by public recognition of one’s language: ‘symbolic affirmation’ and ‘identity promotion.’ First, the recognition of a group’s language by the state is also symbolically an affirmation of the group, and therefore a sign of the consideration and respect of others for that group. Especially when there is a history of unequal power relations between groups in a political community, “a refusal of recognition can become symbolically connected with a sense of powerlessness and subordination” (Patten 2001: 696). Secondly, public recognition can contribute to the cause of identity promotion – which is similar to the goal of survival noted by Taylor. When a group’s language is used in public institutions, and there are “meaningful public activities” taking place in it, people are more likely to feel that making decisions that contribute to the maintenance of the group will not be “futile or disadvantageous” (Patten 2001: 697). On the other hand, when group members are strongly invested in an identity but government policy appears to be unsupportive or even against them – while supporting other language(s) – accusations of unequal treatment may arise. Therefore, in states where either of these interests have great importance, policies of official multilingualism may be required for political reasons other than the strengthening of deliberative democracy. For public deliberation to function, then, it must be able to incorporate each of the recognized languages.

Both the material and the symbolic status benefits of multilingual deliberation can be brought together using Nancy Fraser’s theoretical framework. She argues that both recognition and redistribution are necessary for social justice, and unifies the two concepts under the umbrella of “the norm of participatory parity” (Fraser & Honneth 2003). Incorporating linguistic diversity into the public sphere can have beneficial effects on both dimensions. First, including the language of a certain group *recognizes*

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<sup>2</sup> This is not to say that group identities based on language, or the language practices within communities, should never change. In implementing policies of this sort, governments must always be careful to leave room for the autonomy of the individuals affected, in changing boundaries and the way they view and practice language.

them as full and valued members of the political community. Second, inclusion of their language will allow fuller participation in processes of public deliberation, which should lead to more of their interests being heard at a national or federal level. Greater acknowledgement of the interests of a previously marginalized group should generally result in a more equitable distribution of goods within a society.

For instance, there will always be people who will have trouble communicating in any language other than their own. (Even if education in order to learn a common public language is available, some individuals may be more skilled at learning it, or have more resources to put toward such an endeavour.) If public institutions cannot accommodate them in their own language, they will be disadvantaged in their ability to participate in or even communicate with the wider political community (Patten 2003a: 363). In other words, the ability to speak one's own language in the public sphere will give one greater access the resources that come with being able to fluently speak a language of the state. However, even if speakers of a minority language are able to speak the common public language, they might "still be deeply attached to their own language community" and have an interest in its survival (Patten 2003a: 363). And therefore we come back to the public recognition described by Taylor, which minority-language speakers may feel is necessary in order to show them the respect their language and culture deserve. In most multilingual contexts, full participatory parity will require a deliberative democratic to treat linguistic diversity, not as a problem to solve, but as an aspect of difference to be embraced. Practically, however, this is easier said than done.

### **Towards a Reconciliation**

The theoretical literature on multilingualism and deliberative democracy offers several possibilities for their reconciliation. Translation between the various languages of the public sphere is one of the more obvious possibilities. Relatedly, a state could pour resources into programs to facilitate individual bi- or multilingualism. A third option is to reconceptualize the centre of theories of deliberative democracy: what is necessary is a shared *understanding*, not necessarily a shared language. Fourth, a system of multiple public spheres can be implemented, one for each language community, with one overarching sphere in a common language. Finally, procedural standards offer some potential for finding solutions that are appropriate to individual political contexts.

Translation between languages is the most obvious method of facilitating public deliberation between members of different linguistic communities. This can be accomplished through official translation of government documents, parliamentary discussions, and other such records; through translation of various media; or through bilingual individuals who help to transfer information and arguments from one community to another. For instance, Alan Patten argues that, so long as "mediators and go-betweens are able, through personal bilingualism, or reliance on translators and interpreters, to bridge any linguistic divides that they encounter, a common public language is not necessary for deliberative democracy" (Patten 2003a: 379). This is the option that the European Union has chosen, in official policy, to manage the 21 official languages of their supranational polity (Ives 2004: 31).

One critique that is often made of translation-based solutions is inefficiency (Addis 2007: 137). Translation between multiple languages takes up time and resources, which could have been spent on other priorities (Patten 2003a: 379): documents have to

be published in several copies, translators have to be present at all public deliberations, or meetings may take longer because of interpretation. Nonetheless, a political community could very well accept a decrease in efficiency, if it resulted in an increase in government legitimacy. Deliberative democracy itself is not the most efficient way of governing a state, but it has other clear advantages that make its implementation worthwhile. As the number of languages in a state increases, however, the more burdensome this inefficiency becomes – in a country with one hundred languages, it would hardly be possible to translate all deliberation into every language. This issue has prompted some to argue that translation is not at all an option for the most linguistically diverse countries in the world (Addis 2007: 136-37).

Moreover, such a requirement may limit conversations in a multilingual sphere to formal arenas where translation services are available (Addis 2007: 136). This would negatively impact the influence of what Habermas call the “weak public:” the wider, informal public sphere where communication is unconstrained and public opinion is formed (Habermas 1998: 307-8, 314). As Archiburgi argues, “the more the level of politics narrows down, the more the possibility of resorting to linguistic intermediaries decreases” (Archiburgi 2005: 546). Not everything can be translated exactly; invariably, some summarization will occur. Finally, translation cannot play the essential role in forming a shared understanding, and sense of national community, that is often attributed to language (Ipperciel 2007: 401).<sup>3</sup> One can conclude, therefore, that while translation could work in some contexts, when compared to a shared language, it is limited in its ability to facilitate deliberation.

A related solution would be for linguistically diverse states to invest in individual multilingualism. With enough resources and dedication, educational programs could be implemented to ensure fluency in each of the languages that might be used in the public sphere. If such a program were successful, citizens could put forward proposals and attempt to influence public opinion in whichever official language they desired, and know that they would be understood by people from all the country’s linguistic communities. This is one of the methods used by the Canadian federal state in their attempts to unite the French and English parts of the country.

In the end, however, this solution is not very realistic. Such an education program would require enormous resources and excellent capabilities, which often may not be available. Even if these existed, speakers of the dominant language may not see the value in learning a minority language which has little relevance in their daily lives, and would not put in the effort required. Growing up in English Canada, it is obvious that both of these problems exist when it comes to teaching French as a second official language. Furthermore, the feasibility of such a program is limited to situations where there are only two or three languages that need to be integrated into a common public sphere. More than that, and both the logistical requirements and people’s ability to learn languages become strained.

Both solutions presented so far have attempted to lessen the impact of the barrier that linguistic diversity represents to deliberative democracy. A different approach would be reconceptualize the theory itself. Much of the literature on language and democracy, besides speaking of language as an instrument of communication, notes the shared

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<sup>3</sup> For more on this argument, see Anderson (1991).

understanding that a common language helps to create among individuals in a political community (see for example Anderson 1991 or Ipperciel 2007). Perhaps what are needed are actually these shared norms, and not necessarily a shared language. Clearly, this shared understanding would be easier to achieve with a common language than without one, but that does not mean that it is impossible. After all, there are a few examples in existence of multilingual states that still manage peaceful, democratic politics relatively well. Donald Ipperciel, however, argues that these states (Switzerland, Canada, Belgium, and Spain) are not multilingual nations with common public spheres; instead, they are “multinational states” with “distinct public spaces of political integration” (Ipperciel 2007: 407-8). While this may be true to some extent, the fact still remains that – at least in Canada – there is a discourse of politics at a national level, and norms about how our democracy should function. There are even norms about multilingualism in the public sphere: when federal politicians and officials give speeches, they generally alternate between the two official languages. A weaker form of deliberative democracy could be articulated which would only require this kind of understanding, instead of a shared language.

A fourth option, instead of dismantling the centrality of communication through a shared language, is to conceive of a multilingual deliberative democracy as existing by way of multiple public spheres. A notion first developed by Nancy Fraser, it is adapted by Adeno Addis to fit the problem at hand (2007). In his conception, each linguistic community deliberates first and primarily in their own, separate, public sphere. An overarching public sphere in a common language would then provide the communication and mutual understanding necessary at the level of the state. Institutionally, the linguistic sub-spheres would correspond to linguistically distinct regions, where the official language would be the language of the group. In fact, the multilingual states mentioned above might very well be existing examples of this model.

According to Addis, this solution has three advantages for deliberation. First, sub-spheres would make it easier for minorities and other marginalized groups to bring their concerns to the common public sphere, by providing them with “parallel discursive arenas” where they can discuss and formulate issues in their own language first, before presenting them to the national public (Addis 2007: 149). Secondly, linguistic groups will have the public space required to maintain and cultivate their language (and, to the extent that they view language as tied up with culture, to ensure the survival of their culture and group identity as well). Third, these smaller, monolingual public spheres will increase the genuine deliberative and participatory democratic nature of the political community.

The idea of multiple public spheres, when articulated in this fashion, has many commonalities with the territoriality principle of multilingualism discussed by Alan Patten: while a state remains bi- or multilingual at the federal level, each region functions monolingually in the local language (Patten 2003b). Furthermore, despite Addis’ claim that, for Habermas, there is only a unitary public sphere, it is possible to find support for multiple spheres in the latter’s theory as well. In one of his writings, Habermas asserts that “the integrative force of ‘solidarity’ [...] should develop through widely expanded and differentiated public spheres as well as through legally institutionalized procedures of democratic deliberation and decision-making” (Habermas 1996: 28). While these differentiated publics should all be connected somehow into a wider, overarching sphere,

it is clear that a system of multiple public spheres could fairly easily be integrated into Habermas' conception of deliberative democracy.

However, Addis' proposal falters when he fails to answer the question he asks in the first sentence of his introduction: if the language of the state is an area of conflict, how would the groups involved agree on what language the common public sphere should operate in? (Addis 2007: 119). If no shared language exists, but citizens can agree on what language they want to make common, a policy of language education can be one step towards creating a strong democracy. But if recognition is the most salient factor, issues of status, prestige, and power may mean that groups cannot agree to let their language be left out of the wider public sphere. In addition, the linguistic federalism that Addis proposes would only work where linguistic groups are clearly territorially concentrated (although it is also possible to envision linguistic public spheres that are not territorially based). A final criticism is that a network of smaller public spheres would only allow for greater democratic deliberation on a national level *if* the common forum were strong and extensive enough to ensure that information flows freely between all the spheres. Otherwise, communities of co-linguists could become closed off from the rest of the community. In sum, multiple public spheres are a plausible system, but it may be possible to implement them only in situations where certain conditions – territoriality, an accepted common language, strong links between spheres – can be met.

The last possible solution – that I will discuss here – is to extend the core proceduralism of deliberative theories of democracy to the decision about how to cope with linguistic diversity. Such theories offer few, if any, prescriptions about the content or form of a state or community's language policy, other than that it cannot violate basic human rights (Latin & Reich 2003: 97); it does not require the public sphere to operate in one common language, but neither does it insist that multilingualism needs to be represented in that arena. Instead, it asks "whether certain procedural standards have been satisfied in the generation of whatever outcome" is decided upon (Kymlicka & Patten 2003: 49). As Peter Ives argues, language policy is a political issue rooted in a particular context; therefore, it should be up to the citizens themselves to decide how to incorporate their multilingualism into the political deliberations (2004: 27).

For Laitin and Reich, the procedural standard to be met is democratic legitimacy. Language policies should be in the realm of "the messy contestation of democratic politics rather than as the result of clean specifications from first principles" (Laitin & Reich 2003: 93). The authors argue that language justice is a public good – and what is the public sphere, other than a forum for discussion of the formation and allocation of public goods? The state will need to be sincerely open to options other than a single, monolingual public sphere, but it is ultimately the citizens, through democratic procedures, who will choose the particular path taken.

The democratic procedures involved will need to go beyond simple aggregative majoritarianism, however. Otherwise, majority or dominant linguistic groups would have no reason not to ride roughshod over the language claims of other communities. Laitin and Reich suggest that methods of recourse – to the courts, for example – should be sufficient to avoid these "majority tyrannies" (2003: 99). It seems more helpful in this instance, however, to think of the procedural requirements in terms of deliberative democracy. All citizens have the right to "engage the broader polity in democratic deliberation" (Laitin & Reich 2003: 93). The same processes of argumentation,

information diffusion, and public opinion formation through which other issues are decided in deliberative politics could also be used to decide the linguistic profile of a political community's public sphere.

A further issue that proceduralism also runs into is a paradox that has been encountered before: in what language should we deliberate about the language of deliberation? Certainly, this is somewhat of a problem. There is, however, no reason that a temporary policy of extensive translation could be instituted to facilitate discussion while the decision was being made.

Such a procedural solution would of course not guarantee a linguistically diverse public sphere. However, the important thing is that some form of multilingualism would be a viable potential outcome, and communities would at least have their language claims given equal consideration by the society as a whole. As deliberative theorists often note, people and groups will accept the decisions made through democratic processes that go against their interests, but only if they feel that they have been given a fair hearing (see for example Valadez 2001: 38). In addition, while a proceduralism based on deliberative democratic standards may seem to require no departure from the existing theory, it is in fact quite radical: being open to other options would require striking at the central core of Habermas' theory, the essentiality of communication based on shared linguistic norms. Such a reconceptualization obviously requires more time and space than is available here, but it is a definite avenue for further investigation.

## Conclusions

Deliberative democracy, as it is currently envisioned, contains no viable solution to the problem posed by linguistic diversity within a political community. The theory posits a common language as necessary for public deliberation, and presupposes the existence of one before deliberative democracy can be implemented. This is evident in the writings of Jürgen Habermas, the preeminent theorist in the subject. Nevertheless, at the same time, deliberative democracy holds much promise for civil and inclusive politics in multicultural societies. In order to fully reach this potential, it is necessary for the theory to leave some room for the possibility of linguistic differences in addition to other kinds of diversity.

Many arguments can be found in the theoretical literature to support this conclusion. Some claim that including linguistic diversity will enhance the democratic and participatory nature of public deliberation. Others argue that monolingual politics creates discrimination and inequality in multilingual contexts, and therefore cannot be supported. Finally, many justifications rest on the importance of recognition and rights for minority groups.

How exactly to reconcile multilingualism and deliberative democracy remains a subject for discussion. Translation and individual education can increase mutual understanding, but can become extremely burdensome if there are more than a few languages. Another option is to reconceptualize deliberative democracy so that a shared understanding and shared norms can replace a shared language. The theory could also be modified to allow for the existence of multiple public spheres – one for each language – and a common sphere in a shared language holding them all together. Finally, procedural solutions advocate using the legitimacy of deliberative democratic processes to come to a contextually appropriate solution.

In the end, some sort of procedural standard for agreeing on a language policy for the public sphere seems to be the best solution for a country like Nigeria (provided it continues to work toward democracy). In a state with hundreds of languages, translation becomes logistically almost impossible, and a policy of individual fluency in all languages is out of the question. The concept of multiple public spheres is somewhat more promising; however, a separate sphere for each language would be hard to coordinate and maintain since there are so many. Perhaps some sort of compromise involving all three solutions is needed. Admittedly, reaching an agreement through deliberative democratic procedures, with all interests represented, equal voices, extensive translation and information diffusion, and, above all, inter-cultural dialogue, is a difficult goal. Nevertheless, it seems to be the best way to incorporate linguistic diversity while still respecting context, individual autonomy, and the nature of public policy formation in a deliberative democracy.

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