What is language? A response to Philippe van Parijs

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Abstract: When we consider the issue of linguistic justice we must define what we mean by language. Standardisation of languages is closely associated with the development of the nation-state and the de Saussurian conception of language as system is in concert with nationalism and its divisions. In the early 21st century, however, this view of the world as a mosaic of stable national monolingualisms is outdated. In a globalising world much of the political, social and economic structure that is developing is transnational and patterns of contact, both real and virtual, have become extraordinarily complex. In the resulting communities of communication of this superdiverse world much language practice is more function driven than in the recent past. New practices mean that we cannot consider questions of linguistic justice in this new world order using the linguistic toolkit of the old. The flows, exchanges and networks of globalisation present us with a new paradigm and we need to recalibrate concepts.

Introduction

It is extremely useful to strip the debate about language attitudes, choices and practices back to bare essentials. In doing this, professor van Parijs gives us an insightful analysis of current concerns which cuts through much of the obfuscation that habitually cloaks language issues and masks group interests and rivalries. There is, however, one element in the mix, which he does not examine forensically, and that is language itself. In my response to his book I would thus like to concentrate on this aspect and deconstruct what we mean by language. I am going to argue that it is essential to define our understanding of the nature of language before we pass to a discussion of how to encourage justice in the linguistic domain.

This understanding is deeply rooted in social and political contexts. How we view language is not a given, fixed once and for all. In my response I am going to take a 'longue durée' view and address the historical dimension of the issue and show how much political, social and economic contexts determine language attitudes and behaviour.

What is a language?

In scholarship there have been two divergent positions on the nature of language. The first derives from the scientific tradition that holds that there is a 'real' world 'out there' that can be understood and described objectively in language. It finds expression in positivism in the 19th century and some strands of structuralism in the 20th. The second is rooted in the belief that speakers/writers are autonomous subjects who, through free will, co-construct meaning with their interlocutors. From 19th century romanticism to late 20th post-modernism, scholars in this tradition argue that individuals create language from their own life experiences and for their own personal communicative needs. For the first group language is used to describe reality and for the second language frames that reality.

Halliday has defined these two quite distinct and oppositional traditions as philosophical-logical and descriptive-ethnographic:

In the former, linguistics is part of philosophy and grammar part of logic; in the latter, linguistics is part of anthropology and grammar is part of culture. The former stresses analogy; is prescriptive, or normative, in orientation; and concerned with meaning in relation to rhetorical function. The former sees language as thought; the latter sees language as action. The former represents language as rules.... The latter represents language as choices or as resource (Halliday, 2003: 99-100)

An understanding of this dichotomy is a prerequisite for any useful discussion of language rights. It affects what we mean when we say, for example, that we want to promote 'parity of esteem' (van Parijs 2011: 174) for different 'languages'. Do we mean that we wish to

preserve an ideal system, a free-standing structure or do we mean that we are setting out to safeguard the rights of speakers to maintain their practices? Before any attempt at language management, we have to ask: 'Do we believe language to exist apart from its speakers or do we conceive language as on-going and ever-changing social behaviour?' Whether we consider language as autonomous system or as dialogic creativity, as rules or resource profoundly affects how we approach the whole question of linguistic justice.

Language as system and nation-building

The concept of language as strictly ordered system is closely connected with the growth of the nation-state in Europe. This kind of political arrangement seemed to need a codified standardised form of language for its development. Standard languages and homogenised groups on defined territory developed in tandem.

In the early modern period monarchs began to wrest power from their barons and rule through a centralised administration. Their fledgling bureaucracies and legal systems functioned in the language of the king and the capital. In concert, the phenomenal growth of print in the 16th and 17th centuries promoted the standardisation and spread of this single medium.

And when rebellion and revolution challenged the absolute power of the monarch, the process of standardising language and promoting this single standard gained impetus. If the people were to replace the monarch as the locus of sovereignty and legitimacy then there needed to be a means of consulting them. Subjects and citizens have different communication needs: the former can be 'told' and this can be accomplished through bilingual intermediaries; the latter must be 'consulted' and this provokes the need for a community of communication. Thus the status, corpus and acquisition planning necessary to achieve a homogenous community of communication became part and parcel of nation-building. And every national group aspiring to self determination and a national homeland undertook such language planning at an early stage in its mobilisation (Wright 2004).

Other technical and social developments underpinned the linguistic homogenisation of the national group: industrialisation required a more educated population (Gellner 1983) and state education systems provided the training, thus ensuring spread of the national language; the growing consumption of mass media in the national language (Anderson 1991) promoted competence in both written and spoken forms of the national language; citizen armies replaced mercenary forces and general conscription brought together the young men of the national group with inevitable consequences for linguistic convergence (Walter 1988).

Linguists contributed to the ideology that language is a strictly ordered system and that language use, national group and national territory should ideally be congruent (the fundamental European ideology of one language, one people, one state). As they codified and standardised the national language (often working in national language academies) applied linguists strove to provide the linguistic underpinning to national claims to be unique and separate. This was not self-evident as only the speakers of the pre-Indo-European language (Basque), the Finno-Ugric languages (Finnish, Estonian and Hungarian) and the Indo-European isolate (Albanian) could easily use language as a boundary marker. Most Europeans spoke languages which belonged to dialect continua (Romance, Germanic, Slavic, etc.) and at the beginning of the modern period the linguistic landscape is best described as overlapping isoglosses with no clear linguistic demarcation lines on the continuum. The boundaries came as linguists engaged in what Kloss (1967) termed *Ausbau*. As national languages were codified and standardised the aim was to achieve maximum linguistic convergence within the national group and maximum linguistic differentiation from other neighbouring (national) groups (Milroy and Milroy 1985).

Theoretical linguistics was in concert with the political imperatives of nation-building. De Saussure's seminal work directed attention to the discrepancies between language systems as they are described in grammar books and dictionaries and taught in formal education and actual language practices. He developed a description where language is divided between *langue* and *parole*, where the latter is the performance of individual speakers with all the idiosyncracies of their idiolects and is an imperfect and incomplete reflection of the former, which is the ideal system¹. De Saussure himself does not go so far as to claim that language has a life of its own. His view is more subtle: *langue*, the ideal system, cannot be witnessed in its entirety in the repertoire of any speaker; *langue* exists perfectly only within the collectivity (de Saussure 1916:14). But, although he would have argued that language cannot be reified and seen as existing independently of speakers, he did conceive it as an imagined system that represents the totality of what all its speakers do. And as his ideas spread, this subtlety was mostly neglected. Out of context, his famous quote 'Language is speech less speaking' (de Saussure 1916: 77) seems to formally endorse the idea of perfect system.

An influential strand of 20th century linguistics followed in this mould, focusing on internal logical or grammatical mechanisms. Hjelmslev and the school of glossematics 'took the Saussurean dictum that *langue* is form not substance to its logical conclusion' (Harris 2001: 128) and worked in the sphere of possible and ideal systems rather than naturally occurring language. Chomsky (1968:111) set out to 'abstract away from conditions of use of language and consider formal structures and the formal operations that relate them'. Generative linguistics was concerned with the ideal native-speaker, rather than actual practice.

The legacy of structuralism with its idea of language as an abstract, self-contained conceptual system, a system of incontestable, normatively identical forms is extremely powerful. In the vast majority of cases, Europeans are still socialised and schooled in one national language and taught to respect a rule-based system. When and if they learn another language in school, this is billed as 'foreign', and requires acquisition of another set of rules. How most Europeans view language is caught perfectly by the metaphor van Parijs borrows from Gellner (1983), who compared the European nation-state language system to a Modigliani painting where boundaries are clearly demarcated. Europeans have been taught to see their languages as discrete and to downplay the resemblances between neighbours on the dialect continua.

The Modigliani metaphor applies not only to language but also to much political, social, economic and cultural activity in the nation-state system. Europe of the nation-states can be seen as a 'mosaic', with each interlocking national piece maintaining clear boundaries. Within national frontiers national sovereignty was inviolable; no law superseded national law; the domestic market was protected; the national currency independent; national defence was assured by a national army; national media broadcast to the nation in the national language, national education systems socialised the young into the national system, culture was largely a national affair. To use a different metaphor we could describe nation-states as 'containers', in each of which national life was played out in the national language. When national members exited their container, they entered **alien** systems, using **foreign** languages.

It seems to me that it is this concept of language and group that underpins van Parijs' analyses of linguistic justice as fair cooperation (van Parijs 2011: 50-85) and as equal opportunity (van Parijs 87-113). In his exploration of language injustices there is the underlying assumption that we are dealing with homogenous national groups using discrete national language systems. When he considers the possibility of some kind of tax transfer from one national linguistic group to another to redress the imbalances of linguistic advantage/disadvantage, it is clear that he has the self-contained system concept of national languages in mind. Thus, if there is any evidence to support the idea that clearly demarcated political and linguistic systems are undergoing change (i.e. that they were actually a construct of Modernity rather

than fundamental and unchanging structures), then van Parijs' analysis of linguistic relationships becomes outmoded.

Language as practice and a globalising world

So what evidence is there that our understanding of the world as compartmentalised states and discrete language systems is undergoing change? First we can argue that the nation state system has weakened. Although it is clear that the nation-state is still far from extinct, every factor (national sovereignty, market, defence, cultural homogeneity, media and infrastructure) that characterised it has undergone or is undergoing some modificationⁱⁱ. In Europe, change has been far-reaching:

- Some national **sovereignty** has been relinquished as governments have signed the various treaties of the European Union and the various charters of the Council of Europe. Some supranational commercial law and some international human rights law regularly take precedence over national laws.
- The protected domestic **market** has been replaced by the European common market, which itself is operating within a world system where the pressure is to move to neo-liberal free market practice. In addition, trans-national corporations escape the control of the nation-state and work on a world stage to avoid control and tax.
- National **defence** is now enmeshed in larger systems. Most European states are part of NATO and rely on fellow members in a contract that is more binding than old style alliances. The doctrine of non-interference in the internal affairs of states is increasingly challengedⁱⁱⁱ.
- **Transport** infrastructure allows movements across boundaries for relatively low cost and effort. And there are fewer formalities. Under the Schengen agreement most European states have relinquished border passport controls
- Cultural heterogeneity has replaced the fleeting and precarious homogeneity achieved within the nation-state. Migration from former colonies brought millions to Europe in the second half of the 20th century. The Treaty on European Union (1992) increased labour mobility within the EU. And even where stringent immigration control has been (re-)introduced, governments have not been able to stem flows which have continued on clandestine routes. The result is diverse and complex migrant communities, particularly in the major cities. The **assimilatory pressures** that the national host communities attempt to exert may have little effect in such settings.
- E-technologies are democratising both access to information and its publication. National audio-visual and print **media** are increasingly supplemented (if not replaced) by internet networks where news circulates transnationally and with little regard to 'authorities' and hierarchies.

Given the change in each of these political, economic and social contexts, the key contexts that shaped and maintained national language systems, we should expect linguistic developments. All the changes listed above involve people in various kinds of linguistic border crossing, and we can see new communities of communication forming in the flows, exchanges and networks of this increasingly trans-national world. As van Parijs (2011: 21-37) notes, the increasingly common solution is to use English to participate in globalisation. The question then arises what we mean by the term 'English'.

Are these border-crossing communications taking place in the codified, standardised national language used in the UK, the US, Canada or Australia etc. or is some new linguistic development taking place? In van Parijs' argument there is a tendency to assume the former. In some respects he is accurate. Much elite language use in international settings is still standard UK or US English. The written standard continues to be the norm in most formal publication (e.g. scientific research, legal documents etc.). Alongside the native speakers, those who have expended the considerable effort and expense of acquiring standard UK and

US Englishes continue to use them. They are cultural capital in Bourdieu's (1982) sense of the term and mastery of these standards still confers prestige in some circles.

However, this is a fluid situation. In the long term, it is unlikely that communities of communication using English as a lingua franca (ELF) will continue to be shaped by the standard of native speakers. Intelligibility and communicative efficiency will be the benchmarks rather than the model of native speaker forms. Given the knowledge that we have in linguistics about language change in situations of language contact and about how language is developed to be fit for purpose, we should expect linguistic change when large numbers of non-native speakers of English regularly use it among themselves^{iv}. We should also be aware of how ELF is increasingly used in new contexts that are not policed or dominated by English native speakers. In new settings, for example, the virtual, ephemeral and unconstrained interaction of on-line social networks or the diverse complexities of the great megalopolises, it becomes increasingly difficult to recognise any cross linguistic interaction as obeying the strict rules of national language as system, and this particularly true for English.

What is happening is not yet clear. A major debate is currently raging about the nature of ELF. In sociolinguistics there is a clash between those who are amassing vast corpora in order to be able to track new patterns of ELF usage (e.g. House 2002, 2010; Jenkins 2007; Seidlhofer 2011, 2012; Mauranen 2003) and those who believe that such codification will encourage unhelpful standardisation and models (e.g. Saraceni 2008, 2009, 2010; Canagarajah 2013; Rubdy and Alsagoff 2013). There is some confusion over whether ELF is a new variety that can be described. Can ELF be seen as a set of norms and constraints? Can it be seen as a set of alternative models? Should it rather be conceived as an approach, where negotiation allows the mutual shaping of the language that will be used in that particular community of communication? The only thing that we can say with any certitude is that in the enormous, amorphous mass of ELF users, agency is bottom up rather than top down; language form is less predictable and more flexible as users negotiate meaning to fit their purposes. There is tension; in order that communication succeed, features need to be recognisable by the interlocutors but, without normative pressure, they are moulded in each individual instance of communication of ELF. Variants can be unproblematic where the interlocutors understand the need to negotiate meaning. Without processing, however, they may cause misunderstanding. It is disconcerting for those used to strict rules and guidelines in language, to understanding language as right or wrong, to find themselves in a position where language is more fluid.

Now as many aspects of national life take on a global dimension and actors in different sectors establish and manage transnational relationships, Halliday's (1978) term 'linguaging' seems to encapsulate the creative process of accommodation and negotiation to be noted in some language interaction. Medvedev, Voloshinov and Bakhtin's^v understanding that human language is essentially creative, and therefore inevitably divergent and tending to heterogeneity, provides a useful paradigm. The latter argued that a view of language that stresses structure and system to the detriment of creativity and negotiation of meaning does not reflect how language actually works^{vi}. Voloshinov framed the argument in the following way:

(T)he task of understanding does not basically amount to recognizing the form used, but rather to understanding it in a particular, concrete context, to understanding its meaning in a particular utterance, i.e. it amounts to understanding its novelty and not to recognizing its identity. (Voloshinov 1994: 33)

So while understanding that we are in a process of change with all the attendant difficulties this causes for analysis, I think that it is still possible to claim that ELF is more accurately described as 'language in practice' than 'language as system'. ELF is characterised by negotiation of meaning, recalibration in response to interlocutors and a high degree of linguistic accommodation. The resulting dialogic creativity is often fit for purpose but may

depart in varying degrees from norms recognised as English by native-speakers. Such new language behaviours adopted in order to instigate and maintain relations across language borders undermine the old paradigm of second language acquisition where the aim was to learn a different national language system and acquire native speaker like mastery of a free-standing linguistic structure. If we accept this description of language which foregrounds creativity and adaptation and challenge the view of language as unified construct, what consequences does this move from 'language as system' to 'language as practice' have for van Parijs' linguistic justice argument?

English as a lingua franca: who is advantaged?

To start with, it affects the issue of 'advantage'. Focussing on Europe, van Parijs notes that a transnational elite is evolving in professional spheres as governance, law, research, commerce etc. become increasingly European rather than national. He reports that highly mobile professionals working in supranational and international settings are increasingly using ELF. The development of a lingua franca is, he claims, a good thing and aids this collaboration, but there is a profound injustice implicit in the situation: those who acquire English as a second language to use in trans-, inter- and supra-national settings are providing a social good at high personal cost, which those who have acquired English as a first language have not had to pay. He reflects on the inequality in linguistic relationships which permits English native-speakers in political, managerial or professional roles to rely on others' knowledge of English and to function in multilingual settings without effort on their part. He suggests various ways that English native-speakers could redress (or could be made to redress) the situation. It is difficult to disagree with his argument if we accept all the premises.

However, I am going to argue that advantage and disadvantage with regard to ELF is perhaps not quite as clear cut as van Parijs asserts. If we cease viewing language as a discrete system learnt as such in the classroom and informed by grammars and dictionaries and see it rather as the negotiation of meaning in context, we realise that the native-speaker is not necessarily the best equipped to achieve successful interaction in transnational settings. If we accept the Bakhtinian claim that every utterance is 'a responsive link in the continuous chain of other utterances which, in effect, constitute the continuity of human consciousness' (Morris 1994: 5) who are then the skilled communicators? Those monolingual native-English speakers whose limited language experience encourages them to see any 'linguistic form as a fixed self-identical signal' (Voloshinov 1994: 33) or those English-speaking multilinguals who have been trained to see language as 'a changeable and adaptable sign' (Voloshinov 1994: 33)? If all utterances are dependent on the context in which they are produced, and on what precedes and follows them, it seems valid to claim that a multilingual who moves between systems will be better at negotiating meaning in ELF communication than a monolingual whose education has not alerted them to the arbitrary nature of the sign nor to the fact that language is essentially action in context.

I would argue that anyone who is a native English speaker and who has never undertaken any serious and sustained second/foreign language learning may theoretically possess the linguistic system that enables transnational interaction, but will almost always have little skill in the 'linguaging' that is necessary. This is a finding from two sets of fieldwork I carried out in 1996 and 2006 (Wright 2000, 2007). I investigated patterns of spoken communication in the European Parliament, where English is increasingly used in an informal way as a lingua franca. The findings showed advantage and disadvantage were linked more closely to 'monolingualism versus multilingualism' than to 'English native-speaker competence versus the rest'. MEPs divided in the following way:

- One set of native English-speaking MEPs functions well in an ELF setting and derives some advantage from their English native-speaker status. However, they only have this advantage because they are language aware. They are alert to the linguistic practices and political traditions that are national and which have no place in the EP. They can accommodate linguistically, negotiate and co-construct meaning.

- Another set of native English speakers performs extremely poorly in the multilingual setting of the EP even though, in theory, they can work in their first language (usually their only language). This malfunction stems from an extremely rigid view of language; they use English as they would with a homogenous group of native-speakers. They fail to understand the mediated dimension of communication in the EP. Their linguistic insensitivity obstructs accommodation and negotiation. They regularly misconstrue meaning and they often fail to get their own message across to their heterogeneous audience.
- Those with first languages other than English who have good ELF skills do well in the networks of the parliament. Their linguistic sensitivity, honed by their own apprenticeship, predisposes them to accommodation, recalibration and negotiation in their interactions. They tailor their communication to the audiences they want to reach and are skilled in processing the messages they receive. It is noteworthy that the ELF they employ is often very far from English native-speaker norms but fit for purpose
- Those with first languages other than English who are disadvantaged by the presence of English as a lingua franca in the EP are all those who do not have the skills to use ELF effectively or at all. They are side-lined from much of the informal political process. They cannot lobby informally nor access unofficial networks of information and even where translation and interpretation are available they may miss some of the message^{vii}.

The various linguistic behaviours of this elite group where English is used in novel dialogic interaction and where native-speaker norms do not necessarily prevail illustrate that it may be problematic to portray advantage connected to the spread of English simply in terms of native-speakers of English versus those with other first languages (e.g. van Parijs 2011: 92). The opposition may rather be between those who have acquired the flexibility to deal with language as action and those who are imprisoned within their own language system, whether this is English or any other language. If this is so, then the free-riding problem is not quite as van Parijs describes^{viii}. All those contributing to successful cross linguistic border interaction appear to have invested in some form of linguistic education/training.

Now, it is obviously true that ELF is close to national standard English and many argue that English native-speakers start from a privileged position vis-à-vis ELF (e.g. Gazzola and Grin 2013). We can agree that this is still the case when non-native speakers of English strive to maintain UK and US standard forms and address monolingual English speakers in a stable language variety that these latter can correctly and quickly decipher. But such speakers are, in Halliday's analysis, those who are oriented to the prescriptive and the normative, focused on rules and concerned with meaning in relation to rhetorical function. We see such stability among professional linguists in the EP, but in my fieldwork I found the politicians to be far less form-focused. In debate and negotiation language was action and resource, and meaning was negotiated. If interaction is dialogic creativity with speakers using linguistic repertoires to create meaning in context, then, without the toolbox to appropriate, calibrate, repair and re-present, the monolingual is not privileged. To get the skills and perspective necessary to deal effectively with ELF interaction, it seems essential to acquire the linguistic awareness that comes with second language acquisition.

So to sum up, advantage seems to depend on how we conceive language. If we conceive language as stable system we have the scenario where groups A to Y have learnt the **standard** language of group Z so there can be intergroup communication. In this case group Z benefit without effort on their part. If we conceive language as practice the following scenario may be more accurate. Many in groups A to Y have learnt the language used by group Z, appropriate it and use it in different ways as a lingua franca among themselves and sometimes with group Z. Often it is much easier to leave the Zs out of the network or the

contract, because it takes a little more effort to interact with the Zs, who in their vast majority do not always seem to understand the particularity of the lingua franca and the different approach needed to understand and make themselves understood in the lingua franca setting. As one francophone MEP said to me in a 2006 fieldwork interview ‘Je comprends tout le monde [en anglais], sauf les Anglais’ (Wright 2007). In this case the benefit to group Z is not so clearcut.

The unresolved nature of the global lingua franca introduces a whole new set of problems for van Parijs’ desire to introduce redistributive justice at global level for unequal access to it.

Language and migration

There is another line of argument in *Linguistic Justice for Europe and for the World* where this issue of standard language is also pertinent. In the discussion of linguistic territoriality (van Parijs 2011: 133-174) we are once again faced with the question ‘what is a language?’

Since World War II migration has created sites of complex transnational interaction in Europe. There is increasing linguistic heterogeneity in many towns and cities. In his chapter on linguistic territoriality, van Parijs (2011: 133-174) discusses how communication could be managed in such settings. He develops the argument that ELF is more likely to be tolerated/accepted if it is corralled very strictly to international interchange among groups who have different first/official languages. He argues that migrants should not rely on ELF for communication needs within a state (2011: 134 and 144) and that, once resident, they should commit to knowledge and use of the official state language. To enforce this he calls for ‘a territorially differentiated coercive linguistic regime that makes it realistic to expect immigrants to learn weaker local languages’ (2011: 174).

If we disentangle the different categories of migrant it becomes clear that once again we need to contrast ‘language as system’ versus ‘language as practice’. Some migrants are in a better position to acquire the state language than others. Those who stay long enough for their children to be educated and who have the status which allows them to apply for citizenship will be pulled into the language, territory, people nexus. A number of European states have introduced citizenship tests with language competence assessment for those applying for residency or naturalisation (Wright 2008). Such citizenship testing for the older generation together with schooling in the official language for the younger generation will contribute to a ‘well-entrenched territorial regime’ and migrants in this category are most likely to learn the standard national language.

The problem is that a large number of migrants will not be resident long enough for education to have an effect or for citizenship to be on offer. Because ‘more people are now moving from more places, through more places, to more places’ (Vertovec 2010: 86), linguistic integration is becoming ever harder to achieve^{ix}.

This is true where elite migrants are constantly moved from job to job within trans-national corporations or international institutions and where English is the language of the workplace. They can exploit the linguistic repertoires of their co-workers to save themselves the effort of learning the language of the space in which they live (often briefly). Van Parijs is right to castigate their arrogance, but at the same time it is true that circumstances do not aid them to ‘do the right thing’. They lack the two prerequisites essential for successful second language acquisition: the need to learn and the opportunity to practise. Of course, failing to learn the host language may be disadvantageous to them; as monolinguals in a multilingual environment, they will experience the same problems as the monolingual MEPs, lacking control of interactions, always beholden to someone else’s understanding and unable to tailor their own contributions appropriately.

In the case of migrants in unskilled work and refugees, Vertovec's observations are even more pertinent. Many European cities and towns have experienced substantial migration from many varied countries of origin. Vertovec (2007) defines the resulting mix as superdiversity, the diversification of diversity. He maintains that current diversity cannot be understood in terms of multiculturalism or even post-multiculturalism; it is more complex and enmeshed. In his view we are looking at fusion rather than the coexistence of different cultures. Blommaert (2010) agrees, contending that migrant communities even in relatively small towns are immensely complex and that social organisation and exchange is being reinvented in these contexts. Evidence is emerging to show how language and identities are in flux in superdiverse settings (Blommaert and Rampton 2011; Fanshawe & Sriskandarajah 2010).

Such superdiversity is not a favourable setting for van Parijs' 'well-entrenched territorial regime'. Again the two conditions for successful language acquisition are often absent. A number of elements limit the motivation to acquire the state language. There may be instability - among those in unskilled work and with the most precarious employment, transport infrastructure and the porous nature of borders make it easy to move on if conditions become difficult or if opportunities appear better elsewhere. There will be differential immigration statuses with varying entitlements and restrictions of rights - those with little or no stake in the state may have insufficient motivation to acquire its language. There may be no economic imperative - patterns of settlement may make it likely that employment is provided within the migrant community. But most importantly, in the complexity of the population mix, the language of the state may be just one of many languages regularly encountered, the opportunities to acquire it in its standard form may well be scarce and the imperative to do so may be absent.

On the issue of the opportunity to practise, Vertovec makes the point that civil integration is likely to be achieved through 'the acquisition and routinization of everyday practices for getting on with others in the inherently fleeting encounters that comprise city life. These include simple forms of acknowledgement, acts of restricted helpfulness, types of personal consideration [and] courtesies (2007: 4). If such interaction takes place with the host community, it promotes some knowledge of the state language, but, in conditions of superdiversity, civil integration is most likely to take place with other immigrants, and here the medium is unlikely to be the standard national language.

A personal anecdote provides an example of such non-standard communication. I recently spent a semester in a small university town in central Finland as visiting professor. I often ate in a restaurant where the cook was Turkish and the waiter Lebanese. The staff from the local bicycle shop (Somali, Kenyan and Ethiopian) and local Finns also ate there. The conversations I listened to and sometimes took part in over a number of weeks were exactly the 'simple forms of acknowledgement, acts of restricted helpfulness, types of personal consideration [and] courtesies' that Vertovec imagines. We used all the linguistic and paralinguistic resources at our disposal to make and maintain contact and show friendliness. I was so fascinated that I kept a language log and, looking at the interactions, it is difficult to pigeonhole them as any named language that has a published dictionary and a grammar, although ELF was clearly part of the mix. It seemed to me I was clearly involved in language as practice, in an example of the Hallidayan notion that people exchange meanings by 'linguaging.'

So in current migration what languages and what forms of languages are likely to be acquired? Who learns language as system and who acquires language as practice? There are, of course, still formal classes for economic migrants and refugees, where the standard host language is taught, although provision has decreased in the increasingly stringent economic conditions after the economic crisis of 2008. Migrants whose stay is extended and whose children are in state schools will have greater opportunity to learn the national standard.

Migrants who apply for citizenship must learn the national standard as a condition for acceptance.

On the other hand, the communication needs of many migrants do not require the acquisition of national standards or any language as system. In superdiversity, interaction is mostly language in practice. For example, it is unlikely that when van Parijs evokes 'Ecuadorians or Moroccans speaking at least some Spanish in Catalonia, or Pakistanis or Kosovars speaking at least some English in Sweden' (van Parijs 2011: 159), the languages in question are standard English or standard Spanish. Typically the interaction will be negotiated using linguistic repertoires that include these lingua francas, which will not be in standard forms. Although this is my speculation in the case of van Parijs' example, there is ample current research to support the assertion^x.

Perhaps it is necessary to recognise that the imposition of the territoriality principle may not be as easy as in the nation building past. We should remember that the success of top down policies to impose a single national standard on a territory was in part due to the fact that the top down pressure from elites worked in tandem with other social and economic phenomena (industrialisation, urbanisation) and was in concert with widespread acceptance of nationalist ideology and patriotic identity. In the megalopolises that I am describing, the top down requirement to acquire a national standard does not dovetail with new social and economic phenomena (the e-technology revolution, fluid patterns of migration) and is not in concert with the global and local identities that many migrants assume (de Fina 2003; Sebba 2002 etc.).

Concluding remarks

Van Parijs' book gets to the very heart of the connection between language and power and plays an extremely useful role in getting us to review this relationship. He explores possibilities in a world where the nation-state is no longer fully sovereign and where justice is increasingly conceived as a matter for humanity rather than the nation. However, while he adopts what could be seen as a post-national stance in his search for justice in linguistic matters, van Parijs does not engage with the post-national view of language. He has not taken into consideration that 'language as system' is not an absolute but merely a product of a political and social system at a given point in human history.

He is not totally wrong in maintaining a container view of language. Cultural capital still accrues to those who acquire native-like knowledge of a prestige language of wider diffusion, and in elite transnational contact there is still advantage for those who acquire and employ a 'foreign' language 'fluently'. Folk linguistics (c.f. Niedzielski and Preston 2000) show how the vast majority of people still take a purist stance. Scholars in the Chomskyan tradition continue to investigate language as formal system and work from the premise that there is an ideal native-speaker. But we are in a period of change. Linguistic research^{xi} increasingly foregrounds the concept of function over form. After centuries of academic focus on standard and prescription we could call this trend in linguistics the descriptive turn^{xii}.

So, I would argue that any discussion of linguistic justice has to consider the interdependent relationship of political structure and language. Any attempt to undertake formal language management in the second decade of the 21st century needs to acknowledge that the way we think about language and the ways we use it are changing along with political, social and economic settings. Linguistic justice cannot be discussed only in terms of the relations of homogenous national groups speaking national languages. The analysis has to take into account how elite and mass linguistic behaviours are changing in the fluid conditions of globalisation, transnational interaction and superdiversity. And perhaps we need to recognise that top-down language intervention was a phenomenon of nation-state building, reliant on (national) identity politics. In a globalising world there may be no consensual acceptance of an authority competent to impose linguistic solutions, and this would be particularly true if its

policies ran counter to social processes. Agreement on where we can employ lingua francas and the rules for their usage will of course emerge, but may well come from bottom-up language in practice and may be more fluid and less stable than language systems in national frameworks.

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ⁱ Notebooks discovered in Geneva in 1996 (Joseph 2012) suggest that de Saussure’s ideas were more complex than this. However, it is how de Saussure’s work was understood and used in the 20th century which is of interest here

ⁱⁱ Of course, many people are experiencing these changes with deep unease; the ideologies of the nation-state are deeply rooted. And although they may be increasingly aware that their political, social and economic structures are in flux, many are not yet fully reconciled to change and there is resistance. There could yet be a nationalist backlash. However, and particularly for the aspects that interest us here, I believe we can claim that many facets of our world are now post-national.

ⁱⁱⁱ For example NATO intervention in Bosnia, in 1995-96 with UN agreement.

^{iv} We already understand some of the likely processes of transplantation, crossover, acculturation and nativisation from the research undertaken by World Englishes scholars (e.g. Kachru 1998).

^v There is much dispute over the authorship of individual works. I thus group them and recognise the creative nature of their collaboration 1919-1929.

^{vi} Outside the communist world a parallel and equally robust rejection of structuralism was gaining ground in the work of Wittgenstein and Austin.

^{vii} In simultaneous interpretation it is estimated that only about 60% of the text of a speech can be rendered. Therefore interpreters act as filters, foregrounding certain aspects of information and suppressing others. There is inevitably delay in the circulation of European Parliament documentation as texts are translated into all 24 official languages. This is problematic where a swift response is required and advantages the users of languages whose versions appear first, particularly the groups whose languages are used for drafting.

^{viii} The failure of monolinguals in the multilingual setting of the European parliament is readily observable. The interactional incompetence of monolingual English MEPS is one of the reasons that keeps them out of networks

and blocks relationships. The monolingual Estonian or Portuguese are hampered by relay interpreting, blocked by delays in translation or unable to lobby in private and in confidence. Both groups are ineffectual politicians.

^{ix} Migration may not be proportionally greater than in past centuries, but it does have novel features. For example the 19th century immigrant from Europe to the United States did not tend to return. The goal was to settle. Transport made it expensive and costly to remain on the move.

^x See for example Arnaut et al (2012), Blommaert and Rampton (2011), Blommaert et al (2012) Kytölä (2012) and the conference presentations at the superdiversity conferences held in Copenhagen 2012, Jyväskylä 2013.

^{xi} The functionalist school includes scholars such as Firth and Halliday. They showed how linguistic structure is associated with the realization of social structure, in a process of mutual creativity (Halliday 1978). Halliday's notion that people exchange meanings by 'linguaging' suggests a more creative process than Chomsky's implementation of a rigid system dependent on explicit mechanisms for generating possible sentences. Functionalist insights were taken up in discourse analysis, where the modalities of linguaging are explored. Coulthard and Sinclair sought ways of analysing communication above the level of the sentences and the phrase. Fairclough investigated the relationship between social change and changes in discourse.

^{xii} And if we have any doubts about whether there is actually rejection of top-down, elite-led prescription and acceptance of more organic, bottom-up, mass-led language behaviours, we have only to consider dictionary making. Lexicography exemplifies the change precisely; it has become an investigation of what people actually do, rather than instruction on what they should be doing. The new technologies permit the collection and processing of billions of words and phrases gathered from all kinds of language making situations. Corpora based dictionaries now reflect usage as well as model it.