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Normative language policy: interface and interfences

Yael Peled

Abstract   The emerging interdisciplinary work in language politics and language policy and planning studies demonstrates a rising interest among researchers in the interface between sociolinguistics, political science and philosophy. Much of the resulting cross-disciplinary work, however, tends to focus on the subject matters (politics, language) themselves rather than explore the broader issues that transpire from working in the interface between distinct fields of academic inquiry. Reflecting on the meaning of interdisciplinary work in LPP, I examine the interface and internal fences between sociolinguistics and political philosophy as fields of inquiry. I then move on to consider the way(s) in which "thinking linguistically" and "thinking politically" may be advantageously combined in the fundamentally interdisciplinary terrain of normative language policy.

Keywords   Normative language policy · Adaptive political theory · Linguistic justice · Language ethics · Interdisciplinarity · Complexity

Normative language policy

Language policy as a human practice emerges from what is, perhaps, the most fundamental characteristic of the linguistic human condition: the inescapable tension between linguistic diversity on one hand, and societal (e.g. political, economic,

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environmental) interdependence on the other.[1] Particularly in our contemporary world, in which challenges take more frequently a global shape (e.g. economic crises such as the 2008 recession, or the ongoing debate on climate change), the inescapable basic fact is that we are quickly becoming more and more dependent on humans—individuals and communities—whose native language we do not share. Whether within the borders of sovereign nation-states or across them, this fundamental tension between linguistic diversity and societal interdependence envisages language policy as a practice that is designed to secure cooperation in the face of an irreducible sociolinguistic complexity.[2] It is therefore little wonder that this fundamental tension continues to be a constant challenge for current political frameworks that attempt to reconcile the two, such as multiculturalism, deliberative democracy[3] and cosmopolitanism (Archibugi 2005; Ives 2010).

Irreducible and inescapable tensions necessitate decision-making on relative importance. Language policy, therefore, could be understood primarily an act of *prioritisation*, namely the relative ranking of languages (as well as, more broadly, of language practices and language attitudes) by their respective importance according to certain criteria such as efficiency or symbolic value. Language policy, of course, is never just about the language itself, if the word is simply understood to mean something like an abstract, self-contained set of grammar, morphological and spelling rules that are attached to a particular linguistic community. Rather, linguistic (and political) mythologies, aesthetics and ideologies, as Ricento notes, play a pivotal role in any such act of prioritisation (Ricento 2005a: 5). A more refined outlook on language policy, recently suggested by Spolsky, therefore views it as comprised of three interrelated, albeit distinguishable, components: (1) the *actual* language practices of the members of the speech community; (2) the *value* assigned by members of the speech community to different linguistic varieties; and (3) the *management*, or exercise of authority, in an attempt to influence and shape the language practices of members in the speech community (Spolsky 2004, 2009). The three taken together provide a first glimpse into one of the many different types of complexities that are inseparable from the process of prioritisation that underlies any policymaking on language.

If the praxis of language policy is the act of prioritising linguistic practices, ideologies and power relations, then language policy as a field of inquiry could subsequently be defined as the academic field that aims to make a systematic inquiry on this prioritisation process, its structure, patterns and the dynamics that govern it. Qualifying language policy as a "field", however, should be done with due caution: as Ricento notes, "there is no overarching theory of language policy and planning, in large part because of the complexity of the issues which involve

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[1] Following on Schmidt (2005: 98).

[2] The argument for irreducible complexity does not imply that, in pure quantitative terms, there may not exist circumstances in which the *number* of language, or the extent of the linguistic repertoire, may be bigger or smaller. Rather, it argues that even in a situation with a smaller number of languages, the fundamental challenge of difference and interdependence still cannot be entirely avoided.

[3] The discursive component of deliberative and other participatory models of democracy makes language policy a key issue in democratic theory. See Schmidt in this volume, and also Kymlicka and Patten (2003, 14–16, 40–41), Archibugi (2005).

language in society" (Ricento 2005b: 10), Despite its historical roots in the field of sociolinguists, language policy is increasingly perceived today as an intrinsically interdisciplinary domain, incorporating theories, concepts, frameworks and methods from a broad range of fields such as economics, law and political science. In addition to the intellectual enriching of the work in the field, this disciplinary expansion has gradually provided this emerging field a useful path for moving beyond the strong *descriptive* ethos of sociolinguistics research into *normative* theorising. Many researchers in the field are therefore presently and increasingly engaged not only with the question of *how* (and why) language is interrelated to social structures, institutions and processes, but also—and increasingly so—how it *ought* to.

Value judgements, of course, formed part of the field even in its inceptive days, in which its self-perception was largely value-neutral (Ricento 2000: 200). Later developments such as the linguistic human rights literature in the 1980s, and the rise of critical applied linguistics in the 1990s are a clear indication of language policy researchers' growing interest in the normative dimension of the prioritisation process inherent to language policymaking. Somewhat concurrent to these developments there has also been a parallel rise of interest in language among philosophers, particularly political philosophers, around two major debates in the profession at that time: the communitarian/individualism debate, and the rise of multicultural theory (De Schutter 2007). And yet, while both sociolinguists and political philosophers have been nurturing a common interest in the political philosophy of language, so to speak, for almost three decades now, it remains nevertheless difficult to identify a relatively stable, distinguishable branch that may be titled "normative language policy". The phrase itself remains to be formally or systematically defined.

This intriguing albeit unfortunate state of affairs, it has been frequently suggested in the literature (May 2003; Schmidt 2005; De Schutter 2007; Peled 2011, 2012; Réaume and Pinto 2012), is the product of a continual disengagement between sociolinguists and political philosophers. Despite important commonalities in research interests and questions, it remains to date easier to identify individual researchers who engage with normative analysis in language policy than point to a common body of work, let alone shared basic theoretical, conceptual or methodological conventions. The notion of 'normative language policy' is therefore better understood presently as something akin to a makeshift orchestra whose players arrive from different backgrounds with different training, different ideas as to the type of music they should perform, and the identity of the conductor whose authority and expertise they find acceptable.[4] Fields of inquiry, of course, are perhaps more similar to jazz bands than traditional orchestras, in the freedom of individual exploration granted to each musician. But even jazz bands, save the most experimental ones, converge around *some* commonalities—from the basics of rhythm and tonality to more complex tunes ("standards"). In the general absence of these commonalities,

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[4] This strong diversity of opinions, backgrounds, motives, aims and expectations was certainly evident in the process of putting this special issue together, from the general rationale and choice of contributors, to the content of the articles and the review process.

academic fields, just like jazz bands, remain not so much pluralistic as largely scattered.

Normative language policy as a distinct branch within language policy, it seems safe to argue, is at present in the state of *negotiating* its particular commonalities. Similarly to jazz bands, it requires some kind of a common *repertoire*—of theories, concepts, frameworks and methods—for the purpose of having a meaningful engagement. However, the strong interdisciplinary nature of language policy, while being one of its main intellectual assets, is paradoxically also one of the main challenges that it presently faces. In the following sections of this article I explore the challenge of interdisciplinarity to a more engaged theory of normative language policy, and the way(s) in which this challenge may be successfully met. The path to this success, I argue, lies in two theoretical moves: first, the combination of the scientific epistemologies inherent to "thinking linguistically" (in sociolinguistics) and "thinking politically" (in political philosophy); and second, the reconceptualization of the dynamics of normative language policy as complex adaptive systems. The two combined, I propose, are likely to assist that newly-formed jazz band equivalent in finding its unique sound.

Prior to moving forward with the discussion, it is important to emphasise that my main purpose in this article is to identify existing trends in the emergence of normative language policy as a distinct branch of inquiry, examine their benefits and disadvantages, and outline possible pathways for its future(s). I therefore aim to present a more integrative framework for the normative analysis of language policy, rather than provide specific solutions or individual prescriptions. The emergent state of normative language policy as a notion and a framework implies, if not necessitates, the need to focus on refining questions rather than seeking definite answers at this stage. Hence, my goal in this article is better likened to the tuning of a musical instrument, rather than to the composition or the performance of a particular concert piece.[5]

Interferences: normative language policy as an interdisciplinary terrain

Normative language policy is an intrinsically interdisciplinary field that draws on sociolinguistics and political philosophy. In considering the dynamics, structures and possible trajectories of the interplay between these two fields, however, it is useful to keep in mind that sociolinguistics itself struggled in its early days with many of the issues that now face researchers engaged with the normative dimension of language policy. Reflecting on the history of sociolinguistics, Spolsky (2010) outlines several of the problems, tensions and disagreements that accompanied the 1964 Bloomington, Indiana meetings, which brought together linguists, anthropologists and sociologists to discuss the common interest in language in society. These problems included an unequal disciplinary representation, the lack of familiarity with

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[5] I explore in detail the application of normative language policy as a theoretical and methodological framework to contemporary test cases in a dedicated monograph on linguistic justice in Quebec (with Leigh Oakes, in progress), drawing on Carens' contextual approach of "justice as evenhandedness" (Carens 2000).

linguistic theory among the sociologists, methodological gaps, limited influence on intra-disciplinary developments, and mutual unwillingness to "give up" parts of one's disciplinary "turf" for the purpose of a combined interdisciplinary training (Spolsky 2010: 7–8). Ultimately, Spolsky comments, "sociologists were interested in linguistic variables, but not *linguistics*, while linguists were interested in broad social contextualization, but not in *sociology*" (Spolsky 2010: 9).

A similar characterisation seems to apply to the emerging field of normative language policy. If "language in society" was the common thematic denominator of early sociolinguistics, then it seems safe to suggest that its contemporary equivalent in normative language policy is that of "language in polity". The nexus between the linguistic and the political, however, does not always, or even in most cases, translate to a corresponding nexus that moves from the subject matters (e.g. language and power-relations) to the respective domains of specialised and systematic inquiry (e.g. linguistics and political science). That is, interest in language among political scientists, including political philosophers, does not necessarily imply an interest in *linguistics*. Among linguists, likewise, interest in politics and "the political" does not necessarily imply an interest in *political science*.

Any non-superficial understanding of interdisciplinarity, however, seems to require more than just a basic interest in an out-of-the-discipline subject, be it as strong and long-term committed as it may. Rather than the incidental import or adaptation of theories, concepts or methods from one discipline into the other, interdisciplinary work is perhaps better understood as a deeper interplay between different *scientific epistemologies*, that is, the core set of basic questions that at the heart of any systematic inquiry: what constitutes an important question? What are the main theories and conceptual maps? How are theories to be formalised and tested? Which sources or authors are deemed as canonical? Normative language policy, therefore, should be understood not merely as the face-value intersection between language and politics as subject matters, but rather as a complex and dynamic interplay between *thinking politically* (e.g. "thinking like a political scientist") and *thinking linguistically* (e.g. "thinking like a linguist") (Peled 2012). Political scientists and linguists, of course, come in different shapes and sizes, and it would be misguided to portray either discipline as stagnant or monolithic. But it seems safe to suggest that owing to their different training, they tend to approach differently questions that relate to power in language, particularly in cases where the respective disciplines have very little history of mutual engagement.

Interdisciplinarity, according to this interpretation, is defined as *the complex interaction of scientific epistemologies*. Normative language policy may be consequently defined as the complex interface between the scientific epistemologies of political science (*thinking politically*) and linguistics (*thinking linguistically*). But this, once again, is easier said than done. In truth, interdisciplinarity, in any emergent field, could be likened to the notion of multiculturalism, in the striking gap between the positive and celebratory discourse that often accompanies it on one hand, and the inescapable tensions and difficulties that immediately arise from it in actual practice. The promotion of multicultural ideas in liberal democratic polities cannot mask the fact that the praxis of living in a multicultural polity is incredibly

complex and often filled with uncertainties and anxieties.[6] Interdisciplinarity, too, has been increasingly celebrated in academia, but it brought with it its own tensions, disagreements and challenges. Some of them are intellectual in nature: in pursuing the goal of realigning and transcending disciplinary boundaries, how, exactly, should it be carried out? But others are less so. In the sociology, politics and administration of university life, interdisciplinarity poses its own challenges, in the less easy or clear accommodation of interdisciplinary researchers and projects in the major apparatuses of academic life, such as access to funding, employment prospects and teaching opportunities.

Interdisciplinarity, like multiculturalism, is hard work because it is "fuzzier" than traditionally distinct fields. It undermines and challenges traditional modes of thinking (theoretical, conceptual, methodological), perceptions of individual and group professional identity, and boundaries of the self. This is also, presumably, why there exists to date relatively little research that focuses on interdisciplinarity itself ("what is interdisciplinarity?"), rather than on different instances of it ("what is political economics?"; "what is ecolinguistics?").[7] The "post-Westphalian" engagement it advances is in clear tension with the continual tendency for specialised knowledge on one hand, and the traditional disciplinary structure of university culture on the other. At the same time, it is hard to think of a more viable vehicle for original, pathbreaking and transformative work. Phenomena in the real world, after all, do not take place in discrete, nameable and identifiable intellectual domains, such as "political science", "philosophy", "linguistics", "history" or "ecology". They happen, simultaneously, in all of them at once.

Normative language policy, as an interdisciplinary area of inquiry, is no exception to this rule. Quebec language politics, language death in Australia, assimilation policies in Turkey or the implementation of language tests as citizenship prerequisite in the European Union—all of these are simply not reducible to an intra-disciplinary comfort zone, developed and nuanced as it may well be. Presuming to understand such complex phenomena using the scientific epistemology of a single discipline (to the extent that it is possible to talk about a more or less stable formulation of it, of course) is no more of a "phenomenological" truth than Aristotle's inference that, by identifying the underlying logic of ancient Greek grammar, he has in fact identified the universal logic of human thought itself. If there is any practical conclusion to be drawn from this, it is the inescapable need to push beyond mutual interest in subject matters, and to look much more closely at the fundamental questions, issues and assumptions that underlie each discipline. "Scrutinising" scientific epistemologies and their interaction(s) is certainly a demanding task, with unclear guidelines and uncertain standards. But it is hard to see how it may be avoided, if normative language policy is to be seriously perceived as an interdisciplinary pursuit.

Sociolinguistics and political philosophy, the "parent" sub-disciplines of normative language policy, are different from one another in almost every respect. They

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[6] Consider, for example, Okin's inquiry in *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?* on the tension between gender equality and cultural respect (Okin et al. 1999).

[7] Interdisciplinarity-focused literature is surprisingly recent, including Klein (1991, 1996) and Moran (2002). First handbooks were published as late as 2008 (Hadorn et al.) and 2010 (Frodeman et al.). Other useful works include Klein (2005) and Repko (2011).

have different understanding of what constitutes an important question, a useful approach, or admissible data. Linguists, with all their interest in normative inquiry, very rarely utilise thought experiments or modes of reflective equilibrium when thinking about moral principles in language policy. Political philosophers, on their part, rarely engage with the type of empirical investigation routinely carried out by linguists. Reflecting on the complex interaction between "thinking politically" and "thinking linguistically" invites, if not necessitates, a reflection not only on particular theories (e.g. liberal language rights), concepts (language death) or methods (attitudinal surveys), but also on the nature of knowledge and its production. The need to negotiate a better-informed common sphere between these two very different disciplines makes the task of conceptualising normative language policy a very complex matter indeed. Fortunately, however, "complex" does not necessarily imply a completely amorphous, shapeless entity. In fact, particular interpretations of it might prove to be very useful in advancing the debate on the nature, boundaries and dynamics of this emerging field of inquiry. This is my purpose in the next section.

Interface: *complex* normative language policy

The strong interdisciplinary nature of normative language policy research necessarily implies a complex inquiry. As the previous section suggested, interdisciplinarity is not merely the combination of two or more disciplines into a single project, framework, theory or method. Rather, on a much deeper level it implies the interplay between different scientific epistemologies, each with its own approach as to what constitutes a scientific inquiry and method, what makes a good research question, how to identify and operationalize concepts, what forms of discovery are considered useful or what type of sources are used. In researching normative language policy, should we opt for empirical data collection or thought experiments? Should we have Labov or Kymlicka at the back of our mind? Should we concentrate on addressing current instances of linguistic injustices, or on trying to figure out what precisely makes them such? Adopting a catchall strategy might seem like a good idea, until we realise that this means committing to a "view from everywhere" that is demanding to the point of being unfeasible. Knowing the boundaries of one's own "native" discipline is demanding enough, much less those of unfamiliar disciplinary territories. This is one of the main reasons for shifting our attention from "discipline" to "scientific epistemology". The latter provides us at least a general map, or a guiding rationale, for exploring those boundaries in which the intricate topic of normative language policy is situated.

Normative language policy, as an intrinsically interdisciplinary field, is a complex business. Labelling it as such, however, is intended to do more than merely highlight its rich and multifaceted fabric. "Complexity" in this respect does not refer to the understanding of the word in everyday speech, which simply means that a certain issue is generally intricate and has many different bits to it. Likewise, it does not correspond to the notions of "complex equality" or "complex justice" that

are found in egalitarian political philosophy.[8] Rather, it relates to an emerging body of research on what is known as "complexity theory"—also sometimes known as "systems theory" or "complex adaptive systems"—an emergent framework in the philosophy of science. Complexity theory, originating in the natural sciences in the late twentieth century, focuses its attention on the behaviour of *systems*: their emergence, behaviour and interactions with their environment. In the real world, as this body of literature is progressively demonstrating, many of the entities that we expect to exhibit a simple, mechanistic behaviour exhibit in fact anything but. Systems such as cells, ant colonies or markets are better understood as behaving in a *dynamic* rather than static way. Their emerging patterns are nonlinear and unpredictable. They are capable of self-organisation and self-modification. Their boundaries are unclear and fuzzy. They are better perceived as adaptive and open-ended processes rather than static, self-contained and mechanistic entities (useful introductions to complex systems are found in Meadows 2008, Gros 2010, Mitchell 2011).

Making the case for normative language policy as a *complex* inquiry under this interpretation lies in the intrinsic complexity of its "basic stuff", namely language and politics. Normative language policy, posing questions such as "what is linguistic justice", "how to secure equal rights to language in a multilingual polity" or "what type of language ethics transpires from democratic theory?" are reliant on two basic concepts—the first is "language" and the other is "polity". Both concepts are often perceived in current literature in either political theory or sociolinguistics as *static*, conceptualised as a self-contained entity, which has a clear and defined meaning, and a generally close-ended nature and as a self-contained entity (e.g. a discrete polity, a unified language). Such a "Westphalian" view of both language and the polity is, at the same time, often criticised in the literature, either by sociolinguists who perceive the linguistic justice debate as weak on its conception of the intricacies of language, or by political theorists who are concerned with sociolinguists' casual understanding of the subtleties of democratic politics, the analytical intricacies of egalitarian theories, or theories of justice. Both disciplines, in other words, rightfully make the case that "it (e.g. 'polity' and 'language') is more complex than that". But the attention seems to focus largely on the more superficial level of the subject matters of power and language, rather than the interplay of the scientific epistemologies of political science and linguistics.

A *complexity* approach to normative language policy begins by reconceptualising both polity and language as complex systems, namely as open-ended, dynamic, nonlinear entities, which have fuzzy boundaries and exhibit emergent adaptive behaviour patterns. Despite the significant influence of the Westphalian tradition of how we think about the polity and its language(s), it is in fact surprisingly hard to identify where, precisely, do they start and end, or predict how exactly they evolve and according to which trajectories. "Where does one language start and another end? With the

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[8] Note that these two interpretations are not mutually exclusive. The systemic set of social institutions that comprise a polity (e.g. government, the media, education) suggests a potentially useful way for re-interpreting, as it were, the notions of complex equality and complex justice (e.g. Walzer 1984; Walzer and Miller 1995; Miller 2001) when applied to normative language policy. I hope to further develop this line of argument in the near future.

exception of languages with insignificant historical contact (e.g. Hebrew and Japanese), a clear division between languages is not always so easy to establish. Such divisions in themselves are often influenced by political circumstances rather than purely linguistic criteria, such as whether the language community in question has been successful or not in 'grabbing a territory' (to use Van Parijs' recommendation). Language contact and language change complicate such attempts even further, especially in evolutionary terms. Nonstandardised languages and hybrid variants also contribute their fair share.[9] Boundary-setting in politics is just as difficult, despite the seemingly neat configuration of political boundaries in atlases and other reference materials. Political borders and polities hardly ever remain intact: conflicts—armed and otherwise—often result in the redrawing of borders. Globalisation and immigration transform their social, linguistic and ethnic composition. In fact, if there is anything that could be safely inferred from history, is that neither languages nor polities remain forever unchanged.

Identifying both language and the polity as complex entities in themselves becomes an even trickier business when we think about their *interplay* of, that is, how political transformations affects language evolution and vice versa. The *co-evolution* of polities and languages is a lot less mechanistic than several hundreds of years of nation- and language-building heritage would have us believe. Neither the nation state nor standard language models operate in any way along a *teleological* trajectory. Making predictions in linguistics, such as the identity of the next global language, is rightfully regarded as a precarious business. In a similar vein, very few political scientists would be willing to make any kind of strong predictions for the future of present national and transnational polities, let alone those who might decline (and, of course, those who will emerge) in the future. Polities and languages co-emerge, co-decline, co-evolve and co-adapt. The lives of the two are usually *interrelated*, as authority in politics and authority in language are very rarely divorced from each other.[10]

The continual interplay of language and power makes for a strong reason to "tune" the general notion of normative language policy along complexity theory-inspired lines. This is because the structural features of open-endedness, adaptability and fuzzy boundaries seem to map so well on the dynamics of languages, polities and their interplay in the real world, in which Westphalian-inspired characteristics such as "discrete", "nameable" and "identifiable" are often the result of particular political and linguistic ideologies rather than universal laws of nature. Such fundamental characteristics require, if not necessitate, a corresponding theory that could handle these complex and co-evolving dynamics efficiently. And a capable theory is important not only for the purpose of improving our understanding of the past or present dynamics, but perhaps even more so in thinking about the future. If we concede that the polity and language have unclear boundaries, and that they

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[9] On the application of complexity theory to language, see Elllis and Larsen-Freeman (2009) and Massip-Bonnet and Bastardas-Boada (2013). A recent call for integrating complexity theory into language policy research, specifically in the context of sociology and law, is found in Bastardas-Boada (2013).

[10] Consider, for example, Wee's discussion of Singlish in *Language without Rights* (Wee 2011). The book makes a very thought-provoking argument for the important tension between the dynamic nature of language on one hand, and the strict analytical framework of the "language of language rights" on the other.

interact, adapt and evolve in an unpredictable manner, what implications do these insights have not only for the empirical research of language policymaking but also for its *ethical* properties? If there is no simple "prescription" for achieving morally-desirable outcomes in the politics of language, how can we know whether particular policy measures, such as the introduction of bilingual education or language tests, are not only useful (or not) but also morally permissible? What kind of normative language policy may emerge under such circumstances of necessarily bounded rationality?

While the intrinsic unpredictability inherent to a complexity conception of the language, polity and their co-evolution might seem discouraging, it is by no mean intended to diminish the role of human agency in this process of co-evolution. The fact that we are unable to "engineer" particular linguistic and political outcomes, especially in the longer term, should not detract from the fact that human agency plays a crucial role in the interplay of language and politics in the short run. Some purposeful interventions in language politics, notably in language revival, have seen thus far significant success. Hebrew certainly stands out in this context, but the Welsh and Maori cases do seem to offer some place for optimism.[11] Focusing on successful outcomes, however, is only one part of the task of normative language policy. The other part is reflecting on the ethics implied by these measures, the values they seek to promote and the principles in whose name they are enacted and introduced. We will probably never be in full possession of a "grand-narrative" on how to achieve perfect justice, so tells us a complexity approach to normative language policy, since such teleology simply does not exist in the real world.[12] But what it does allow us to do is to be more reflective about the ethics of human agency in language policymaking, so we would have a more nuanced capacity to judge whether some proposed policies (e.g. territorial versus individual language regimes) are both more practical and ethical than others.

Normative language policy as an adaptive *language-in-polity* framework

The subject matter of sociolinguistic research is often formulated as "language-in-society". The notion of *normative* language policy as presented in the previous sections, by contrast, by seeking to engage linguistics and political science, could be therefore said to redefine the subject matter as "language-in-*polity*". The shift from "society" to "polity" intends to introduce to the analysis of language policy the never-ending process of ranking and prioritising that characterises politics as a

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[11] The reclamation of Hebrew, of course, cannot be detached from the consequences of this process suffered by speakers of Jewish heritage languages such as Yiddish, Ladino and different varieties of Arabic. The question of costs—not purely in monetary terms but also in human cost—is pivotal to any ethical debate in the politics of language. This seems to be particularly pertinent to debates that take place in an environment of bounded rationality, where such costs are not always clearly identifiable or anticipated from the outset.

[12] A very insightful proposition for an adaptive approach to social justice is found in Ian Shapiro's *Justice against Domination* (Shapiro forthcoming).

human activity ("thinking politically"[13]). The capacity for thinking politically about the complex interplay between language and the polity offers a useful way forward, by unpacking the intrinsic interdisciplinarity of normative language policy research as the interface between "thinking like a linguist" and "thinking like a political philosopher". Interdisciplinarity itself, of course, could be viewed as a complex process, exhibiting traits such as open-endedness, adaptability, unpredictable emergent patterns and fuzzy boundaries.[14] The more these two scientific episte-mologies engage, the greater likelihood that their shared interface would develop as a distinct field of inquiry, with stronger theoretical, conceptual and methodological commonalities between those who specialize in thinking about language in society and those who are professional ethicists.

It is critical to stress that the imperative to develop the *interface* between sociolinguistics and political philosophy does not imply, however, the erosion of the *interfences*, or of existing disciplinary boundaries, fuzzy as they may be. Paradoxically, a meaningful engagement with interdisciplinary research requires an underlying awareness of the existence of disciplinary boundaries, in order to highlight the distinction between their different ways of thinking (e.g. "thinking like a linguist", "thinking like a political scientist", "thinking like a lawyer", "thinking like a physicist") in the first place. In the absence of such distinctions, the qualification "interdisciplinary" runs the risk of being reduced to a non-reflective and non-systematic "hodgepodge" of theories, concepts and methodologies.

There is little question that experimental research and exploratory work are pivotal for breaking new grounds. But it is precisely the thinking about the individual "boxes" that enables the thinking *outside* the box, let alone the establishment of *new* boxes: why *this* particular research question on language tests in Quebec? Why *these* particular concepts for investigating Belgium linguistic territoriality? Why *these* tools to examine language death in the Pacific? Why *this* list of references on minority language rights? Thinking about interdisciplinarity as the complex interface between the disciplinary boxes of scientific epistemologies, offers interdisciplinary researchers a more reasoned, nuanced and self-aware reflective terrain. Interdisciplinarity does not preclude the analytical, or intellectual, need for thinking in disciplinary terms, such as thinking politically or thinking linguistically. It simply makes the point that these are not self-contained or standalone perspectives on the inescapable and irreducible complexity of the real world.

Applying a complexity framework to the interface between language and the polity, the previous section argued, means shifting from thinking about these entities as static, self-contained and discrete entities to dynamic systems that co-evolve and adapt. One important implication of such a shift is abandoning the expectation of discovering a "grand theory" that may fully account for this dynamic co-evolution, and with it the hope for finding permanent, "fixed for once and for all" solutions to

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[13] This part of the discussion is greatly indebted to Michael Freeden's *The Political Theory of Political Thinking: The Anatomy of a Practice* (Freeden 2013).

[14] On the interconnectedness of complexity and interdisciplinarity see Klein (2004). A very useful description of the historical evolution of disciplines *from* interdisciplinary spaces is found in Weingrat (2010).

tensions and conflicts that emerge through such co-evolution, be they the national language conflicts of polities such as Belgium and Canada, the challenges facing aboriginal peoples in Australia and the US, or the changing power equilibria of local languages with global English. This by no mean implies, however, that human agency has no role or capacity for influencing these complex dynamics. National governments, community NGOs, global corporations and other political actors are all agents that are capable of realising political and linguistic transformations. The "real politics" of language policy is often precisely the dynamic equilibrium of power to which they are all part. What the application of complexity tells us about this equilibrium is simply that no single actor may be able to indefinitely "engineer" this equilibrium to its own purposes and interests. The open-endedness of the dynamic interface between language and power implies that human agency certainly plays a crucial part in the shaping of that interface, even if it is incapable of achieving complete control.

Given all that we know about the dynamic interface between language and the demos, including the limitation of that knowledge, which policies for the future are ethically permissible, and why? This is the main terrain in which a complex normative language policy framework operates. The main goal of such a framework, respectively, is not so much to propose a *numerical* solution to present linguistic tensions around the globe, as to suggest a different way of looking at them, and, consequently of unpacking and addressing them. Being open about the interdependent co-evolution of language and polities further introduces to contemporary debates on the politic of language a more honestly modest admission of the capacities and limitations of policymaking to achieve desired outcomes. It therefore detaches itself from more metaphysical political and linguistic ideologies, or otherwise mitigates unrealistic expectations for an indefinite "fix" in response to anxieties over sociolinguistic changes and transformations. It might be that it is impossible to *perpetually* engineer a particular linguistic regime for a polity or protect a smaller minority language from decline. But this does not mean that it is impossible to influence the *trajectory* of this transformation, particularly on shorter time-scales. The dynamics of this transformation might not be linear or adhere to a simple and replicable chain of causality. But being unable to *guarantee* a perfect outcome cannot and ought not deter actors from active participation in the power equilibrium to which they are a meaningful part.

Foregoing the *metaphysical* component in thinking about normative language policy is also crucially important for the "thinking politically" component of that complex interdisciplinary interface. Close-ended, utopian or eschatological-like visions of perfect justice may paradoxically detract rather than encourage the advancement of concrete and realisable "micro justice(s)", such as greater visibility for marginalised communities and individuals, progressive policies designed to address systemic clusters of disadvantage (e.g. in income and health disparities) especially when they correlate with linguistic difference, or local bottom-top revitalisation efforts. A complex adaptive approach to normative language policy is therefore necessarily *contextualised*, since its adaptive component is highly sensitive to the particular local circumstances and environment within which the system operates. What might constitute an ethically defensible policy in India might

not suit the circumstances of the politically and linguistically different polities of Australia, Japan or Tanzania. And what is practical and ethical right now may be unfeasible or illegitimately coercive in a hundred years' time.[15] Evaluating the justifiability of alternative language policies is therefore inevitably a local issue rather than an across-the-board application of a particular moral principle, suitable for all polities and invariably throughout their evolution.

Complex normative language policy, to summarise, is, at its base, the acknowledgement that the interface between power and language does not operate in a linear or predictable fashion. Attempting to impose close-ended solutions on this dynamic and irreducible complexity would be both unrealistic and unethical. Unrealistic, since the adaptive nature of the interplay between politics and language is not simply "engineer-able". One cannot simply expect polities, languages and their interplay to remain unchanged through time, at least not outside a highly ideological perception. It would also be unethical, since such an imposition would imply the constraining of an ethically reflective human agency, which is aware of its changing circumstances and is capable of responding to these changes in better—and worse—ways. Denying future generations the opportunity and responsibility for a meaningful participation in the shaping of their own political and linguistic circumstances effectively neutralises the dynamic prioritisation process of politics as a human activity.

Conclusion

Saying that we live in a complex and changing world runs the risk of stating either a triviality or cliché. And yet, the irreducibility of the complex interactions between the fundamental human condition of linguistic diversity and societal interdependence implies that opting for simplistic conceptualisations of these interactions is likely to result in inadequate theorising and problematic real-world consequences. The main challenge that transpires from this "insolvable" tension between difference and interdependence is finding a suitably complex framework that is capable of working with this tension, rather than attempt to offer supposedly finite solutions to it. The move from "language in society" to "language in polity" that is proposed in this article is thus intended to "tune" along these lines the theory-building process in normative language policy, and the current quest for theoretical, conceptual and methodological commonalities between sociolinguists and political philosophers.

More broadly, normative language policy, for better or worse, is an intrinsically interdisciplinary inquiry, at whose core there exists a dynamic interface between the scientific epistemologies of its parent disciplines. Such an approach to this emerging

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[15] Consider, for examples, how factors such as revitalisation, standardisation and political independence affect linguistic regimes. Highly coercive policies that might be seen as justified when a language is under clear threat, for examples, may cease to be perceived as legitimate once that language is no longer endangered. Similar extrapolations can be made for pre- and post linguistic standardisation (e.g. the legitimacy of variants) and pre- and post political independence. (e.g. attitudes towards English as a global language).

field is full of challenges as is full of potential. In purely intellectual terms, it remains undecided on what it considers a good research question, a pertinent set of concepts, or a useful discovery procedure. In more practical terms, its emergent nature means that it does not correspond comfortably to existing institutional knowledge organisation (e.g. departmental division in academia), and far from approximating the range of infrastructures (e.g. dedicated journals, teaching curricula) that is more readily available within the respective boundaries of its parent disciplines. The insights it is capable of offering, however, as the set of articles included in this special issue certainly demonstrates, seem to justify the continual pursuit for a shared terrain at the interface between the subjects matters of language and power, their two parent disciplines, and their epistemic boxes.

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