

Linguistic Justice for Europe and for the World

Van Parijs, Philippe

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Anna is a six-year-old girl who lives in the Canton Ticino, Switzerland. Her mother tongue is Italian, but her parents would like her to go to an English-speaking elementary school. They approach a private American school in Ticino, where most classes are given in the language of Mark Twain. Since she is of compulsory school age, then in order to go to this school Anna needs to receive a special authorisation from the Department of Public Education of the Canton Ticino. The authorities refuse to provide that authorisation. Anna's parents decide to present an appeal, first to a cantonal tribunal and then to the Federal Tribunal. The appeal is rejected. The main explanation of the judges is as follows: Canton Ticino has the right to defend the linguistic territoriality principle (LTP).

Even though the girl's name is a product of my imagination, the episode itself is not. The case is real and the ruling of the Federal Tribunal (number 2C_449/2011) is of 26 April 2012. It is quite emblematic because it shows to what extent the Swiss authorities – both cantonal and federal – rigorously apply the LTP. True, similar rules can be found in other multilingual settings, such as Quebec. In Québec they reflect the desire to defend the French language from an objectively probable Anglicisation, whereas in Ticino such justification is lacking. However, there is no plausible risk that English will replace Italian in the southern part of Switzerland. Nevertheless, the federal judges were unanimous in stating that "the public interest meant to protect the *italianità* shall prevail over private interest of the appellants" (my translation from Italian). This demonstrates how rigorous, indeed rigid, is the application of the LPT in Switzerland.

Anna's parents think that they have been victims of an *injustice*. The authorities of the Canton Ticino, on the other hand, believe they have acted in a *just* way. But what does "justice" mean in the domain of language? For what reasons should respect for the LPT (see art. 70, Swiss Federal Constitution) take priority over the individual freedom of language (see art. 18, Swiss Federal Constitution), which can find its expression, for example, in the freedom to choose the school in the language of personal preference?

In recent years, political philosophers have engaged in the language issue with normative arguments (see Kymlicka and Patten 2003). In this context, the book written by Philippe van Parijs represents a successful attempt to construct a comprehensive theory of "linguistic justice" (LJ). The main result of Van Parijs's analysis consists of two conclusions: first, only one lingua franca – English – should be promoted at the global level and, second, local languages should be protected through a rigorous application of the LTP (more precisely, Van Parijs speaks of a "territorially differentiated coercive language regime").

Van Parijs presents a number of empirical facts that show English has become the main language of communication at the global level and then explains why, in the long run, no other language can perform that function (chapter 1). However, the diffusion of English as a lingua franca is not simply an empirical and irreversible fact. It is also desirable from the point of view of global justice based on the principle of equality (§1.9) and it facilitates the emergence of a transnational *demos* (§1.10). Still, this does not imply that such an evolution is just or fair. In fact, it is not necessarily fair that non-Anglophones need to spend their time and money in order to learn English, while English speakers can use those very resources for other activities. Further, the English-speaking countries profit considerably from the arrival of non-Anglophones who attend classes of English language. How can such an injustice be addressed?

If we consider language as a common good, and therefore conceptualise LJ as "fair cooperation", we can develop various schemes ranging from the efficient and/or fair share of costs to equal share of benefits that result from adopting English as a lingua franca (chapter 2). Van Parijs opts

for an equalisation of the proportion between costs and benefits. The result of such a scheme is that approximately half of the costs necessary for learning English would be supported by non-Anglophones, while the other half would be covered by English speakers.

Yet Van Parijs is less interested in language as a common good, than in language as a personal resource. From this point of view, we create injustice if we depart from an equal distribution of resources based on the diversity of native language equipments (p. 87). Out of this concern, Van Parijs conceives LJ as "equal opportunity" founded on distributive justice (chapter 3). Such a conception of justice requires a redistribution of resources from those who are advantaged from the linguistic point of view (the Anglophones) to those who are not (the non-Anglophones). This need not necessarily imply money transfers: it is possible to disseminate the lingua franca at almost no cost (for example, Van Parijs proposes the banning of dubbing movies into English and suggests opting for subtitles).

These measures are not sufficient, however. Theories of justice do not limit themselves to considerations of equal exchange or the equal redistribution of resources. Justice is also respect, dignity and esteem. Consequently, Van Parijs develops a third approach to LG (chapter 4), which he calls "parity of esteem" (also labelled "equal dignity" or "equal respect"). What does this mean? Sometimes it means that we would recognise, if only symbolically, the existence of a given language in a given context (suffice to mention the recognition of Romansh in Switzerland as a fourth "national language"). Sometimes, though, the symbols are not enough. LJ as "parity of esteem" requires much more than that. According to Van Parijs, it demands the application of the LTP (chapter 5). The LTP, however, shall not be defended with nationalist arguments (such as national sovereignty). Rather, it serves (a) to resist colonialist attitudes, (b) to avoid the disappearance of a minority language because its speakers, out of kindness, switch to the language of the majority (again, we can think of the Romansh speakers in the Grisons), and (c) to make sure that a local language can continue to be used as a medium of communication by its speakers, who are regarded as a political community.

Attentive readers might have noticed that two motivations that are frequently used in the justification of the LTP, especially in the Swiss context, are missing. These are "linguistic peace" (§5.7) and the promotion of language diversity (chapter 6). The latter, in particular, should not be seen as a goal in itself. Van Parijs convincingly draws our attention to a paradox, whereby the promotion of multilingualism not only can bring about a decrease of diversity, but may also result in a trade-off between diversity within a given linguistic area and diversity between different linguistic areas (§6.3).

No doubt a book exploring such a complex topic contains elements that can be criticised because they are not totally convincing or because they have not been sufficiently developed. In particular, the LTP, as formulated by Van Parijs, can be seen as too weak to protect local languages from dominant and hegemonic languages (see Grin 2011). Conversely, it can be considered as being too rigid to take into account the plurality of languages in contemporary societies and to respect language freedom (see De Schutter 2008). As far my reading of the book is concerned, I think that the role of *democracy* in the theory of LJ, albeit all but ignored by Van Parijs (see §5.13), requires further theoretical developments. Without question, the LTP has many merits and, in general, it should be defended. Nevertheless, we must admit that the idea that linguistic borders should be set once and for all clashes with some basic principles of liberal democracy. In my view, the response of Van Parijs to this critique is not totally satisfactory. However, we should recognise that his book offers an informed, intelligent and stimulating analysis of a problem that has been neglected in political theory. It is a seminal work on multilingualism that can hardly be ignored in future theoretical approaches.

Yet we still need to address an initial question of this review. Does LJ, as elaborated by Van Parijs, offer theoretical support to justify the decision not to allow Anna to go to an English-

speaking school on the territory of the Canton Ticino? The answer is negative. Such a decision is clearly disproportionate because it applies the LTP in too rigid a way. At the same time, LJ should lead us to argue that, if Anna had been allowed to go to the American school, it would have been unjust if her parents alone had to bear the entire cost, without receiving any support from English-speaking countries.

[The official name of the SPSR, proudly exhibited on its cover, is given in four languages. Indeed, this journal welcomes contributions written in French, German and English, as well as in Italian. This is a good example of linguistic justice as “parity of esteem”. Yet to my knowledge, no SPSR article has ever been published in Italian. Probably no scholar has ever submitted a paper in this official Swiss language, considering that all Italian-speaking Swiss political scientists publish their works almost exclusively in English, French or German. The topic of this book review was too inviting, though, not to address this lacuna. The few readers who do not understand Italian may wish to have a look at the English translation available online (bit.ly/SQVlzN). However, advocates of English-only in social sciences should not rejoice too quickly: on the same website they will find translations of this review into (in alphabetical order) Bosnian Serbo-Croat, Dutch, French, German and Romansh. Needless to say, the addition of any further language will be most welcome.]

Nenad Stojanovic
Zentrum für Demokratie Aarau,
Universität Zürich

Translation from Italian: Nenad Stojanovic
Revision: Michael Woodsmansy

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