



## When Language Rights are Not Enough

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***When Language Rights are Not Enough:  
Dialogue for Reconciliation in Post-Conflict Settings***

P McDermott and M Nic Craith

Abstract

This article posits a new framework in relation to language rights in post-conflict settings, giving a key position to dialogue, which we see as a multidimensional process central in most reconciliation processes. Yet this notion is seldom utilised with regard to language rights, and subsequently in language policies. Instead, powerful stakeholders such as governments or transnational organisations often consider the introduction of language rights as ‘enough’ to resolve language disputes. We discuss the impact of this in a variety of settings, arguing that a static interpretation of language rights, such as in the text of a peace agreement or a constitution, is not sufficient. The application of language rights without follow-on dialogue can antagonise rather than reconcile the very disputes they claim to settle. We argue that a more fluid consideration is required that captures the complex and changing dynamics of linguistic identities in the volatile context of a peace process. A neglected aspect in the debate on language rights in post-conflict settings is the way dialogue can, over time, alter the relationship language communities have with their own language and potentially with the language of their ‘other’. We draw on international examples that indicate dialogue should be a central consideration in post-conflict settings at all levels, from transnational organisations to governments’ national policies, and finally to grassroots initiatives within and across communities.

**Wenn Sprachrechte nicht ausreichen: Dialog für Versöhnung in Postkonfliktsituationen**

Dieser Aufsatz postuliert einen neuen Bezugsrahmen für den Umgang mit Sprachrechten in Postkonfliktsituationen, der dem Dialog, den wir als einen multidimensionalen Prozess betrachten, der in den meisten Versöhnungsprozessen von zentraler Bedeutung ist, eine Schlüsselposition einräumt. Dieser Begriff wird jedoch selten im Hinblick auf Sprachrechte und später in der Sprachenpolitik verwendet. Stattdessen betrachten mächtige Interessengruppen wie Regierungen oder transnationale Organisationen die Einführung von Sprachrechten oft als "hinreichend", um Sprachstreitigkeiten beizulegen. Wir diskutieren die Auswirkungen dieser Sichtweise in diversen Umständen und argumentieren, dass eine statische Interpretation von Sprachrechten, wie z.B. im Text eines Friedensabkommens oder einer Verfassung, nicht ausreicht. Solcherlei Einführung von Sprachrechten ohne anschließenden Dialog kann genau die Dispute, die sie zu schlichten vorgibt, eher verschärfen als beilegen. Wir argumentieren, dass eine flexiblere Sichtweise erforderlich ist, die die komplexe und wechselhafte Dynamik sprachlicher Identitäten im volatilen Kontext eines Friedensprozesses erfasst. Ein vernachlässigter Aspekt in der Debatte über Sprachrechte in Postkonfliktsituationen ist die Art und Weise, in der Dialog im Laufe der Zeit die Beziehung verändern kann, welche Sprachgemeinschaften zu ihrer eigenen Sprache und möglicherweise zu jener der "anderen" haben. Wir stützen uns auf internationale Beispiele, die darauf hindeuten, dass der Dialog eine zentrale Überlegung in Postkonfliktsituationen auf allen Ebenen sein sollte, von transnationalen Organisationen über die nationale Politik der Regierungen bis hin zu Basisinitiativen innerhalb und zwischen Gemeinschaften.

## Introduction

The issue of language recognition in the aftermath of conflict has proven challenging globally (McDermott and Nic Craith, 2019; Nic Craith and McDermott, 2022). In post-conflict regions where there continues to be contestation over statehood, the very act of speaking or promoting a particular language may be viewed as a political act. Linguistic identity can be utilized by communities to create boundaries between themselves and their ‘other’ and peace treaties alone will rarely end such antagonisms. The very existence of debates on language recognition can negatively impact on the nature of intercommunal relationships themselves which can stymie peacebuilding efforts. Government decisions on language policy are invariably scrutinized by different sides of an ethnonational conflict as a highly emotive issue. Public authorities have struggled to balance the claims of different language groups in these settings. Protagonists or international observers may think that they have ‘peace on paper’ but it is highly likely that language will continue to be drawn on as a marker of symbolic difference which further polarizes communities.

Recognition of languages in post-conflict settlements, or constitutional change after a conflict, frequently involves the accommodation and some recognition of linguistic difference as a peacebuilding tool. ‘Linguistic diversity’ has been championed by international organizations like the European Union (EU), the United Nations (UN), the Council of Europe (CoE) or the African Union. While policy makers and political observers appreciate the ‘positive’ symbolic value of a language for its speakers, a language can also have ‘negative’ symbolic value for another community. The emotions around a particular language are not simply relevant to its traditional community of speakers but are also felt by non-speakers and other language communities. In a post-conflict society, while members of one community may favour greater recognition for their own language, opponents may react strongly against any such initiatives. Although the advocacy of language rights might be viewed as an inherently good thing this perspective can be overly optimistic of the realities.

A key point of exploration in this article is the role of dialogue as a tool to overcome divisive linguistic identities. To address our research question on the significance of dialogue, we consider a wide-ranging set of international scenarios, where there are different levels of dialogues (or none at all). A fundamental element of our argument is the importance of internal dialogue *within* communities as a precursor to cross-community conversations. The purpose of such internal dialogues is to reframe interpretations of language diversity within communities before encouraging dialogue *between* previously antagonistic groups. Constructive cross-community dialogue might seem unlikely given the intensity of antagonisms in the immediate aftermath of conflict. However, carefully managed dialogue, if considered as part of a longer-term process, has the potential to re-frame relationships between language groups.

In our approach, we consider a range of dialogic processes. We begin with a consideration of grassroots activism as a key player in the initial pursuance of language recognition. When this process has been drawn on during conflicts, and unless carefully managed it can result in communities enforcing boundaries around their “own languages”. We then critique how powerful agents such as the state often intervene to accommodate linguistic communities. Without careful management, formal peace processes can encase language recognition within a series of rights and obligations which may satisfy one community but irritate another. In some instances, as we will discuss below, recognition of language rights has heightened rather than softened political views.

A critical consideration in the case of dialogue includes the stage of reconciliation at which it will prove useful. Not all conflicts are immediately ready for a dialogic process and communities may need some time before they reach a point where identities become more

malleable and difficult debates about language can meaningfully take place. There is the issue of whether these initiatives are allowed to emerge naturally, or should there be some form of catalyst from other actors such as the state or international bodies? There is also the question of who leads the dialogue? Should they be led by policy-makers, community leaders, language groups or a fusion of all of these? And how can the furtherance of dialogue be achieved considering the context in which very entrenched views towards the ‘other’s’ language might be held?

The points we make in this essay have arisen from common trends identified in our fieldwork which has been conducted in a range of sites in Europe over the past-two decades. Our consideration of these trends has been enriched by engagement with bodies such as the European Centre for Minority Issues, Conradh na Gaeilge and the Institute for Conflict Research and UNESCO. Our methodological approach is primarily interpretivist and derives from anthropology rather than political science. In the Weberian tradition, we consider how macro-level factors generate apparent ‘social facts’, particularly as they relate to questions of linguistic identities in post-conflict locations. The originality of our article derives from a re-assessment of the context of language debates in various regions via a *verstehen* approach. Instead of a deep case-study by case-study analysis in individual sites, we draw primarily on the issue of different levels of dialogue and how they have diminished (or failed to diminish) antagonisms.

Our core point is the call for an innovative approach which incorporates opportunities for meaningful dialogue within and across communities in the sphere of language policy. This would align with the principles of respect as laid out in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe’s (OSCE) ‘Ljubljana Guidelines on Integration of Diverse Societies.’ This document states that: “Integration policies should include measures that encourage cross-community dialogue and interaction based on tolerance and mutual respect” (OSCE, 2012). This covers a broad range of initiatives in various fields, including education, media, and language policy. While this approach states the need for cross-community dialogue in the field of post-conflict language policy, we argue that dialogue *within* communities about the languages spoken in their wider geographical region is a crucial first stage. Such dialogue can potentially introduce new ideas and histories about the languages of a (former) enemy. Processes such as this can serve to deconstruct negative attitudes and opinions before intercultural dialogue can then occur more fruitfully. Our contribution adds to this missing element of that debate by arguing that current approaches of simply recognising or accommodating the demands of particular language communities do not go far enough in the pursuance of peace. Instead, recognition and dialogue are two processes which should be viewed as intertwined.

### **Theories of Recognition and Dialogic Processes**

In the aftermath of conflict, peace treaties or new constitutions often include the idea of ‘recognition’ as retribution to affected parties for past atrocities. This can include improved political and cultural representation in the wider society. Dealing with diversity in this way has been conceptualised by Charles Taylor as the ‘politics of difference’ (1992). The claims of groups which have felt unjustly treated during a conflict can, in these circumstances, come to be recognized or accommodated by legal or policy changes.

Taylor’s argument should be set in the context of the German philosopher, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel who could be regarded as the “founder of European ethics or recognition” (Martin et al, 2016). Hegel’s theory of recognition emphasized the importance of affirmation where one group would recognise the cultural identity of another. If that recognition is not forthcoming psychological harm can occur. The self-esteem of individual members of that group can be damaged and any potential to reconcile conflicts between them

impaired. The idea of recognition is a vital component of much contemporary international law to address the harms that non-recognition brings. While there is still a raging debate on the tensions between the application of group versus individual rights, there has been a growing appreciation that the two cannot be disentangled (Kymlicka 1995; Hegel 1807).

More recent approaches, such as critical and decolonial theory, have re-framed the Enlightenment perspective on recognition and taken a more emancipatory stance. While recognizing the psychological harm put forward by Hegel, and later by Taylor, theorists such as Nancy Fraser (2000), have developed a broader framework which takes account of economic disadvantage as well as low cultural self-esteem which is generated by a historical lack of recognition. Such reframing posits more affirmative actions, often by those in power, which redress past/historical legacies of systemic inequality and offer solutions to recognize and remove those differences.

In post-colonial contexts this approach can relate specifically to places where there has been non-recognition of indigenous languages. Decolonial theories of recognition, identify mechanisms of former subordination, and structural oppression where languages have often been symbolically annihilated (Mignolo 2008; De Santos *et al*, 2007). Fanon (1967) for example, notes that even the end of direct colonial rule will not suffice to undo the psychological damage and other harms to indigenous populations. Indigenous knowledge and worldviews in these contexts have been disrespected, marginalized and in some instances, indigenous peoples have been dislocated or relocated. In such instances, processes of recognition require the acknowledgement of the value of indigenous epistemologies and languages and the promotion of public dialogues that recognise alternatives modes of thought as well as different languages.

None of these processes of recognition, however, can be applied in post-conflict societies without the potential for antagonisms between different ethno-linguistic groups to emerge. The decolonising process can create perceptions of ‘gain’ or ‘loss’ between competing groups. We argue that recognition will only succeed when significant emphasis is placed on the relationship between communities. This inevitably involves communication and dialogue on issues such as language policy, values, and fairness (Patten, 2020). We note that for these negotiations on what is fair to be meaningful there needs to be a reassessment of views, attitudes, and interpretations *within* groups first. This can serve to deconstruct past prejudices against another language group. The importance of dialogue in dealing with culturally diverse contexts has been reinforced by academics such as Parekh (2000/2006) and Modood (2007/2013). Through hermeneutic dialogues taking place within an ethnolinguistic group, individual members can come to recognize the limitations of their current position and develop a richer understanding of their relationships with other competing groups.

Typically, such dialogues could take place in informal settings ranging from the private homes, cafes, community centres/halls and more recently in the online space. Such activism begins within and is led by communities themselves. From these initial internal dialogues comes the latter option of reconstructing the limits of a group’s ethnic boundaries before reaching beyond those boundaries to others. One of our thoughts in reframing the process of recognition is to take an incremental approach to this discussion. Our ideas here draw on Gadamer’s notion of valuative judgements which are really “prejudices” (*Vor-urteile*, “pre-judgments”) which need to be tackled before progress can take place. Dialogues across communities will not succeed unless there is first internal reflection, which might reconcile former negative evaluations of others.

Taking a thematic approach to the question of dialogue in language policy, we utilise examples from several post-conflict societies to illuminate certain trends in the following locations: Northern Ireland, Guatemala, North Macedonia, Sri Lanka, and Cyprus. We point first to a series of interconnected routes to which speakers of minority languages in post-

conflict contexts draw upon in their quest for recognition. Our contention here is that in many of these cases, it is the role of dialogue which is often missing or misjudged. However, we point to some cases where fledgling dialogue has occurred, which indicate the significance of this approach more formally within peacebuilding processes.

The desire for linguistic homogeneity, so evident in the age of modernity, led to the widespread oppression of linguistic groups who did not conform to the demands of the state (Barbour and Carmichael 2000). In essence, an attempt was made by states, sometimes violently, to deny the continuation of languages that were regarded as leading towards separatism. In such instances, states attempted to curtail opportunities for dialogue regarding language issues. However, communities reacted by instigating dialogues about their own language among themselves. This led to the emergence of what we might term linguistic counter-publics in a dominant public sphere which is “felt to betray or is no longer capable of allowing for critical rational engagement” (Fenton and Downey 2003, p. 21). The absence of two-way dialogue between state and community hardens ethno-linguistic boundaries. Language instead becomes a symbolic medium by which a community challenges state oppression through its own inward-facing and somewhat closed dialogue. The purpose of this dialogue is to resist another, usually dominant, linguistic culture. In this context, a community’s own activism establishes places and practices, which counteract the dominant narrative of the state.

### **Inward-facing Dialogue, Counter-Publics and Recognition**

One context in which grassroots activity, and linguistic counter publics has similarly been prevalent is the case of Northern Ireland (Kabel 1977, Hutchinson 2002). Since the establishment of Northern Ireland in the 1920s, the Irish language was denied state recognition. In the early 1970s, grassroots movements took hold in the setting of an ethno-national conflict where Irish speakers set about constructing linguistic counter publics. Examples of this process include the establishment of self-funded Irish-medium schools which were distinctive from the state education provided in English. Parents in locations such as West Belfast set up schools such as *Bunscoil Phobal Feirste* which promoted Gaelic language and cultural ethos.

Camille O’Reilly (1999) refers to the discourse of decolonisation where language was utilised at the time by nationalist communities to counteract the dominance of the state. For example, the adoption of Irish as a medium of communication by nationalist prisoners held in the Maze prison exemplified this decolonizing use of the language (Delap, 2017, Nic Craith, 2003). Such factors ensured that elements of the Irish language movement became associated with the separatist politics of Sinn Féin which supports the withdrawal from the United Kingdom and the establishment of a united Ireland. In the 1990s, community activism played an increasing role in the debates about the language in Northern Ireland. Activists succeeded in lobbying for the inclusion of some clauses in the 1998 Good Friday Peace Agreement. Organisations like POBAL engaged with debates on governmental language policy initiatives (Muller, 2010, p.124). We consider these processes to be a largely ‘*inward facing*’ form of dialogue ‘*within*’ communities, which emerged as an expression of resistance.

This inward-facing conversation about the language among Irish nationalists sparked an adverse reaction from those, primarily Protestant/Unionists not included in the conversation (Pritchard 2004). Such reactions are hardly surprising. In a different context, Paul Roe (2002) discusses the societal security dilemma that occurs when actions taken by a group to foster its own identity are perceived by other groups as threatening their identities. This can lead to the employment of countermeasures, which weaken the societal security of the first side, sparking a dangerous dynamic that can bring about ethnic violence. The security dilemma refers to a context where one party in “trying to increase its security, causes a reaction in a second, which,

in the end, decreases the security of the first. Consequently, a process of action and reaction is manifest whereby each side's policies are seen to threaten the other" (Roe, 2002, 58).

This was precisely the scenario which occurred in Northern Ireland when Irish language demands sparked an adverse reaction from many unionists. The momentum of community activism among Irish-language speakers created a situation where the British government could no longer entirely ignore. A hesitant dialogue was generated between grassroots and the state. At the time of writing Irish language speakers are still hugely dissatisfied with state support for the language in Northern Ireland. There continues to be some resistance to the promotion of the language by some within the unionist political parties although this is not always reflected amongst unionists themselves (McKay, 2021; Nic Craith and McDermott, 2022).

Inevitably, community activism does not always generate simple responses. Sometimes the internal dialogue within a community can illustrate different opinions within the community itself on language issues. In the case of Guatemala, throughout the 20th century the indigenous languages of the Mayan people were frequently posited by those in political authority as 'divisive' to the state where Spanish was the official language. During the bloody war of the 1980s, indigenous Mayan language identities were mobilized by some grass-roots organizations. Activists who supported the speaking of the indigenous languages were castigated as linguistically divisive, not only by the state, but also by other Mayans who preferred the use of the dominant Spanish (Choi, 2002, p.23). The latter had internalized the "cultural cringe" identified by Fanon (1967) which made them acutely aware of the "superior" status of Spanish and the "lower" position of their indigenous tongues in a social and economic hierarchy (Barrett, 2008, p. 284).

An essential component of the inward-facing debates for the activists was to boost esteem for languages that had been demeaned during the colonial process. Activists argued for the significance of indigenous languages for their identity and the compatibility of Mayan languages with modernity. These inward-facing movements aimed to improve the value that Mayans themselves would attribute to their own languages. Activists in these cases were often linguists and sociolinguists from Mayan backgrounds. By lobbying the state, these enthusiasts contributed to the eventual recognition of language rights in the 1995 "Agreement on Identity and Rights of the Indigenous Peoples". The Agreement was an important treaty in the peace process of Guatemala which led to constitutional reform and the subsequent setting-up of a range of commissions dealing with Mayan identity. The agreement recognised the cultural identity and rights of Indigenous populations such as "their relationship to land, languages, education, holy places and participation rights" (Holmlund, 1999, p. 5). Such an inward process of dialogue can be viewed as instigating an improved recognition from the state and a reassessment by a community from within regarding the value of its own linguistic heritage.

Whilst activism is necessary on the route to recognition and in counteracting discriminatory practices by a state, there are dangers associated with the process. The perception might be that this is a community looking only 'at themselves' which involves the use of language to draw exclusive ethnic boundaries. These boundaries include those who 'belong' and exclude those 'who do not'. In a post-conflict scenario this can result in the establishment of siloes and competing linguistic identities. For example, while a group might view its own language positively, the attitudes displayed towards the language of a competing group might be much more negative and thus generate antagonism even in a supposed period of 'peace'. Overall, this may discourage linguistic crossover where a member of one group actively could attempt to engage with and learn the language of their past enemy.

### **National and Transnational Dialogues: The Absence of Grassroots Perspectives**

In the previous section we noted internal community approaches to language planning at grassroots level. At the opposite end of the spectrum, we see the most powerful political entities

involved in managing language policy— namely, nation states and international organizations. Powerful actors like the USA, Russia, or supranational bodies like the EU, CoE or the UN can have significant input either positively or negatively into shaping dialogues on language across borders. As such interventions involve influential or elite actors, they can be construed by language communities as far removed from the actual experiences on the ground. The dominant political narratives of elites can in some cases exacerbate tensions.

To illustrate this, we point to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (renamed North Macedonia in 2019). The Serbo-Croatian language was a central part of life in the region during the period of the Yugoslav state, and Macedonian and Serbo-Croatian were both taught in schools. When North Macedonia achieved its independence, “Serbo-Croatian was completely removed from the elementary school curriculum and the 1992 Constitution declared the Macedonian language and Cyrillic script to be in official use” (Greenberg, 2004, p.165). Macedonian was thus elevated as the preferred language of the new state. At an international level, however, its linguistic status has been disputed.

North Macedonia is a hugely contested place with major identity disputes with two other European states – Greece and Bulgaria. In both cases, the evocation of historical memories, origin myths and the very nature of the Macedonian language have led to antagonism over the definition of Macedonian. The Bulgarian Academy of Sciences considers “Macedonian”, merely as a Bulgarian dialect (Marinov, 2003). Meanwhile, the scientific community in Greece have frequently challenged the denomination “Macedonian Language”. This position on the language relates primarily to the territorial naming dispute between Greece and North Macedonia. The Greek government considered the use of the very term “Macedonia” as appropriating aspects of Greece’s culture and heritage (Heraclides, 2020). This position changed in 2019 with the signing of the Prespa Agreement, drafted with the support of the United Nations. The Greek state acknowledged the official name of “the Republic of North Macedonia” (Republic of Greece and Republic of North Macedonia, 2019, article 3a). This did not have total support at grassroots level. The Agreement had significant implications for language as Greece agreed to recognize the term “Macedonian language” (article 7, 4). Subsequent polls have evidenced that citizens in neither country were happy with the compromise made by elite actors. This is a clear example of a “peace agreement” that has not gained the confidence of citizens on the ground due to an absence of grassroots discussion on wider political and cultural issues.

Language issues, however, have remained problematic with Bulgaria. Cross-border diplomatic relations between North Macedonia and Bulgaria have remained poor due to the continued claims by political elites in the Sofia government that Macedonian is merely a dialect of West Bulgarian. For such critics, the recognition of Macedonian as an independent language denigrated the integrity of Bulgarian linguistic identity. Some EU member states in Central Europe, including Austria, Germany, the Czech Republic, and Slovenia, have argued that this disagreement regarding language should not prevent North Macedonia’s negotiations for accessing EU membership. Unfortunately, such discussions have not involved ordinary citizens in North Macedonia and in the other countries involved in the dispute. There have, therefore, been little dialogic initiatives to enhance understanding of language issues at grassroots level and the debate has been spearheaded by elites that are largely removed from local level reactions and perspectives.

International actors dealing with the language dispute could draw on examples of religious dialogue already taking place within North Macedonia and develop these to address cross-border linguistic contexts. Gjorgjevski (2021) explores how there have been attempts to overcome disagreements and misunderstandings through the promotion of genuine dialogue on difficult cultural matters across religious communities at grass-roots level. Intercultural dialogues have enhanced grassroots appreciation of the richness and diversity of religious

groups in North Macedonia. Such localised activities are often ignored within the charged discourse and actions of political elites. Given the successful nature of this religious intercultural initiative, we question whether this model of dialogue could be adapted to operate in a cross-border way across communities in Bulgaria and North Macedonia. While cross-border debates are often channeled at the high echelons of political diplomacy, we have witnessed how cross-border working at grass roots level has great impact in reducing hostilities and sensitivities regarding difficult heritage (McDermott and McDowell, 2021; Laganà and White, 2021).

### **Facilitating New Dialogues at Grassroots Level**

In the examples above, structures for language recognition have been put in place in a post-conflict context but attitudinal issues towards languages and their speakers have not been addressed. While many peace treaties advance the recognition of particular languages and accommodate linguistic difference, a key question is whether they ever alter negative attitudes about linguistic heritage? The need for a parallel focus between political diplomacy and the attitudes of people on the ground is a key missing element in the journey towards reconciliation.

In post-conflict situations, solutions which emerge from below are more likely to have long term impact than those which come “from above”. It is important that a wide variety of stakeholders engage in the process of dialogue to reach consensus. As Lo Bianco (2016, p.4) notes, dialogue is a critical element of language policy which replaces a unidirectional approach with a multidirectional one. In some cases, there are claims that dialogue has already been embedded in state language policy through consultative approaches. In practice this might involve surveys completed by communities or written responses from language speakers to public consultations. However, when not followed through by policy-makers, such initiatives come across as mere ‘box-ticking’ exercises without genuine meaning. To ensure maximum “buy-in” from the wider community, it may be necessary to organise what Lo Bianco terms “facilitated dialogues” (2016, p.5) “in which the most important aim is to explore practical methods for seeking solutions to deep conflicts”. Such dialogues bring together community representatives and individual speakers, as well as official decision-makers, academic researchers, and international observers in a systematic process from which alternative voices can emerge. Since dialogue between different stakeholders is emphasised, there is an opportunity to enable and empower local communities to have a genuine voice (Lo Bianco, 2016, pp.5-6).

Lo Bianco (2016) points to the example of Mae Sot, Thailand where academics facilitated discussion in 2014 and acted as the bridge between different language communities and policy makers. Participants gave voice to historical injustices, language problems, and took part in workshops and field-visits. While comparatively small in scale, this approach has, over time, the potential to “make a radical break with past practice in language-planning” (Lo Bianco, 2016, p.5). When small-scale approaches, such as this, are repeated over time they can tackle the historical mistrust embedded in communities, which often impedes language planning in post-conflict locations. As Carlá (2007: p. 286) notes, it is frequently the “specific historical context that structures the relationship among individuals speaking different languages.” Activities such as those described above have the potential to raise awareness of these structural circumstances among participants whilst providing new opportunities of seeing beyond these socio-historic contexts.

Such facilitated dialogues are not easy to instigate in post-conflict places. We point to the example of Sri Lanka as a case-study where facilitated dialogues have encouraged some progress due to state initiatives. Yet on closer scrutiny, the involvement of and interaction between linguistic communities has been more limited. The official languages of the state as in the constitution (2000) are Sinhala and Tamil but English is also included among the national

languages. Sri Lanka's sociolinguistic relations are fraught due to the colonial past and historical imbalances between the country's two largest language groups, the majority Sinhalese, and the minority Tamils (May, 2001; De Votta, 2003; Price 2020; Herath 2015). This historical division has continued to impact language planning (Brutt-Griffler, 2002). Following the recent conflict in Sri Lanka between Tamil and Sinhalese (Weerakoon 2006), a transitional process was instigated to deal with identity differences between the communities (Orjuela 2008). A new government department was introduced called the 'Ministry of National Co-existence, Dialogue and Official Languages' which aimed to overcome identity politics, including those related to language.

The new department instigated a national language project that aimed to foster respect for linguistic diversity and trilingualism and thus enhance the relationships between the different communities (Canadian International Development Agency, 2013; Herath, 2015). In this case we see the emergence of limited attempts to foster dialogues between communities and the state. The involvement of the government was an important element of this process. However, what is less apparent is whether these measures have actually fostered inter-community dialogues across language communities. The focus on top-down and bottom-up dialogues rather than on dialogues *across* the language communities meant that a crucial element of the multidirectional approach championed by Lo Bianco was missing and thus hampered progress. The absence of a systematic multidirectional flow between community representatives, individual speakers, policy makers and academics has meant that many state initiatives, which claimed to generate better linguistic crossover, have failed.

### **Intra-Community Dialogues as the Internal "Missing Link"**

Each of the examples above, failed to deliver fully on the linguistic element of peace processes. We argue that a primary reason for the failure of intercultural conversations has been the lack of intracultural dialogues which we regard as a prerequisite to successful conversations across communities. In order to establish multidirectional discussions about language, members of a community need to be empowered to open up dialogues. There needs to be a period of facilitated internal dialogue within a community about other languages that they may be suspicious about or hostile towards. Intra-community dialogue (internal within a community) is a prerequisite through which groups can explore and start to understand the culture of their 'other' in a safe space. Unless a community can engage in its own internal conversations about the language of the 'other', then the process will ultimately stall at the first stage. Such conversations rely on individual members who are willing to lead difficult discussions that challenge the hostility held towards the language of the 'other'.

One approach might be to facilitate debate on the notion of one's wider linguistic heritage and the societal role of languages spoken in the wider environment. Additionally, it could go further in considering how other language traditions, such as those of a former/current enemy, have relevance for them. Another step could include opportunities for learning languages across the ethnic divide, but to do so initially within the safety of one's own community milieu. We regard this step as a 'missing link' which is often ignored as a prerequisite to meeting the next stage of reconciliation by policy-makers. This next stage would involve communities more actively crossing linguistic boundaries. Such an approach might include individuals engaging directly with one another in conversations that reconsider language (including those of their former enemy) as part of a shared heritage. Although governments do not always give value to this process as an important element in the reconciliation process, there are instances where community leaders have taken the initiative at grassroots level.

Such developments apply to the Irish language in Northern Ireland. Some Protestant Unionists are showing a greater interest in learning the Irish language and in debating the

meaning of the language to their own community (Nic Craith and McDermott, 2022). The wider socio-historical context of the region had traditionally excluded unionists from learning a language which they viewed as alien to their political identity as British citizens. The Northern Ireland peace-process over the last 25 years has started to create the conditions for some progressive members of the community to cross linguistic boundaries. We have witnessed the ways in which subtle change can be instigated by protestant/unionist community leaders towards the Irish language, which has frequently been viewed with suspicion by this community (Nic Craith and McDermott, 2022).

Community activists such as Linda Ervine have made huge contributions in developing empathy from within her own protestant community for the language of the ‘catholic side’ without compromising British political identities. Ervine has spearheaded initiatives such as the *Turas* Project (*Turas* meaning journey in the Irish language). The success of these initiatives come from the fact that initial classes take place within community centres or church halls where learners feel comfortable. This project instigated discussion about the Irish language and promoted the idea that Irish was part of a shared linguistic heritage between both unionists and nationalists. *Turas* explored local placenames (most of which originate in Irish) as an opportunity for unionists to engage with the language and its impact on the local landscape. This has encouraged those seeking a deeper sense of belonging to avail of more substantial opportunities to learn Irish. Some of those who took part in the early years of the *Turas* project are now studying Irish at Northern Ireland’s universities where they are interacting with Irish speakers from nationalist backgrounds. This illustrates our argument that initial internal dialogue can lead to a deconstruction of negative views which then provides the conditions for later linguistic crossovers.

Cyprus provides another example of emerging processes where Turkish and Greek Cypriots are having internal dialogues within their own communities about linguistic boundaries and their sense of shared linguistic heritage. From 1974 until 2003, the island was divided with Greek-Cypriots primarily in the South and Turkish-Cypriots in the north (Charalambous and Rampton, 2010). Border crossings were permitted in 2003. Since then, there have been some tentative steps towards reconciliation. These have included the Turkish-Cypriot education authority’s facilitation of Greek as a foreign language in several Turkish-Cypriot second-level schools which is a clear example of an emerging internal dialogue. Young Turkish-Cypriots are engaging within their own community with the language of a former enemy. Given that this process is taking place within a segregated schools system, this does not initially provide widespread opportunity to engage with Greek speakers. However, we argue that this is still an important process which creates the platform internally for altering mindsets and potentially in leading to future inter-cultural dialogue.

This initial process of internal dialogue is important also in building a sense of empathy with an environment shared between different linguistic groups. In a study on the motivations of Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots to learn the language of the other community, Salli (2019) indicated that some of the motivation was driven by a desire to connect primarily with a wider sense of place and territory. One Turkish-Cypriot participant in Salli’s study noted that the motivation to learn Greek was instigated by a desire to read mythologies associated with Cyprus in their original language (2019, p. 835). For others the motivation was personal nostalgia. For instance, one Greek-Cypriot’s motivation to learn Turkish was to recapture the pre-conflict era when many Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots lived alongside one another peacefully. Often these language learning opportunities have been facilitated within places such as local community centres. As was the case in Northern Ireland, these settings provide a familiar environment for a community to begin reframing its perspective towards the language of another.

In this instance, internal community dialogue has been validated by important community structures, especially in an educational context. In the case of Turkish-Cypriots, educational authorities have revised Greek-language textbooks to present a “less nationalist and more neutral narrative of the Cyprus conflict”. This potentially also provides a more shared environment for internal dialogues to begin (Tum and Kunt, 2021). The revised narratives in the textbooks highlight similarities, including linguistic ones, between two groups who share a common homeland. We regard the revision of such textbooks as an example of good practice which could easily be adopted in other post-conflict societies.

Admittedly, these are limited cases and in most examples of divided-societies, languages of one community continue to symbolize the political antithesis of another. Nonetheless, there is opportunity for better consideration of language to act as a prism for human connectedness and recognise that the attitudes towards languages which have been shaped by conflict are malleable and can, over time, be drawn upon to engender better intercommunal relationships.

### **Conclusion: Dialogue and the Implications for Language Policy**

Theorists of liberal multiculturalism note that when states do not recognize cultural and linguistic minorities, this forces groups to maintain their own identities in private clusters, rather than encouraging wider participation in the public space. Iris Young (1990), notes that non-recognition of cultural difference has led to the oppression of many minority groups and that recognition/or accommodation of groups is required to address this. At the same time, critics of these perspectives argue that merely accommodating difference in the public space has the potential to perpetuate cultural silos. In the case of divided societies, the notion of “high fences make good neighbours” is frequently employed as a critique of peace-processes which advocate a politics of difference.

Whilst we do not fully concur with the idea that accommodating diverse cultural identities and languages will always lead to the segmentation of societies, we think that the criticism does highlight important gaps. We suggest here that the fundamental missing link to these arguments is the absence of focus on multidirectional dialogues within and between language communities as well as academics and political elites. The implementation of language rights to support the use and visibility of a language in the public space does not necessarily in itself encourage dialogue and understanding across a divide. Such dialogue within and across linguistic communities might provide some important cultural debate and understanding which can contribute positively to conflict amelioration or resolution in the longer term. We particularly note that for one language community to cross a linguistic boundary and engage with or learn the language of a former enemy, this community will often require a period of internal dialogue about this. Such attempted dialogues may be fraught with difficulty, controversy and may even bring to the fore differences of opinion within a community. This internal dialogue will often require forward-thinking personalities and leaders from within a community itself, but these roles should be recognised more widely in the context of language policy. This might include in strategies to alter and shape more positive attitudes to diversity as well as supporting community development language initiatives. Since cultural identities are socially constructed and they can also be reconstructed as circumstances change (Ross 2009, pp. 8-9). In the context of a peace process, former opponents can begin to develop more hybrid views of their own identity and their relationships with the other. Communities can thus begin to explore elements of identity that have divided them from others in the past.

In many post-conflict societies, we have witnessed peacebuilding projects, often overseen through formal channels and funding structures, which aim to identify commonalities on identity, shared pasts, and common spaces. Yet, in most cases, the role of language policy is undervalued in the process of promoting intercultural dialogue in contested spaces. It appears

that when monitoring peace processes, states or international bodies have been satisfied when communities can simply live side-by-side in ‘peace.’ Yet intergenerational discontent which rumbles on hardly creates the conditions for long-term stability. A more transformative position on language policies and approaches would encourage better understanding towards the language of the ‘other’. Although it is a huge challenge, the relationship between dialogue, language rights, policies and accommodation need to be considered as a more interconnected and multidirectional ‘process’. Given that language issues have been so integral in contributing to the conditions for conflict to emerge, it is a challenge which cannot be ignored.

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