These two exemplary papers raise, both implicitly and explicitly, a number of key issues that bear centrally upon the relationship between politics and language policy. Accordingly, rather than rehearse the points already made so eloquently in the papers themselves, I want to focus on four key areas of tension that these two papers either allude to, or directly address.

Theory and Practice

The tension between theory and practice – particularly, political theory and practice – is expressed at a number of levels in these two papers.

On the one hand, we have the (still dominant) normative understanding of nation-state organization that is predicated on the principle of (public) linguistic and cultural homogeneity. This is most evident, of course, in liberal, ‘egalitarian’ accounts of political theory. This normative position, itself deriving from the principal tenets of nationalism, constructs the relationship between language and the nation-state in one of two principal ways:
While these two forms of nationalism are often juxtaposed in academic commentary on nationalism and nation-states, they both exhibit striking similarities – most notably, in their \textit{linearity} and \textit{unidirectionality} – and take for granted the merits of a public, homogenous, or ‘common’ culture.

On the other hand, we have in political theory the alternative formulation of difference, a position that advocates for the recognition of linguistic and cultural \textit{heterogeneity} in the public domain, and which, relatedly, supports the notion of differentiated group rights for (to varying degrees) co-national groups, national minority groups (including indigenous peoples) and new minorities.

What is interesting here is that the ongoing dominance of the first position is also reflected clearly in the usual formulation of language policy; Accordingly, language policy is most notable for its general failure to address linguistic diversity \textit{positively} and \textit{inclusively} in the public domain. The example of Switzerland, although not without its tensions, as Grin makes clear, provides a much-cited alternative. However, what is most striking perhaps about the Swiss exception is precisely that – its \textit{exceptionalism} – and the concomitant lack of a wide range of other examples, at least at national level, where linguistic heterogeneity has been actively promoted. Thus, a key challenge for language policy development continues to be how to address linguistic diversity positively and inclusively in public policy, rather than to proscribe it, as most often continues to be the case.

This raises, however, another point of tension. How to develop language policies in national contexts that remain accommodating of the inevitably more hybrid language practices of individual speakers ‘on the ground’? This tension between often-complex multilingual practices at an individual level and the necessary codification of languages (and thus language rights) at a collective level is an issue that is currently being prominently debated within sociolinguistics (see, for example, \textit{Journal of Sociolinguistics}, 9, 3: 2005). It also raises a number of important implications for the academic analysis of language policy and, by extension, language rights – implications that both Laponce and Grin highlight in their own papers.

The first is the importance of adopting an \textit{interdisciplinary} approach to these issues. Gone are the days when we could apply our narrow disciplinary focus to such questions and get away with it. What is notable about both Laponce and Grin’s contributions is their broad academic engagement with these issues, and this is to be welcomed.

The second is to recognize and acknowledge the complexities inherent in local contexts and, by implication, the limits of general theories in relation to them – a point that Grin makes clearly in relation to Switzerland. This is a particular challenge for polit-
Terrorial Unilingualism Versus Individual Bilingualism/Multilingualism

Both Laponce and Grin highlight the significance (and some of the problems associated with) territorial unilingualism as a means of instantiating minority languages in the public domain. The most notable limitation of territorial unilingualism – in both majority and minority language contexts – is its tendency to militate against individual bilingualism/multilingualism. In the case of the promotion and/or protection of a minority language, this may well be a price that one is prepared to pay. After all, as Laponce makes clear (and as history attests), the alternative – the personality language principle – is much less likely to ensure the ongoing public use of a minority language in contexts where territorial language rights are absent.

I do not want to discuss here the ongoing debates between the relative merits of the territorial versus personality principles in language policy, since these have already been extensively rehearsed elsewhere. However, I do want to focus on another point of tension that often gets overlooked in these debates. Why is territorial unilingualism only problematized in minority language contexts and not majority language ones? Or to put it another way, if the principle of public linguistic homogeneity is the basis (still) of most nation-state organization, why does the promotion of linguistic homogeneity, via territorial language principles, only come to be constructed as illiberal and/or debilitating when the public language being promoted is a minority one? One might even argue here, that, while minority language contexts predicated on territorial language principles may well continue to delimit the bilingualism/multilingualism of individual speakers, they at least allow for the ongoing possibility of that bilingualism, given that the promotion of the minority language is invariably situated within, or at least alongside, the presence of a more powerful (majority) language. Invariably, when addressing unilingual language policies in majority language contexts, the end result, in contrast, is monolingualism in the dominant language for the majority of the speakers concerned – particularly, when that language is English.

This also raises the issue of consistency or, more pointedly perhaps, double standards. If majority language speakers take for granted the legitimation and institutionalization of that language in the public domain (see May 2001 for further discussion of this
process), why should it suddenly become ‘illiberal’ when minority language speakers attempt to do the same? Indeed, when faced with this latter scenario, majority language speakers often invoke the notion of (linguistic) discrimination – arguing that their individual language rights are being trampled upon. This ‘move’ in the politics of language is often also articulated more broadly in relation to the apparent threat to, or proscription of the majority language in the minority language context. These arguments have been extensively employed by English speakers in both Quebec and Wales, for example, in relation to French and Welsh respectively (see May, 2000; May, 2001: Ch. 6).

However, more often than not, these claims are largely rhetorical, and the nub of the argument actually lies with the desire of majority language speakers to remain monolingual in the majority language – that is, to avoid learning the minority language(s) in question. To my mind, this is a language choice (and a deliberately contrary one at that), not a language right and, so, the issue of linguistic discrimination does not apply. Moreover, language ‘choices’ always need to be situated within the wider context of power, opportunity and constraint in relation to the language(s) in question. This immediately highlights how so-called ‘freedom of choice’, or a laissez-faire approach to language choice, invariably privileges the more powerful language(s) and their speakers.

**Education and Language Policy**

The sociolinguist Joshua Fishman (1991) argues that too much store can be given to education (and other public means of promoting a minority language, such as the media) in the development of minority language policy. If intergenerational family transmission does not occur, he argues, other more public means of supporting a minority language will inevitably fail.

While acknowledging this important point, I think that Fishman also understates the significance of the public domain for the ongoing survival of minority languages. If minority languages are to continue to be valued and used – and this is, itself, a recursive relationship – they must, in my view, have some meaningful public presence. A largely public/private diglossic situation – something to which Laponce refers – does not satisfactorily address this issue because it perpetuates, rather than addresses, the public/private dichotomy and the associated lack of value given to those (minority) languages that inhabit only the latter domain. Minority languages will not be more valued, and used more extensively, until they are able to inhabit both the public and private domains simultaneously. Being consigned to the private domain may continue (for a time) to promote intergenerational transmission, and language use within particular speech communities but it also continues effectively to ghettoize minority languages within low-status language domains. As the wider history of language shift and loss shows us all too clearly, limiting minority languages to these private domains is not likely to see the language sustained over time, as the language comes to be seen as having less ‘value’ and use – from both within and without – and as new generations of speakers consequently shift to speaking the majority language.
In light of this caveat, education continues to play a crucial role in providing public access and opportunity for minority languages, which also perhaps explains why debates around minority languages so often center on education (see, for example, Schlesinger, 1992; Barry, 2000; May, 2001: Ch 5; and Pogge, Laitin and Reich, and May’s contributions in Kymlicka and Patten, 2003). Providing what Herbert Kloss (1968) has termed ‘promotion’ rather than just ‘tolerance’ language rights is also important here. For the reasons discussed in the preceding paragraph, it is not enough to merely ‘tolerate’ the use of a minority language in a particular domain – which amounts to little more than a negative right – it requires active and public recognition and endorsement of the language, as a language not only important for identity purposes, but also for communication and use.

Integrating both the importance of language to identity and the significance of language use(fulness) is also a crucial move here, since their separation is a key means for continuing the public denigration of minority languages. We see this, for example, in the notion of majority languages as ‘vehicles’ of modernity, and minority languages as (merely) ‘carriers’ of identity. And yet it is clear that all language(s) embody and accomplish both identity and instrumental functions for those who speak them. Where particular languages – especially majority/minority languages – differ is in the degree to which they can accomplish each of these functions, and this in turn is dependent on the social and political (not linguistic) constraints in which they operate. Thus, in the case of minority languages, their instrumental value is often constrained by wider social and political processes that have resulted in the privileging of other language varieties in the public realm. Meanwhile, for majority languages, the identity characteristics of the language are clearly important for their speakers, but often become subsumed within and normalized by the instrumental functions that these languages fulfil. This is particularly apparent with respect to monolingual speakers of English, given the position of English as the current world language.

This reintegration of identity and language use poses challenges for proponents and opponents of minority languages alike. The challenge for minority rights’ advocates is that they often base their arguments on the importance of language to identity, but do not adequately address the significance of minority languages for wider communication and mobility purposes. As a result, they fall prey easily to arguments by opponents that they are simply ghettoizing minority language speakers by constraining their social and economic mobility within a language that has little wider use, or usefulness.

However, opponents of minority language rights are also faced with major challenges with respect to the integration of identity and language use. After all, a consistent refrain of opponents is precisely the one just referred to – that minority languages ghettoize minority language speakers; that they are, in effect, of no use to their wider social, educational and political mobility. However, these commentators are also often the first to criticize the public promotion of minority languages, arguing against their promotion on the basis that they infringe the individual language rights of majority speakers, as dis-
cussed in the preceding section. And yet, they cannot have it both ways – deriding minority languages for their lack of utility, and then opposing their utility when it proves to be politically inconvenient (for an extended discussion of this issue, see May, 2003).

Once again, education – and particularly, bilingual or multilingual education – provides a clear avenue for (and related demonstration of) the public use of a minority language and so must continue to play a central part in the wider development of minority language policy.

The Question of which Minorities?

What is striking about both Laponce and Grin’s excellent contributions, and bearing in mind Grin’s specific rejection of Switzerland as an example of ‘national minority’ language protection, is that they both nonetheless discuss contexts that might be said to relate to established language groups, rather than ‘new’ or migrant groups. What is also striking here is how seldom the language rights of these latter groups are addressed meaningfully by national language policies. While there are some examples of official multiculturalism as public policy, including in Canada and Australia, the degree to which the language rights of new minorities are recognized, and accorded some form of state support, even within these contexts, remains remarkably under-developed. The assimilative intent remains a powerful one and does not allow, it seems, much room for reciprocity in the engagement of new minority groups with ‘established’ languages and cultures.

There are extensive arguments in political theory – particularly, in relation to Will Kymlicka’s (1995) seminal work in this area – that allow us to distinguish potentially between the varied entitlements of different minority groups. What is still palpably lacking, however, even in contexts where other minority language rights are recognized (as in Quebec or Switzerland), is the political will to provide new minorities with meaningful, public language rights, even of a relatively delimited kind. In this respect, new minorities deserve at the very least tolerance-based rights and, as the tenets of international law clearly suggest, public access and support of their first language(s), where sufficient numbers warrant – most obviously here, through 1st language education. The recognition of the language rights of new minorities here can also be pursued alongside the promotion of language rights for established groups – it does not have to be a zero sum game. The Quebec Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1975), for example, provides for such an inclusive policy, at least in theory, while continuing to acknowledge the different bases of entitlement among different minority groups within that region.
Conclusion

The papers presented by Jean Laponce and François Grin highlight extremely effectively just what can be accomplished when considered and inclusive language policies at regional (in the case of Quebec) and national (in the case of Switzerland) levels are pursued. But, in making this clear, they also highlight the ongoing absence of (m)any other comparable language policies. The challenge then for much ongoing state-based language policies is, as I stated in the beginning, simply this: to accommodate more proactively and positively the linguistic diversity within its boundaries. Certainly, the long-held practice of states making no accommodations to minority language demands is not so readily defensible in today’s social and political climate. Ignoring such demands is also unlikely to quell or abate the question of minority language rights, as perhaps it might once have done (although even that is highly questionable). Indeed, it is much more likely to escalate them. Under these circumstances, as Fernand de Varennes (1996: 91) has eloquently argued: ‘any policy favouring a single language to the exclusion of all others can be extremely risky ... because it is then a factor promoting division rather than unification. Instead of integration, an ill-advised and inappropriate state language policy may have the opposite effect and cause a levée de bouclier’.

Laponce and Grin show how Quebec and Switzerland, respectively, have tackled and continue to tackle this central challenge. As they both make clear, the practice of accommodating linguistic diversity in these contexts is by no means straightforward or unproblematic – the politics of language policy never is. Nor are the contexts easily generalizable. Nonetheless, these contexts do both provide, in their own ways, exemplary illustrations of language policies that take cultural and linguistic diversity seriously. Now all we need are more of them.
References


