YAEL PELED | Solidarity and/in Language: Theory, Practice, Rhetoric

Abstract: The notion of solidarity can be said to be premised on shared intention and joint action, particularly when oriented towards questions of social and political justice. Yet conceptions of solidary relations remain surprisingly thin on language, and the ethics of the linguistic practices and mechanisms through which individuals formulate a sufficiently meaningful backdrop necessary for shared intention and joint action. My aim in this article, therefore, is to begin filling this gap, in the form of a general normative account that identifies the multilayered interrelations between solidarity and language, and examines their moral and practical implications. I begin with a brief overview of *solidarity and language* in the context of normative debates on bounded political communities. I then proceed to offer a more critical account of *solidarity and linguistic difference*, challenging some of the assumptions underlying its present understanding in that literature. In order to highlight and illustrate that critique, I explore its relevance to the highly political and often overlooked question of *solidarity and language loss*. I conclude with a brief reflection on the field of political theory and philosophy, asking what theoretical, conceptual and methodological insights may be gained from a closer attention to the *language of solidarity* in the theoretical and practical pursuit of justice.

Keywords: Keywords: *solidarity; justice; language; alterity; relief*

Introduction

The notion of solidarity can be said to be premised on shared intention and joint action oriented towards social and political justice work, which brings together parties whose mutual identification and commitment often cannot be simply assumed and/or taken for granted. Intriguingly, despite the pivotal significance of language in facilitating these shared intentions and joint actions, in both popular and experts' conceptions of solidary relations, such conceptions tend to remain surprisingly thin on their linguistic dimension. That is to say, very little concrete thought seems to have been given to date to the linguistic practices and mechanisms

through which individuals formulate a sufficiently meaningful backdrop necessary for shared intention and joint action, specifically in multilingual contexts, both within and across national borders.

This is not a surprising state of affairs, given a limited attention to language and linguistic difference that is still commonplace in Anglo-American analytic political theory and philosophy, resulting in part from the particular self-perception of English as a neutral, instrumental and logos-based system in its intellectual history, and its subsequent bolstering through historical rise to economic, diplomatic, scientific and cultural dominance as a global lingua franca. But it is nonetheless a regrettable state of affairs, because a lingering attitude of either neglect or indifference towards questions of language and linguistic difference entails missing out on a critical component of key contemporary political debates on social justice that often involve frequent calls for solidary action (e.g. racial equality, justice for migrants and refugees). It also entails missing out on the opportunity to develop a more internally-oriented capacity to reflect on the field's very own linguistic convictions, norms, and even ideologies, the extent to which they are in fact sufficiently aligned with its own theoretical self-understanding, and its practical aspirations of moral betterment.

The notion of solidarity, and the important body of scholarship theorizing it, serves as a particularly illuminating example of why disregarding language is a substantive issue for theories of justice. That is because solidarity entails a certain form of commonality, and of a way of being together with others – who are different from oneself in some important ways (e.g. race, ethnicity, religion, class, language, ability, gender, sexuality, nationality, legal status) – in a certain way. One significant aspect of solidary relations is their non-habitual nature, which gives them their distinctive intersubjective quality. That is, solidary relations often take place among parties who cannot simply take their sense of mutuality for granted. This means that the process through which this mutuality is negotiated and formulated may often have little to rely on, in terms of a shared backdrop that anchors how the involved parties see themselves and their relations to one another. That shared backdrop must therefore be negotiated, and that negotiation process is unavoidably linguistic.

Moreover, the process of negotiating a shared backdrop for solidary relations is never detached from local and global power relations between languages and linguistic communities, which are more often than not inequitable. Indeed, as I argue below, solidarity is sometimes sought by minoritized communities precisely in relation to an experience – or threat – of deliberate linguistic suppression, oppression and even erosion. The assumption that a global

lingua franca such as English can somehow serve as a neutral vehicle for the interrogation and facilitation of global solidarity and justice seems oddly oblivious to the violent historical trajectories through which global languages, such as English, French and Spanish, have acquired that power and influence, and to their lingering impact on smaller linguistic communities worldwide. This intrinsically apolitical perception of language and communication is particularly acute in the case of communities faced with the very real prospect of language loss, a profound type of moral harm that often motivates calls (or simply hopes) for solidary relations and actions, but one that is nonetheless rarely considered as such in theories of justice, including global justice, if at all.[1]

My point here is that theorizing justice, and especially theorizing solidarity as a constitutive element of that process, cannot simply rely on the convenient assumption that a shared language (of which a global lingua franca is perhaps the most prominent example) is a purely instrumental tool for pursuing justice by facilitating bonds of solidarity, globally and otherwise. The link between the two is most often far less innocent than it appears - or is hoped - to be, and overlooking its internal moral tensions, ambiguities and ambivalences risks producing a conception of solidary relations that in fact perpetrates and reinforces power inequities rather than challenging them. It seems important, then, for a more informed conception of solidarity to take these linguistic complexities into account, particularly when oriented not only towards theory-building but also with a practical orientation in mind.

The task of producing that conception is my primary aim in this paper. More specifically, I aim to offer a brief sketch of the multilayered interrelationships between solidarity and language, and what they entail for moral and practical action-guidance within and especially across national borders. The structure of my discussion is as follows: I begin with a brief overview of *solidarity and language* in the context of normative debates on bounded political communities. In the following section I then proceed to offer a more critical account of *solidarity and linguistic difference*, calling into question some of the assumptions underlying its present understanding in that literature. In order to highlight and illustrate that critique, I then explore in the following section its relevance to the highly political and often overlooked question of *solidarity and language loss*. I then conclude in my final section with a brief internal reflection on the rhetoric of some of the literature in the field (and the field itself, more broadly), asking what theoretical, conceptual and methodological insights may

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1   Rare exceptions include Blake (2003), Nichols (2006) and Nowak (2020).

be gained from a closer attention to *the language of solidarity* in the theoretical and practical pursuit of global justice.

The brief sketch presented in the remainder of this paper is not intended to constitute a unified account of solidarity and language, much less so a polished one in any finite way. It is intended, rather, as a set of considerations that address pertinent core questions, ideas, challenges, anxieties and hopes related to the complex notion of solidarity and/in language, and in the hope of contributing to its development in the broader context of the theory, practice and rhetoric of justice, especially global justice. With that in mind, my account here is nonetheless underlined by the overarching view that solidary relations entail a specific form of being together with others in a certain way that is profoundly linguistic in nature. This fundamental linguistic aspect of solidary relations, I contend, and their multilingual realities, cannot be regarded as an ethically-irrelevant matter without risking significant moral harm. Rather, the multilingual backdrop of solidary relations ought to be understood in the context of the power relations that shape notions of language, linguistic agency and linguistic difference, and the manner in which these power inequities often consequently impact on how solidarity is envisaged, whom it readily identifies as deserving or legitimate partners, and whom it sometimes tends to overlook.

Solidarity and Language

What role does language play in contemporary normative scholarship on solidarity? Language is primarily invoked – in several normative varieties - as a form of human diversity that poses a challenge to solidary relations among members of a political community, a challenge which therefore necessitates a common language for sustaining the political community and ensuring support for the welfare state (e.g., Van Parijs, 2003, 2011, 2021; Banting and Kymlicka, 2017). The primacy of a common language as an expected – or hoped – mechanism for sustaining solidary relations is evident just as much in the normative body of scholarship dedicated specifically to linguistic justice, and in the extension of that organizing logic from the *inter*linguistic domain (i.e. between speakers of different languages, e.g. English, French, Turkish, Hebrew) to the *intra*linguistic domain (i.e. between speakers of different varieties of the same language). Coupled with the functions of nation-building and political stability, the idea is that

> 'a shared standard language can help to create a we-feeling among the speakers of different dialects, which may lead to sufficient motivation and common identity to undertake common projects and to be prepared to share a scheme of solidarity beyond the local solidarities of one's fellow dialect speakers' (De

Schutter, 2020: 162).

It is noteworthy that, even though the argument in favor of a common standard is reasoned in affective terms ('we-feeling'), it is nonetheless identified as an instrumental/non-identity function of language rather than an identity-related one. But this seems like an odd identification in at least two ways: first, it seems to suggests a notion of solidarity that appears to be less affective and almost transactional[2] without much in the way of identifying the concrete causal chain that is perceived to link the two; that is, the perceived process that 'translates' an intervention in co-citizens' individual linguistic identity (including attitudes and practices) in order to secure the instrumental end of a general 'we-feeling,' and whether or not that extended 'we-feeling' is itself an identitarian entity. And second, from the perspective of linguistic minorities, who are often the less powerful parties and therefore potentially in greater need for solidary relations and the relief they bring, the promotion of solidarity in instrumental terms may be seen as merely legitimizing inequitable power relations under the rhetorical guise of an appeal to commonality and mutual concern. This is the case at least to the extent that it largely entails a one-way linguistic adaptation along the power inequity line rather than against it (effectively a 'soft' assimilation).

That is not to suggest, of course, that a common linguistic standard is fundamentally antithetical to solidary relations. Only that the linguistic commonality that is envisaged to facilitate solidary relations cannot be conceived as a simple instrumental imposition of a particular linguistic system over all others, with little regard for the precise terms and conditions under which it is formulated and deployed, and whether or not that process has been an equitable one.[3] By the way of an analogy consider something like a common currency, which underlies a consolidated and coordinated system for accumulating, mobilizing and (re)distributing a resource. The commonality of that currency does not in itself preclude that some may nonetheless still need to work harder to accumulate it than others through no fault of their own, and

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2   A similar critique could even be extended to linguistic *majorities*, in the sense that the shared identity argument may be less about the shared identity itself as the benefit that is generated from it (Sangiovanni, 2015: 351-352).

3   To emphasize, my point is not that the promotion of a particular language is entirely impermissible, but rather that its permissibility relies on whether or not a governing power is aware of the inequitable costs of that promotion, and whether or not it sees itself obliged to provide relief in certain cases when they are too high. On that account, I contend that the liberal nationalist argument premise that '[r]equiring shared blood is exclusionary of immigrants, but requiring a shared language may not be' (Banting and Kymlicka, 2017: 19) can only be justified if the linguistic culture of the political community is sufficiently responsive to the lived realities of linguistic alterity (more on this below) of all its members, for example in inclusive access to emergency services. Because just as a political community cannot be neutral on the language of its governing apparatus, an individual can rarely be neutral on the language into which they have been acculturated and its particular cultural scripts of wellbeing, health and illness.

indeed sometimes through the fault of their co-users. Under such inequitable terms and conditions, the 'we-feeling' that a common linguistic standard is presupposed to generate can nonetheless still result in the impression that it is intended as an exclusive rather than inclusive 'we'.[4]

Having to work harder in order to accumulate an equal amount of currency is not a metaphorical proposition in the context of language and linguistic difference. The convenient allure of a common linguistic standard rarely takes into a meaningful account a greater burden not only in terms of material resources (e.g. lessons, accessibility fees, lesser protection from the financial repercussions of exploitation) and related ones (e.g. time), but also in terms of emotional and cognitive resources (e.g. second language anxiety and stress, language fatigue) (Peled, 2021: 832; 2023: 592-594). The justification of this inequitable burden in the name of generating sufficient support for redistributive policies seems particularly striking in light, for example, of recent findings - from the Canadian context - showing that immigrants, French-speaking Quebecers and Aboriginal peoples 'are considered more likely to be in need and – on most measures – not responsible for their plight; but they are also judged to be less genuinely committed to the larger society' (Harell et al., 2022: 993).[5]

The upshot of the above is that the rhetoric of 'shared language' as an aspirational basis for solidarity rarely tells the full story of what exactly make a specific language shared, how does this particular sharing relationship manifest itself in the form of inequitable communicative burdens and entitlements, and what are their overt and covert dimensions. It also seems noteworthy to point out that the strong emphasis on a common language in considerations of solidarity seems to overlook the fact that what makes an individual or a group linguistically-different may in fact constitute a greater claim for solidary relations and action, and that what is *not* shared may well be just as morally

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4   Wilson (2019) provides a useful account of what the referential ambiguities caused by the lack of grammatical clusivity marking in English entail for the strategic deployment of pseudo-inclusive personal pronouns by more powerful actors (e.g. in clinical settings, child-directed speech, classroom discourse), for the purpose of enhancing solidarity. See also Íñigo-Mora (2004) for a more specific discussion of the dynamic and strategic use of 'we' in the institutional context of the British House of Commons. I consider more specifically below the role of 'we' statements in normative scholarship, and what they entail for a more linguistically-equitable notion of solidarity.

5   While the study seemingly does not directly address language other than in the general sense that ties knowledge of the common language to a civic mode of nationalism, it is possible to some extent to gauge the general orientation of what respondents' attitudes would be towards such hypothetical question from two sources: first, from the finding that, even while English-speaking Canadians tend to perceive French-speaking Canadians as equal members of the nation, they nonetheless view targeted spending on the preservation of Quebec's distinct culture as too high (Harell et al., 2022: 997); and second, from the conclusion that while a sense of shared 'we-ness' does indeed matter for support in redistributive policies, '[i]mmigrants and minorities are widely perceived as lacking the right sort of commitment to the "we", and hence as less deserving of redistributive solidarity, even when they are seen as genuinely in need and not responsible for their disadvantage' (Harell et al., 2022: 999).

significant as what is.

For example, a foreign accent commonly evokes a strong pre-reflective judgement identifying a newcomer who is a new speaker as an outsider, accompanied in many cases by numerous forms of bias and prejudice, which can make newcomers feel compelled to get rid of their accent as part of their integration process. (Accent bias, of course, targets not only foreign accents but also, for example, regional- and class-based ones). But for a newcomer new speaker fleeing persecution, war or environmental crisis, for example, their accent can sometimes be all that remains from a life and a world that have been irreversibly destroyed. In this case, societal pressure to demonstrate one's successful integration through the 'neutralization' of one's accent seems less of a reasonable demand under liberal nationalism/culturalism, and more as an even greater reason for seeking solidarity in the face of morally impermissible peer pressure. It seems odd, then, to limit the scope of the linguistic aspect of solidarity to a shared language while disregarding the moral pertinence of solidarity precisely in situations of linguistic difference.

One possible reply to the critique of a narrow sense of solidarity through a common language comes from De Schutter's important clarification that premising solidarity on linguistic instrumentalism is intended in circumstances in which every speaker is proficient in it (2020: 160). In other words, the view that a common language can indeed be used as an instrumental vehicle for generating solidary relations in linguistically-diverse settings, when there exists 'a shared standard language (compared to not having one) and by ensuring every speaker is proficient in it' (*ibid*.: 159-160). De Schutter himself is very mindful of the need to specify that this instrumental usage is conditioned on the requirement that the standard will not require 'strong accent uniformity' (*ibid*.: 161). But the trouble with qualifying the shared language requirement with a permissive approach to some degree of accent plurality is that what counts as uniformity is not only highly dependent on interactional power relations at the micro level, but also necessarily arbitrary at the aggregated macro level. There exists no singularly accepted measurement of where precisely that sufficiency threshold lies between 'strong accent uniformity' and 'weak accent uniformity,' and/or who is deemed as a legitimate authority to adjudicate on that question. The hope that there exists (or could exist) some kind of a neutral linguistic system, that is successfully and sustainably detached from any interfering social or political indexicality, can paradoxically hinder rather than advance efforts to establish solidary relations in multilingual contexts. The case of the foreign accent of the asylum seeker mentioned above hopefully presents a compelling case for why seeking to neutralize linguistic variation may not always be conducive to

generating a 'we-feeling,' and may in fact lead to a feeling of greater isolation and detachment.

Furthermore, it is also worth pointing out that this proposition is effectively built on an essentially ableist premise, regrettably not uncommon in normative considerations that involve linguistic matters in some way, which tend to conflate language with speech (i.e. spoken language), even in scholarship that is critical of ideal(ized) speech situations. In so doing, this form of 'modality chauvinism' (Snoddon, 2022: 724) reinforces the perception of sign languages as a deviance from a platonic idea(l) of what language and linguistic agency 'truly' are, and a view of D/deaf individuals and communities as deficient instead of a distinct culture and experience worthy of equal respect and dignity.[6] I say more on this below, in the section on the language of (theorizing) solidarity. What is important for my discussion here is that the idea that solidary relations can be premised on a largely neutral notion of language and linguistic agency is a problematic basis for theorizing solidarity across linguistic boundaries, within and beyond national and political borders. A more promising approach might lie, instead, in the question of developing and sustaining solidary relations not by disregarding linguistic difference but rather by recognizing its moral and practical significance. I take this question up in the next section.

Solidarity and Linguistic Difference

In order to consider the challenge of solidarity in the face of linguistic difference, it is useful to begin by clarifying what, precisely, this particular form of difference means and entails. This clarification is important, because the very word 'language' is not always used – or conceptualized - in normative theorizing in a particularly analytical manner (Peled, 2021: 830). Moreover, politically-salient aspects of linguistic difference, such as variation and change, tend to be either overlooked or ignored, reflecting authors' private linguistic beliefs, convictions, habits, preferences and sometimes ideologies rather than a more principled and reflective understanding of the social and political life of language.[7]

Developing that kind of understanding is critical specifically to theorizing solidarity, because linguistic judgements can play a significant role in a pre-reflective determination of who is perceived as equal moral, political and

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6   This tendency also makes it harder for theories of solidarity to recognize solidarity between Deaf and hearing co-citizens, with disadvantaged groups more broadly, and international Deaf solidarity(ies) worldwide, all of which offer valuable insights for a grounded framework for theorizing solidarity.

7   De Schutter's (2020) notion of intralinguistic justice is a rare exception here, whose significance lies also in opening the door to interdisciplinary and multimethod work that bridges normative political theorizing with empirical socio- and applied linguistics, and in engaging a notion of solidarity that is central to the literature on language attitudes (Oakes and Peled, 2018, 2021).

linguistic agent in solidary relations. For example, when calls for solidary actions and relations issued by minoritised linguistic communities are overlooked or dismissed by powerful linguistic majorities, who either assume or simply expect such calls to be issued to them in the language(s) of their habitual convenience. The problem of limited linguistic self-awareness can result in the extension of solidary relations not so much to those who call for it, but rather to those who are linguistically-convenient in terms of their specific linguistic particularities (e.g. accent, modality). It is vitally important, then, for a more principled account of solidarity to be mindful of that potential risk. Here I am following on Sangiovanni's emphasis that a principled and justice-oriented notion of solidarity cannot be treated

> 'as a form of fellow-feeling that is not readily susceptible to rational assessment, akin to those emotions or passions that merely overcome us, and for which we have no justification. I think this is a mistake. If solidarity is meant to name an important and valuable form of collective action — and one that is closely connected with social justice — it should be capable of being grounded in reasons' (2015: 348).

That critical stance ought to be extended, in my view, to those linguistic features that have a powerful impact on the formation of that fellow-feeling, yet nonetheless are rarely accounted for as such.

So what do I mean by 'linguistic difference'? Linguistic difference is often referenced in normative theorizing in the context of multicultural and multilingual societies, under labels such as 'linguistic diversity' and 'linguistic plurality.' Importantly, this designation tends to be rather vague on whether the multilingual entity in question is society as a whole or only some (most? Few?) of its members, owing in part, perhaps, to an ambiguous stance on whether that designation ought to reflect a normative order (i.e. a de *jure* or *de facto* recognition of more than a single language) or empirical realities (i.e. in demolinguistic terms). It is worth pointing out, though, that conceptions of linguistic diversity tend to reflect a regrettable bias towards powerful, standardized and spoken languages, overlooking minoritized non-standardized, signed and contact languages (mixed, pidgins and creoles),[8] or otherwise perceiving them as 'not real languages' in some vague yet persistent sense. My conception of linguistic diversity here is therefore both broader and more refined than the one(s) typically found in most theories of multiculturalism,

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8   Parsing these three descriptors in any fixed way is impossible, given the heterogeneity of their interrelations, for example in the case of indigenous sign languages or BASL (Black American Sign Language).

language rights and linguistic justice. And it is precisely for this reason that this conception seems more helpful, I argue, for a fuller consideration on the complex relation between language and solidarity.

But 'difference' also captures a second and often more covert dimension of variance in the linguistic human experience, which refers not to a diversity of languages but rather to a diversity of types of linguistic agency. By that I mean the difference, for example, between monolingual and multilingual agency, best illustrated, perhaps, by the lingering prevalence of a monolingual ideology and the 'monolingual mindset,'[9] and contrary to the reality that multilingualism is just as common as a human norm (Grosjean, 2021: 1, 27-28). It also captures the more substantive difference between spoken and signed modalities, and of multilingual and multimodal linguistic repertoires, competencies and identities. It likewise captures the difference between normative and non-normative communicators. The significance of capturing issues of agency under the label of 'linguistic difference' lies not only in providing a fuller account of the complex communicative challenge to theorizing solidarity, but also in challenging an unreflective link between solidarity and very particularistic linguistic features (e.g. a linguistic standard, a particular accent) and form of linguistic agency, more broadly. In so doing, it draws on the important reorientation of the notion of solidarity from that of a shared agency to that of a shared goal (Sangiovanni, 2015: 344), in 'de-unifying' the joint communicative agency of the 'langscape' of solidary activities (e.g. protests, demonstrations, marches) and their various public articulations (e.g. chants, speeches, banners).[10] That is, in acknowledging and embracing agential difference, the very understanding of the link between solidarity and language shifts from acting identically to achieve a shared goal, to jointly acting in different ways to advance a common purpose.

This reorientation is pivotal for theorizing solidarity across different dimensions of linguistic difference, in decoupling solidary relations from the experience – or an expectation – of a shared form of particular linguistic agency. More specifically, this decoupling, premised on a reflective attitude of linguistic epistemic humility (Peled, 2018: 365-367, 2021: 834-835), entails the extension of solidarity not only between individuals and communities who do not necessarily share a common language, but also whose own experiences of

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9   Clyne defines the monolingual mindset as 'seeing everything in terms of a single language. This includes (a) regarding monolingualism as the norm and plurilingualism (whether bilingualism or multilingualism) as exceptional, deviant, unnecessary, dangerous or undesirable, (b) not understanding the links between skills in one language and others, and (c) reflecting such thinking in social and educational planning' (2008: 348). The term was initially coined in German ('monolingualer Habitus') in Gogolin (1994), following on Bourdieu (1991).

10   See, for example, Hazel (2017); on collective action and social activism in multilingual contexts see Mamadouh (2018).

linguistic agency can vary significantly. For example, between a monolingual hearer from a dominant linguistic community and an indigenous Deaf signer whose sign language is facing extinction. In other words, the shift from agency to goal relieves considerable conceptual and theoretical pressure off the view that solidarity requires and/or is premised in some crucial way on a substantive form of agential linguistic unification. The possibility of this decoupling serves, if nothing else, as an important form of epistemic check and balance on unreflective linguistic judgements that often considerably skew who is – and isn't - perceived as part of the 'we-ness' that facilitates solidary relations and action. One context in which this decoupling seems particularly valuable is that of language loss, which is the topic of the next section.

Solidarity and Language Loss

I have argued in the previous sections that the relative neglect of language and linguistic difference in theorizing solidarity is a regrettable state of affairs, particularly in light of the tendency to focus on the role of linguistic homogeneity in the formation and sustaining of solidary relations, while having relatively little to say about the practical limits and moral limitations of that homogeneity in cases of individuals and communities whose languages enjoy little protection or recognition. In this section my aim is to develop this line of argument further, in relation to the phenomenon of language loss.[11] More specifically, I argue that the experience of language loss is critical for a more language-attuned normative theorizing of solidarity, particularly when oriented towards justice, for three reasons: in the first instance, because language and linguistic difference (conceptualized along the lines identified in the previous section) continue to be frequently overlooked in theories of justice. Furthermore, even within the developing dedicated literature on linguistic justice, language loss more specifically remains largely absent (Roche, 2021; Nowak, 2020).

  Second, language loss matters for theorizing solidarity, because many instances of this particular type of loss due to historical injustices, for example in the form of institutionalized forced assimilation, were facilitated by a process of deliberate and intentional destruction of solidary relations targeting members of now-endangered linguistic communities. And third, because individual

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11   The notion of 'language loss' can understandably be treated with suspicion, insofar as it can be said that by employing it I in fact offer a sanitized depiction of a social, historical and political process that result from extensive and brutal violence, often targeting specific language and linguistic communities deliberately, with assimilationist and/or genocidal intentions (a forceful and compelling critique of that tendency can be found in Davis (2017)). My account here explicitly rejects such a decontextualized approach to language loss, as my sceptic interrogation of the notion of a shared language above hopefully demonstrates. My use of 'language loss' is motivated primarily by the aim to

and communal experiences of language loss, and the immense psychological toll of language grief may sometime lead to self-withdrawal and self-silencing (e.g. Nowak, 2020), which makes the formation of solidary relations particularly challenging, further exacerbating an already inequitable burden of communicative labor.

What makes language loss particularly significant for social justice-oriented theories of solidarity, within and especially across national borders? First and foremost, as an epistemic check and balance on the primacy of the notion of a shared language in conceptions of solidary relations - whether in the form of a normative condition (i.e. a shared civic language), or a presupposed empirical reality in the form of a pre- or non-linguistic commonality, which is somehow assumed to sufficiently facilitate intricate meaning-making processes of reasoning and mutual justification all by itself. And yet, just how founded is that assumption?

Consider, for example, a recent and otherwise very thoughtful consideration on justifying bounded solidarity for reasons of democratic self-determination (Pippenger, 2023), whose main argument is premised on the idea that such type of self-determination constitutes 'a commitment among compatriots to seek out each other's perspectives and give them special weight in their reasoning. This commitment is a kind of bounded solidarity that is necessary in order to establish the epistemic conditions of democracy' (*ibid.*: 770). What the argument seems to overlook, however, is that any kind of joint epistemic activity is necessarily grounded in some form of linguistic particularly, which means that any kind of interaction, by virtue of its own social, political and linguistic indexicality, is always a bounded interaction. The existence of a linguistic boundary within the boundaries of the political unit is a substantive and surprisingly under-theorized challenge in democratic political theory (Peled, 2021). What I intend to highlight here is merely that such presupposition of a collective epistemology, which links bounded solidarity to democratic self-determination, seems equally oblivious to the inequitable power relations that underlie this collective epistemology, as the liberal-nationalist appeal to a shared culture as the basis of bounded solidarity, which is one of the main targets of Pippenger's critique. Such obliviousness makes it difficult for liberal theory to account, for example, for the moral significance of bounded political and linguistic self-determination in the specific context of indigenous struggle for linguistic security (Nichols, 2006).

I argue in a previous section that theorizing solidarity in the specific context of language and linguistic difference requires being mindful of the fact that what

is shared is not the only thing that is valuable or important, and that what is *not* shared can have equally important moral significance and consequences. What I aim to highlight here, in the more specific discussion on solidarity and language loss, is that language loss matters for theorizing solidarity, because what is shared (a specific language, a form of linguistic alterity, a distinct philosophy of what language is)[12] is not guaranteed to be there in the future, when a more ethical and practical path for its sharing may materialize. This positions language loss at the very core of a broad range of approach to theorizing (in)justice, including historical, social, political, environmental, structural, global and temporal. It similarly highlights its centrality to an intersectional analysis of power relations more broadly, a centrality that nonetheless stands in stark contrast with language's lingering theoretical neglect (Roche, 2021: 167).

 A second reason why language loss is important for theorizing solidarity has to do with the role of deliberate linguistic suppression, oppression and erosion of we-feeling and solidary relations among minoritized groups, for example through institutionalized forced assimilation facilitated by the Canadian residential school system and the American Indian boarding schools. Under the 'aggressive civilizing' mission of such institutions, designed to 'take the Indian out of the child' and thus 'solve the Indian problem,' the use of indigenous languages was banned and enforced through brutal acts of emotional and physical violence, strategically deployed to disrupt and then erase emotional attachment to any language other than the official and colonial ones (English or French). In addition to forced removal from families and strict separation from siblings even within the same facility, punitive methods of language acquisition cruelly tested the strength of solidary bonds between co-linguals in home and community languages marked for erasure, where children would not only be severely punished for using their language, but also encouraged – actively or implicitly – to report on peers who have committed the same infraction, in order to save themselves from (further) punishment. Even supposedly positive

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12 Davis highlights that '[i]ndigenous communities and scholars working in language documentation and reclamation regularly emphasize the importance of contextualising endangered languages, or the description, in detail, of the robust geographic, linguistic, spiritual, and social dynamics of languages, of language activists, and of language reclamation projects' (2017: 49), a task which is essential for decolonising the notion of language itself in academic research, for example in challenging monist and non-embodied conceptualisations of language, and centering them instead on its grounded understandings as 'a basket, a life narrative, and even the key to the afterlife' (Leonard, 2017 in Davis, 2017: 49). An even more radical reconceptualization of language is outlined and explored in Snoddon (2022).

methods of language pedagogy would nonetheless be very clear on linking authorized forms of we-feeling exclusively to the colonial language in the eyes of school authorities.[13]

What I aim to highlight here is that justice-oriented normative theories of solidarity, especially those sensitive towards questions of language and linguistic difference, have much to benefit from a more engaged approach to the lingering presence of historical linguistic injustices towards minoritized groups, and what their individual and communal lived experience entails for how solidarity-related arguments, claims and propositions are received and interpreted by members of those groups. This is especially the case when solidarity is theorized either with a principal emphasis on an ahistorical and apolitical notion of a shared civic language, or when a linguistic commonality for facilitating solidary relations remains either largely presupposed or simply abstracted away. The trouble with that is not only an identity-related obliviousness (or at least apparent disregard towards the principle of equal linguistic dignity); it is also that this type of obliviousness fails to capture that deliberate institutionalized linguistic erosion can be understood as the destruction of a distinct type of 'hermeneutic equipment,' defined as

'interpretive tools we rely on to understand the world and ourselves, i.e. the words, names, and concepts we apply to our emotional states both through (I) slow, deliberate processes of conscious thought and reflection and (II) fast, automatic processes where we rely on mental short-cuts like cognitive biases, scripts, and other heuristics' (Munch-Jurisic, 2021: 13584).

This particular type of destruction can have serious consequences for the very possibility of seeking and forming solidarity relations, because it burdens even further those already shouldering a greater share of the communicative labor, forcing them to work even harder to gain the attention, comprehension, credibility and support of more communicatively-privileged interlocutors.

This particular challenge for solidary relations is worth highlighting, because it emphasizes just how much the sense of 'we-feeling' that underlie such relations

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13   Recounting his time as a residential school student, the Canadian indigenous author Eli Baxter recalls: 'Every Saturday night we watched Western films. They were in black and white, on reel-to-reel. Randolph Scott carried two guns and, while smoking, kept shooting at the charging Indians. He was the good guy. He killed many Indians. He was very good at it. We all aspired to be like him. We categorized the Cowboys as the good guys and the Indians as the bad guys. The main character was always the good guy and we called him 'kaa-nu-gah-cheech,' meaning 'the one who had good moves.' The Indian was usually portrayed as a savage with a monolithic speech pattern; what we called the 'ug' speech. We were always the bad guys. [...] I won first prize for academics at the end of grade two. My academic career started that year. I was finally starting to understand English. My reward was a cowboy outfit. It came with two shiny guns with a full holster of bullets' (Baxter, 2021: 117-118, 123-124).

can be profoundly impacted by pre-reflective and unaware linguistic judgements. The further apart interlocutors are in terms of their languages, forms of linguistic agency, and respective philosophies (and ideologies) of language, the greater risk they are of being marginalized in, or even excluded from, solidary relations. Language loss can complicate this challenge even further, when the more disadvantaged interlocutors have been so thoroughly overwhelmed, traumatized or excluded that they have forgone their own linguistic agency and the will to participate in a meaning-making process to begin with, whether with more distant others or even with one's own community and kin.[14] Theorizing solidarity is indeed a hard ask in circumstances of linguistic difference; but it is so much harder – and arguably more critical – when some of the parties to the solidary relations have suffered an injustice so grave to their sense of personhood and selfhood, that their capacity and very will to interact at all have been undermined so comprehensively.

This challenge is also worth highlighting, finally, because it brings to the fore an experience which seems like the complete opposite of any core interpretation of solidarity, even the very loose one I provide above, of being together with other people in a certain way. Because language is such a habitual part of agency and selfhood, its loss, especially when followed by a gradual loss of linguistic agency more generally, can be experienced as a profoundly solitary experience. If the end of solidarity, especially justice-oriented solidarity, is perceived as the provision of some sort of relief – material, psychological – then I think it seems plausible to suggest that the extension of solidary relations and action are particularly valuable in response to acts of injustice that have engendered a profound feeling of solitariness among individual and communities, within and across national borders. This is especially the case for political conceptions of solidarity, which are, as Scholz emphasises

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14 This devastating intersubjective rupture is powerfully captured by Mojave poet Natalie Diaz: 'The government didn't simply "teach" us English in those boarding schools — they systematically and methodically took our Mojave language. They took all the words we had. They even took our names. Especially, they took our words for the ways we love — in silencing us, they silenced the ways we told each other about our hearts. One result of this: generations of English-speaking natives have never heard I love you from their parents, which in their eyes, meant their parents didn't love them. However, those parents never said, I love you, because it didn't mean anything to them—it was an English word for English people. There is no equivalent to it in the Mojave language—the words we have to express our feelings, to show the things berserking in our chests for one another are much too strong to be contained by the English word love. But after boarding schools and work programs sent them to the cities for work, our children stopped speaking Mojave — they were beaten if they were caught talking or singing in their language. Maybe when they came home their parents spoke to them all about their hearts, but if they did, the children didn't understand anymore' (Diaz, 2014).

'grounded in a commitment to a common cause to end injustice or oppression" and include "a significant critical component as the goal of solidarity emerges from criticism of existing societies or structures, and the solidaristic collective engages in internal criticism in order to avoid recreating the injustice or oppression it is organized to oppose' (2015: 732).

The Language of Solidarity

In the previous sections I have outlined a number of considerations on theorizing solidarity as related to the theory and practice of justice, specifically linguistic justice. In this final section my aim is to look more closely at the rhetoric of theorizing justice, and at what a more reflective attitude towards language can contribute to advancing a justice-oriented (self-)understanding of solidarity. As with the previous sections, my motivation here follows on Sangiovanni's emphasis, quoted above, on the pivotal significance of approaching solidarity in a principled and analytic manner (2015: 348). In other words, the rhetoric of theorizing solidarity itself should also be grounded in a reasoning process. This section also draws on Scholz's emphasis that 'a personal commitment to political solidarity might require one to evaluate vocabularies, idioms, clichés, jokes, and language and communication patterns in order to avoid participating in oppressive practices' (Scholz, 2008: 53), asking what might this commitment entail for how theories of solidarity are – and should be - formulated.

How may a more reflective attitude towards the rhetoric of theorizing solidarity contribute to its development? In the first instance, by extending a similar self-aware attitude to how it constructs notions of 'we-ness' that are so central to argumentation in political theory and philosophy. Especially of the variety that draws heavily on analytic philosophy and its theoretical and methodological reliance on how 'we' (the reasonable, common-sense moral and political actors) think about things, how 'we' do this or that, what 'we' think is plausible and permissible, and, perhaps most crucially, what 'we' think is - and isn't – reasonable. But who exactly is this 'we,' and whose intuitions, convictions, perspectives, judgements and sensibilities does it represent? Non-reflective and non-specified[15] presuppositions of shared epistemic agency are a substantive (although not insurmountable) challenge for the process of mutual reason-giving, which is so central not only to key understandings of political

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15   Here it is useful to recall the point above regarding the lack of grammatical clusivity marking in English, which can result not only in an unreflective and non-analytic conflation of different type of 'we' (e.g. generic, inclusive authorial, editorial, rhetorical, pseudo-inclusive, third-person, etc. (see Quirk et al.,1985: 350–351), but also in an inequitable and unaccountable distribution of linguistic authority and legitimacy, that comes from the implied construction of a particular perspective or disposition as the property of a generic 'we.'

legitimacy and authority, but also more specifically to justice-centered notions of solidary relations and the kind of 'we-feeling' they necessarily rely on. Just as solidarity depends on a certain sense of we-ness, so does the very act of theorizing solidarity, and both ought to be interrogated with equal concern for analytic and principled reasoning.

A special significance of a more self-aware understanding of the language of theorizing solidarity is, of course, inextricably linked to the status of English as an academic global lingua franca, and the tension between its neutral appearance on the one hand and its particularistic realities on the other hand. At the same time, analytic normative political theory and philosophy remain relatively unengaged with concerns over the scientific and epistemic bias of English dominance (e.g. Berthoud, 2021; Gobbo and Russo, 2020; Ludwig et al., 2021; Suzina, 2021), (sometimes referred to as 'Anglobalization'), and its uneasy entanglement with the rise of bibliometrics and other practices and forms of institutionalized knowledge hierarchizing and ranking (e.g. Montgomery, 2013) that shape perceptions of what gets counted as knowledge (Lillis et al., 2010 in Yen, 2021: 27). An important outlier in that regard is part of the developing scholarship on linguistic justice which offers a more critical perspective on the perceptions, realities, anxieties and ambiguities of English as a global lingua franca and its presupposed 'we-ness' (e.g. Ayala, 2015, 2018; Catala, 2022; Contesi and Terrone, 2018; De Schutter and Robichaud, 2017; Oakes and Peled, 2018; Peled and Bonotti, 2016; Peled and Weinstock, 2020). But even that body of work rarely considers a fuller account of linguistic agency and alterity, as reflected in its currently limited attention to language loss (Roche 2021) as well as to sign languages (visual and tactile) and their communities of users. Adding another layer of complexity to the question of the identity of that 'we' is the fact that many insightful contributions to this debate come, in part or whole, from outside philosophy departments and/or professional academic philosophy (e.g. Badwan, 2021; Piller, 2017; Ricento, 2015), and are therefore not always recognized and/or valued as such.

My point here is not to make a specific comment on the linguistic justice literature other than suggest that, for theories of justice more broadly, including solidary-centered ones, this body of work can assist in the important process of a more reflective attitude over the 'we-ness' that is as central to the epistemic act of theorizing solidarity as it is to the notion of solidarity itself. A more reflective 'we,' equally grounded as above in a reflective attitude of linguistic epistemic humility, can help bring the very act of theorizing solidarity into a closer alignment with the normative entity that is its own object of inquiry: a more equitable way of being with others, who are different in some constitutive

way, in a certain manner that is not habitual and cannot be taken for granted, and with the aim of moral progress. Language is key to this process, because its very nature as a 'dividing commonality' (Peled, 2020: 4, 23) - reflected in the reality of linguistic difference – offers neither simple nor fixed moral solutions to the question of what exactly 'being together with others' (together how? which others?) entails for solidary relations.

Within and especially across national borders, the question of language in theorizing solidarity highlights the value of approaching it less as a unity of some sort (especially agential unity), and more along the lines of the notion of 'overlapping solidarity networks' (Gould, 2007: 148, 157). To draw on Gould's own framing, the language question, too, constitutes a distinct 'hard question for global ethics' (*ibid.*: 160), the theoretical and practical significance of which for a better understanding of the theory, practice and rhetoric of global justice should not be underestimated. To illustrate the benefit and value of a more language-aware approach to theorizing solidarity beyond the codified boundaries of standard academic English, let me conclude this section with reflection on the concept of 'ashia' in Kamtok (Cameroon pidgin English). 'Ashia' is an expression of solidarity that does not have a singular or direct English equivalent, meaning 'I empathize with you in your predicament' (Anchimbe. 2012: 126), and can be equally used to address someone who has lost a close relative ('accept my sympathy') or is a victim of another misfortune ('take heart') (Nkengasong, 2016: 17). More generally, it is an expression of warm solidarity acknowledging someone's pain and actively supporting and encouraging them (see Lyonga, 2019). A similar term exists in other African languages:

> 'For example, there is this Igbo word "ndo", in Yoruba it's "pèlé", and I'm sure other African languages have it, but we translate it to "sorry". But "sorry" as used in the West is a very poor translation of "ndo", because it lacks the empathy of "ndo." "Ndo" means "I am with you, I share your pain, I cry with you". No one needs to explain that empathy when you use "sorry" in Nigeria, or in any other African country that I know of. But transport it to the West, and you have to explain yourself. "Sorry" in the West is an apology, which is why in the very many times that I used "sorry" to mean "ndo" with friends, I've been told "you didn't cause it, no need to be sorry". To which I tend to reply "yes, I know, but I have no other word to articulate what I feel"' (Unigwe, 2009).

Neither 'ashia' nor 'ndo' and 'pèlé' are likely to be(come) part of the conceptual core of mainstream theories of solidarity and solidary justice, given the field's strong bias towards standard academic English, even though these concepts

offer a solidarity-pertinent insight into the vocabulary of moral knowledge related to the question of what it means to be with others in a certain way. These and other similar concepts from outside the codified vocabulary of standard academic English highlight the fact that an important way of understanding solidary relations may entail looking at how such concepts are formulated used and understood 'on the ground,' by particular individuals and communities, and on their own (linguistic) terms. In so doing, it is my hope, there is a way forward for a more reflective consideration on solidary relations, and similarly a more equitable sense of 'we-ness' among a diverse community of philosophers, who differ from one another in their class, race, ethnicity, religion, culture, language, gender, sexuality and ability, and who nonetheless have a way of being with each other in a certain non-habitual and mutually supportive way.

Conclusion

The challenge of solidary relations and action against a multilingual backdrop can be understood not merely as the question of how to do things with words, but rather of how to do things with words, with other people, who have their own words, and having to do these things with them in a non-habitual manner, that is nonetheless jointly oriented towards a common purpose, and in the hope of moral progress. This is an undoubtedly demanding challenge for anyone involved in solidary efforts, but it is even more so for theorists and philosophers who seek to understand, analyze and assess these efforts. It requires a critical and reflective attitude towards conceptions and constructions of 'we-ness' that are central not only to the praxis of solidarity, and especially solidary justice, but also to its theory and rhetoric as the product of a particular epistemic community. And it illustrates the importance of being mindful of language and linguistic difference, not as a merely administrative problem that can be overlooked or solved away through technical 'fixes,' but rather as a fundamental element of the question of what it means to be with other people in a certain way, and how best to theorize it.[16]

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