

Linguistic domination: A republican approach to linguistic justice

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journals.sagepub.com/home/psc**Sergi Morales-Gálvez** 

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Abstract

Linguistic justice is about institutions distributing material and symbolic resources fairly when they are faced with linguistic diversity. However, no theory of linguistic justice has developed a systematic and comprehensive account of the moral dilemmas that take place in interpersonal linguistic relationships, in particular the power dynamics leading to (linguistic) domination. The aim of this article is to start building a general theory of linguistic domination, one that offers new conceptual tools for both empirical and normative analyses of linguistically diverse societies. Using the republican tradition of thought, I argue that there is linguistic domination whenever someone is subject to the uncontrolled capacity for interference over their linguistic uses, ideology and acquisition by another agent. This article tests under what conditions this phenomenon takes place and the parties involved in it (both in terms of individuals and political institutions).

Keywords

domination, language, linguistic domination, linguistic justice, republicanism

In the book *Un dinar un dia qualsevol* ('An Everyday Lunch'), the Valencian writer Ferran Torrent describes a situation that was common in the Valencian Country in Spain some decades ago. The novel's main character tells that when he was a child his mother used to change the language that she spoke: as soon as they left their rural hometown to visit the city of Valencia, she stopped speaking Catalan/Valencian¹ and changed to Spanish. It seems that for a long time, especially during Franco's dictatorship (1939–1975), even though most Valencian Catalan speakers conducted their family/personal

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relationships in Catalan, they changed to Spanish as soon as they interacted with people outside their social environment.² Arguably, the fact that Catalan was persecuted and not officially recognised made people modify their linguistic attitudes. But this is no longer the case. Catalan became co-official in Valencia several decades ago (in 1982), meaning that all public services are now supposed to be provided in both Catalan and Spanish, and everybody is entitled to speak either language, both in public and in private. However, it seems that the kind of behaviour described by Ferran Torrent is still common in Valencia.³ But not only there. Linguistically mixed societies like the Valencian Country, Catalonia, the Basque Country and Galicia (Spain), Corsica (France), Latvia, Wales (UK), Brussels (Belgium), regions of Papua-New Guinea, India and Bolivia, or some Canadian provinces such as Quebec and Nunavut (including indigenous groups), among many others, might be affected by this kind of pattern in their interpersonal relationships. In such places, different long-settled language groups are intermingled and share the same territorial spaces, including cities and neighbourhoods.⁴ Actually, long-settled language groups are the main target of this article, as I will explain later on.

My intuition is that there is something morally wrong in the tale told by Torrent. Of course, code-switching is not necessarily problematic *per se*. However, some of the situations in which the interpersonal relationships he describes may be taking place against a background of injustice. In particular, situations may arise where there appears to be a kind of sociolinguistic hierarchy undermining the equal status of speakers of particular languages. Structurally, this appears very similar to a situation of domination. If this is the case, it would explain my intuition; but then we would need to ask the question of how it should be conceptualised.

So far, this phenomenon is one that has been primarily addressed by sociologists, especially sociolinguists (see [Baugh 2011](#); [Bourdieu 1991](#); [Piller 2016](#)). Ordinary political discourse and academic publications in sociolinguistics use the concept of domination in various ways, such as ‘dominant languages’, ‘linguistic dominance’, or ‘the domination of language X over language Y’. In particular, scholars have addressed how people’s linguistic choices are formed and how those choices function in terms of relations of power. They conceive ‘individuals’ linguistic choices as socially conditioned decisions’ ([Riera-Gil 2016](#), 76). Working under the influence of Pierre Bourdieu (1991), they take linguistic choices to be the consequence of society-wide linguistic ideologies which, in turn, are dependent on the domination of some social groups, which use those ideologies in order to perpetuate their positions of privilege. By creating sociolinguistic norms or influencing them, these ideologies directly affect linguistic attitudes and determine which linguistic decisions are preferable (or socially permissible or required) depending on the situation ([Giles 1977](#)).

Therefore, as Elvira Riera-Gil points out, for these critical sociologists, ‘linguistic choices are products of internalised social norms and are usually unconscious or automatic, so in order to influence such choices what must be done is to act on social norms’ (2016, 76). This means that these authors support language policies that deal the problem at its root: the very social norms that are unconsciously adopted by dominated individuals when making their linguistic choices. Yet, how are we to understand ‘linguistic domination’? Exactly what about it makes it wrong? On what grounds, if any, can the solutions that these authors propose be morally justified?

It seems that a general theory of linguistic domination is required here. Such a theory should include a solid general (and descriptive) conception of linguistic domination. This should in turn serve as a basis to develop a normative account of linguistic domination which tells us why it is problematic and what (if anything) ought to be done about it. Under what circumstances should influencing people's linguistic choices be considered domination? When does domination take place in the linguistic realm?

Political philosophers are usually more concerned with normative issues, and have failed to address this problem so far. Some scholars that work on linguistic justice have developed different accounts of how linguistic diversity should be managed, but without a systematic concern for the moral dilemmas that can be found in interpersonal relationships. There are some exceptions, such as Philippe Van Parijs (2011), who develops an account that considers the asymmetrical status of speakers of different languages in their interpersonal relationships. However, as I shall explain later, his account falls short of fully operationalising what is at stake. Therefore, the aim of this article is to advance a general theory of linguistic domination: to develop a general conception of linguistic domination, which can help us later to develop a normative account of the concept. My research question is: *what is linguistic domination, and when does it take place?*

In order to answer the research question, I use insights from both sociolinguistics and from two broad literatures within political philosophy that have dealt with one or other of the two concepts we are tackling in this article. On the one hand, there is the literature that deals with the concept of domination, which is principally grounded in the republican tradition of thought. However, the problem of domination is not only an issue for republican thinkers, but also for other scholars working on different traditions (relational egalitarianism, socialism, etc.). On the other hand, there is the linguistic justice literature,⁵ which tackles the issue of the just treatment of language groups. However, neither has dealt with both issues (language and domination) in a systematic way and at the same time. In order to do this myself, I use the analytical tools offered by the republican tradition of thought and its conception of domination to tackle the issue of linguistic domination.⁶ Linguistic domination, I thus argue, takes place if, and only if, a person or group is subject to the uncontrolled capacity for interference in their *linguistic uses, ideology and/or acquisition* by some other individual, group or political institution. If I am right, I hope to offer good reasons for considering this key issue when examining linguistic injustice.

To answer the research question, I structure the article as follows: in section one, I examine the current gap in theories of linguistic justice (in particular, Van Parijs' theory) when dealing with interpersonal linguistic relationships; I discuss what domination means and why language (choice) might be relevant when talking about this question, especially when dealing with long-settled language groups, and I analyse the different dimensions and domains of language. In part two, I briefly set out my general preliminary definition of linguistic domination. In section three, I explain horizontal linguistic domination (exercised between individuals and groups) and test when it takes place. I argue that it takes place when there are imbalances of power based on at least one of the following two conditions: (1) *the marked language condition* and/or (2) *the mere discretionary condition*. Finally, I conclude the article.

Domination and language

Linguistic justice and interpersonal linguistic relationships

As I have already mentioned, many political theorists working on linguistic justice have developed varying accounts of how linguistic diversity should be managed institutionally. However, few have shown a systematic concern for the moral dilemmas that take place in the daily interpersonal relationships of individuals living in multilingual and mixed territories.⁷ One important exception is Philippe Van Parijs (2011), who develops an account of linguistic justice as parity of esteem that considers the asymmetrical status of speakers of different languages in their interpersonal relationships.⁸ He identifies two linguistic micro-mechanisms – probability-driven learning and maxi-min use – that tend to drive individuals' linguistic behaviour (Van Parijs 2011, 15). On the one hand, probability-driven learning says that one's competence in a language is 'strongly affected by the probability with which one can expect to have to operate in that language, whether actively or passively', which in turn is related to the motivation (expected benefits) and the opportunities that someone has for improving their competence in a language (Van Parijs 2011, 11–13). On the other, the maxi-min use says that individuals tend to use the language that is 'best known by the member of your audience who knows it less well' (Van Parijs 2011, 14–15). For him, these day-to-day linguistic mechanisms might lead to two related claims of injustice that favour languages that are already dominant (Van Parijs 2011, 118–19). First, deviation from parity of esteem; this is a principle of linguistic justice that states that everyone's attachments to their own languages should be treated with equal respect. Second, and relatedly, the recurrent asymmetry of linguistic relationships that are characterised by minorities that regularly cede to dominant languages by switching to them. When 'this happens systematically, when it constitutes a practice rather than a succession of random events, it can easily lend itself to an interpretation analogous to situations in which it is always the members of the same caste or gender that need to bow when meeting members of the other' (Van Parijs 2011, 119).

I agree with Van Parijs' moral concerns and his idea of linguistic parity of esteem, and believe that these relations might express a regrettably unequal status. However, Van Parijs' account falls short and it is ambiguous about how to operationalise this idea of asymmetrical linguistic relationships (as a result of his two micro-mechanisms), which is a phenomenon which leads speakers of some languages to genuflect linguistically when meeting members of other groups. In a way, this gap is not surprising, because his aim is not to discuss the morality of how individuals behave linguistically, but to ask how these injustices can be solved institutionally – even though he recognises that justice as parity of esteem 'can be said to be essentially a matter of attitudes' (Van Parijs 2011, 120). However, how can we distinguish when these mechanisms and situations happen to be, in his words, a morally regrettable 'systematic practice rather than a succession of random events'?⁹ Let's take one illustrative example espoused by Van Parijs. He explains the story about an American executive living with his family in Waterloo (a French-speaking town in the region of Wallonia, Belgium) who irritably complained that, after renting a place for 3 years, the owner was still not able to speak in English. 'There is something wrong', Van

Parijs (2011, 133) argues, ‘with this “colonial” expectation that the local adjust linguistically to the newcomer rather than the other way around’. I agree with him. However, imagine that, instead of an American anglophone living in Belgium for 3 years, we instead consider an Indian anglophone only resident in Belgium for 6 months, on a low income and with few opportunities to learn French due to long working hours. Imagine, like in Van Parijs’ example, that this person asks the owner to have conversations in English. Would that still imply a morally regrettable systematic practice? The question is: how can we tell the difference between morally problematic and unproblematic linguistic relationships? There is, in Van Parijs’ account, not full specification of the wrong in some code-switching examples. Actually, similar problems with Van Parijs’ theory have been already identified in the literature (Stilz 2015; Weinstock 2015).

This is precisely what a domination approach, focused on the conditions under which individuals exercise their linguistic practices, can help to grasp. This is so because this approach highest concern is people’s freedom/unfreedom, and the social conditions under which this freedom/unfreedom is supposed to be exercised. Therefore, I aim to argue that the morality of those linguistic relationships (i.e., if they are free or not) depend on the conditions under which linguistic practices are exercised. To me, this is implicit in Van Parijs’ framework. However, he does not provide a concrete and clear framework to operationalise it. This is the gap I attempt to fill by developing a theory of linguistic domination which, in turn, is also a helpful proxy to incorporate questions of respect. This is so because domination is an expression of unequal standing and dignity (Gädeke 2020a, 201; Pettit 1997, 85–89): ‘leaving some individuals at the mercy of others expresses disrespect for them’ (Schemmel 2021, 67) as unfree (or not sufficiently free) individuals.

Domination and the relevance of language

Domination is an important concern for different traditions of social and political thought. For instance, recently Schemmel (2021) developed a liberal account of domination in his attempt to construct a fully fledged relational egalitarian theory. Some Marxist and socialist thinkers have also developed theories that centre on the problem of domination (Leipold 2022; Muldoon 2022; O’Shea 2020). However, all these scholars are partially indebted to the republican tradition. Republicanism is an long-standing tradition of political thought highlighted by political historians such as J. G. A. Pocock (2016 [1975]) and Quentin Skinner (2016), and also by political theorists, especially Philip Pettit (1997; 2012) and some of his theoretical followers¹⁰ – usually known as neo-Roman republicans.¹¹ Republican thought stands for freedom and against the evils of domination and servitude; it highlights civic virtue and political participation, connects this with its defence of freedom, and demands that institutions limit public and private instances of power, precisely to make a freer society possible.

The basic concern shared by the majority of republican thinkers is domination. Or, to say the same thing in a positive way: attaining freedom as non-domination. Thus, the *republic* or *res publica* is understood by most republicans as a ‘political community of citizens mutually granting freedom as non-domination’ (Pérez-Lozano 2021, 72). This article is based on the contemporary reconstruction of domination developed by

republicans and, in particular, by Pettit (1997; 2012), arguably because Pettit's work is the most widely discussed understanding of republicanism (Paez 2022, 621; Pérez-Lozano 2022, 424) and is the basis of most republican scholars' thought, even that of his critics. Following this reconstruction, I define domination as follows: individuals or groups experience domination when they are subject to the *uncontrolled capacity for interference* over some of their *choices*, exercised by some other individual, group or political institution.

In order to be more precise with the definition used here, let me clarify some concepts. First, there is *interference* when someone (either the political community, a group or an individual) acts in a way that worsens the options that someone else has available (Pettit 1997, 52–54). Second, interference is *uncontrolled* when it 'is exercised at the will or discretion of the interferer' (Pettit 2012, 58) without having to take into account the claims of the interfered party, who is powerless to retaliate or contest such interference. In this vein, it should be noted that actual interference is not necessary for domination to be present: simply the capacity to carry out uncontrolled interference is enough. Third, this interference affects certain choices (not necessarily all choices) that someone is able to make. This point underlines the idea that someone might 'dominate another in a certain domain of choice [...] without doing so in all' (Pettit 1997, 58).

When following the aforementioned republican premises, we need to examine how these elements can be applied to language issues. The first item to address is an important premise of this article: why we should apply this framework to the linguistic realm. As we have just seen, Pettit argues that domination might affect only certain choices that a person is able to make. Therefore, it is not necessary that all possible domains of choice be affected. One of the domains that might be included here is the linguistic one. However, is language so substantively important that it should be part of this picture? I would say that it should, for at least one important reason: having the choice to speak your own valued language(s) is important in order to allow you to protect certain interests.¹² As argued by Brando Nicolás and Morales-Gálvez Sergi (2023, 5–6), we have good reason to consider speaking one's own valued language(s) as a fundamental factor that enables and restricts 'our possibilities to be and to do that which we have reason to value in various fundamental aspects of our lives'. In fact, the linguistic justice literature is full of examples that justify why language is highly valuable for protecting various basic interests (communication, social participation, mobility, self-respect access to one's own valued life-world).¹³ Therefore, we have *pro-tanto* reasons to consider that speaking one's own valued language(s) is a substantively important choice.

Indeed, to state in terms of rights who should have this choice protected and under what conditions is a different story. For the purpose of this article, I assume the following more or less uncontroversial idea: that we have good reasons to care about the possibility of linguistic choice for speakers of languages that have been spoken historically (or long-settled) in particular territories.¹⁴ Indigenous groups are a paradigmatic example of this. This is so for at least two reasons. On the one hand, the importance of the interests at stake. Some of those interests have been espoused in the previous paragraph, the most important being, for the sake of this argument, the following three. First, the autonomy argument. That is, the idea that people living in particular societal cultures (Kymlicka 1995) and

territories have been cohabiting for a while speaking in particular languages and sharing a plurality of values and customs valuable for their members. So caring about that is something to be valued if we mind about people's individual and collective autonomy (Morales-Gálvez 2022). Second, the continuity argument. As argued by Song (2022), linguistic continuity is an important interest because it allows individuals to form valuable human relationships and access to culturally valuable heritage in a particular language during an indefinite period of time. The continuity of a language constitutes, for her, 'the condition of possibility wherein individuals may enjoy the meaningfulness of their linguistic activities' (Song 2022: 79). Third, the communication argument. The idea that language is a social convention already taking place in a particular community and that allows having shared conversations, democratic control on institutions or equality of opportunities when trying to have access to valuable goods such as jobs.

On the other, domination requires a minimal awareness requirement. That is, people should be minimally aware of the linguistic conditions of a particular society when normatively evaluating their linguistic behaviours. I will develop this a bit more in the last section of the paper. In any case, during all this article, the domination framework would basically apply to long-settled language groups.¹⁵

Dimensions and domains of language

That said, the second thing we should do is to examine the concept of language. In order to do so, I use the sociolinguistics literature as a framework. Some sociolinguists argue that there are four interrelated *dimensions* of language (see Figure 1).

First, *corpus* is the codification of a language, such as 'coining new terms, reforming spelling, and adopting a new script' (Cooper 1989, 31). It is about the form and the structure of a language. Second, *ideology* is defined as 'the conceptions about any variety of the speakers' linguistic repertoire or about any relationship between language and society' that 'are the indirect, not mechanical, outcome of the positions, interests, and the social practices of individuals and groups' (Boix-Fuster and Vila i Moreno 1998, 157; author's translation). Thus, ideology consists of the beliefs about language underpinning the sociolinguistic norms that determine which linguistic decisions are preferable (or socially permissible, or required) depending on the situation, thus conditioning linguistic attitudes and uses (Giles 1977). Third,

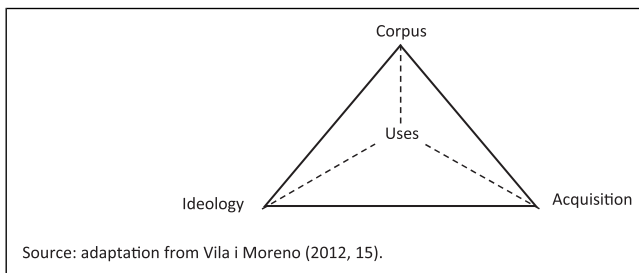


Figure 1. The dimensions of language.

acquisition is the idea that language is also knowledge: a kind of acquired competence resulting from our socialisation (Vila i Moreno 2012, 13–14). Finally, *uses* means the daily linguistic practices of individuals and groups in their social interactions. That is, the language that individuals use and in which circumstances.

Domination, therefore, might be exercised – and this is what I will test – in any of these dimensions of language.

- It might be applied to the shape (corpus) of a language. For instance, when an agent can arbitrarily impose a particular way to use a language (i.e. dialect) as the standard one.
- It might be applied to how we acquire competences in a particular language. For instance, when an agent has the capacity to forbid/persecute the transmission of a language.
- It might be applied to the linguistic uses of individuals. For instance, when someone is able to force someone to speak a particular language in certain spheres of social life in an uncontrolled way.
- It might be applied to linguistic ideologies. For instance, imagine a group of people (e.g. a powerful civil society group) uncontrolledly manipulating people's beliefs about languages and their speakers.

Although it is possible to imagine some uncontrolled interferences over the linguistic ideologies of people, it is less evident than in the other dimensions. Ideology is about how we perceive and conceive languages and their speakers. Therefore, whereas it is easy to see how domination apply and might affect individual behaviours (e.g. someone who stops using language X because it would imply being the target of racist violent individuals), it looks more complicated when applied to someone's beliefs. If this does happen, it is in an indirect way. For instance, in mounting campaigns to persuade people. Therefore, having the capacity to uncontrolledly shape people's beliefs and ideologies seems difficult to apply in a straightforward way, especially in interpersonal linguistic relationships. However, it is still a theoretical possibility. In particular, ideology seems to be one possible vehicle for exercising domination (or not), as we will see later on.

There are then three different dimensions of language that might be affected by domination. However, we still have to distinguish between two linguistic *domains* where domination might be exercised: the interlinguistic and intralinguistic domains. However, the interlinguistic domain has to do with the relationships between different language groups, the intralinguistic one deals with dialectal variants within the same language (De Schutter 2020). The two domains deal with issues of use, acquisition and ideology, but only the latter deals with issues of corpus. To simplify the article and focus on the most controversial side of language politics, this article deals with the interlinguistic domain, leaving aside issues of domination and corpus.

What is linguistic domination?

Thus, my argument would run as follows: there is *linguistic domination* whenever a person or group is subject to the uncontrolled capacity for interference over their *linguistic*

uses, *ideology* and *acquisition* by some other individual, group or political institution. Based on the dimensions of language exposed previously, by *linguistic uses*, I mean an individual's linguistic practices in different spheres of social life – in Spolsky's words, 'the "habitual pattern of selecting among varieties" of a speech community's repertoire' (2004, 5). When I say *linguistic acquisition*, I basically mean language learning. That is, the transfer of knowledge and competences of a language from one agent (say, a parent or a teacher) to another (a child, a new immigrant, etc.). Finally, when I say *linguistic ideology*, I mean people's beliefs and representations of languages and their speakers. However, these three dimensions are highly influenced by the *linguistic status* of languages in particular contexts. Linguistic status refers to the languages people can use and how they can be used depending on the recognition (the *status*) given to them by institutions. In the words of Cooper (1989, 32), the formal 'recognition by a national government of the importance or position of one language in relation to others' and 'the allocation of languages [...] to given functions, e.g. medium of instruction, official language, vehicle of mass communication'. This is especially crucial for linguistic uses. Indeed, depending on the functions allocated to a language (say, a language of mass communication), this would greatly influence an individual's linguistic practices in any particular sphere of social life.

Considering that my concern from the very beginning has been to deal with and operationalise interpersonal linguistic injustices, I think that it is analytically important to leave aside the *status* approach to language, which is more related to how institutions deal with language. In this regard, it is useful to follow Pettit (1997, 13) in his distinction between *dominium* (the domination that an individual/group can exercise over another individual/group) and *imperium* (the dominative power that a public institution is able to exercise over an individual/group). In this regard, it is possible to distinguish between two kinds of linguistic domination: vertical and horizontal. The former has to do with *imperium*, and the latter with *dominium*. In this article, I am going to focus on horizontal linguistic domination.¹⁶

Horizontal linguistic domination

As mentioned earlier, horizontal linguistic domination is characterised by the uncontrolled capacity for interference between private agents (groups and/or individuals) over some dimensions of language. In sum, we could say that:

There is horizontal linguistic domination if, and only if, an individual or group¹⁷ has the capacity to exercise uncontrolled interference over the linguistic uses and acquisition¹⁸ of another individual or group.¹⁹

Let me illustrate this with one basic example: Imagine that a woman called Gwen goes to the monthly meeting of the block of flats where she lives. This community is situated in a Welsh city and, in these meetings, the neighbours decide about issues that concern them all. She is new there, and she is excited to meet her neighbours. The meeting starts with Gwen introducing herself in her native and preferred language: Welsh. However, while

Gwen is speaking, another neighbour, Caroline, raises her hand and says that she does not understand Welsh and asks her to switch to English. The other neighbours do not comment on this matter either way.

The first question would be: are Gwen's options being interfered with? This does appear to be the case. The situation described implies reducing and worsening her available linguistic options when she is communicating. This is not due to Caroline herself speaking in English instead of Welsh, but because an intervention is being made in someone else's linguistic choices. Choices that, in turn (and as I said before), we have good reasons to care about because of the relevant interests that speakers of long-settled language groups derive from using their valued languages in the historical territory of that language group (such as the case of Welsh and English in Wales). In this regard, the crucial question is whether this intervention is *uncontrolled*. That is, is Caroline able to control Gwen's linguistic uses at will? This is more difficult to say. A priori, it would seem so: Caroline appears to be controlling Gwen's possible linguistic uses.

However, it would be strange to accuse someone of domination just because they do not understand me, thus asking me to switch language. Consider a recently arrived immigrant, or a tourist. Maybe even more importantly, consider people that, for whatever reason, have not had reasonable opportunities given to them to acquire basic competences in this language. In all these examples, people might be coming from a context where this language does not have any relevance. Or, even if it is relevant in their contexts, there might be no easy way to acquire the language (for instance, there are no reasonable ways of learning it). In any of these cases, it is clear that the speaker talking to Gwen is interfering in her linguistic practices, but it would be intuitively strange to say that she is doing so in an uncontrolled way. In Pettit's words, it is an incidental fact (2012, 38). These cases imply interferences that may limit people's options, but without implying them being dominated. Following Gäddeke (2020a), this would imply a kind of opportunistic capacity to interfere, but without real instances of domination occurring. Minimal awareness and intentionality should play a role.

Linguistic domination requires something more than this opportunistic capacity to interfere. Something more robust: namely, a capacity to interfere *uncontrolledly*. This capacity to interfere is uncontrolled, I argue, when there are imbalances of power that allow someone to impose costs on someone else because of the language that this person might use. Concretely, it takes place when an agent/s has the capacity to *deliberately* interfere with the linguistic options of other people at no (or a very low) *ex-ante* or *ex-post* cost. This is facilitated by certain structural factors, such as social norms, demographics, or the socioeconomic status of the speakers of each language.

At this point, it is relevant to emphasise three important issues. First, having no *ex-ante* and/or *ex-post* costs basically means having enough power to avoid assuming any cost when making linguistic choices. An example of having no *ex-ante* cost is having the power to refuse to learn a particular language. In turn, this absence of *ex-ante* cost could allow this person to have more power to intervene in the linguistic choices of other people in the future (*ex-post*). For instance, imagine an English-speaker who is a long-term resident in Stockholm. This person knows that a good number of Swedish people are competent in English and so, once there, he decides not to learn Swedish. Therefore, even

after years living there, this person could be able to (more) easily impose his linguistic terms on Swedish-speakers. Something similar could be said about Caroline in our example (imagine she was born in Wales, having reasonable chances to get minimal competence in Welsh).

Second, the *deliberate* aspect requires some intentionality (or negligence) when *linguistic practices* are exercised (Pettit 1997, 60–61). Therefore, it must necessarily apply (most of the time) to languages historically settled in particular places. It would be counterintuitive to say that a Swedish speaker in Stockholm is dominating an English-speaking expat because he has been negligent not being minimally competent in English and it is imposing his linguistic terms on her. However, it would be possible to say the opposite: if this English-speaker has been living for a while in Stockholm, did not make any kind of effort to be minimally competent in Swedish and expect the local Swedish speaker to pay the costs and adapt to her linguistic preferences and terms, then this might be an instance of domination. Speakers of long-settled languages cannot know the mother tongues of everybody moving to their societies, so they cannot have the uncontrolled capacity to intentionally (or negligently) intervene in all newcomer's linguistic practices when engaging with them (with some exceptions, as explained later on). However, this is different the other way around. In this regard, individuals should have enough quality information about how people have been living in a place (linguistically speaking) and then perform their actions taking that into consideration if possible (e.g. having the option to learn the local languages, etc.). Minimal kind of awareness, as mentioned before, should play a role. If not, we would be talking about an incidental interference, but not actual domination.

Third, this capacity to uncontrolledly interfere on someone else's linguistic practices can be exercised at the will of the interferer without taking the interests of the person that can be interfered with into account because there are some structural factors facilitating this. Therefore, for this uncostly (or less costly) capacity to impose your linguistic terms to others might happen, at least one of the following two conditions should be in place: (1) *the marked language condition* and/or (2) *the mere discretionary condition*.

First, the *marked language condition* is in place when some languages are situated as less or more socially valuable (i.e. less useful, less polite, less worthy of respect or the opposite) promoting structures of 'incentives' (Pettit 2012, 60) and 'costs' for individuals that vary depending on the language(s) one happens to speak and value. This implies an asymmetry between languages in a particular context that is sustained and promoted by informal social norms,²⁰ making it clear that speakers of some languages are situated in a privileged position (namely, they are speakers of a *privileged language*), while this is not the case for speakers of other languages (who are speakers of a *vulnerable language*²¹). This notion of linguistic domination refers 'to structurally constituted forms of power' that create a persistent asymmetry of status through social norms 'which mark some as powerful and others as vulnerable' (Gädeke 2020a, 205).²² Therefore, this condition for linguistic domination refers to structurally constituted forms of power in a given context that reveal the existence of persistent status asymmetries – mediated by social norms – between speakers of different languages, allowing some to have the capacity to exercise uncontrolled power over some others.

Second, the mere *discretionary condition* takes place when an agent has the capacity to *deliberately* interfere with the linguistic options of other people at no (or a very low) *ex-ante* or *ex-post* cost, independently of the social norms exposed previously. This interference can be exercised at the will of the interferer without taking the interests of the person that has been interfered with into account because there are some structural factors different from social norms facilitating this (e.g. demographics or the socioeconomic position of the speakers of each language). In this way, the dominators do not need to be accountable for the way they use their power.²³ Generally speaking, both conditions go hand in hand. It is difficult to imagine how the marked language idea might not lead and promote the mere discretionary condition. However, it is theoretically possible to imagine someone being discretionary when exercising their power in their linguistic relationships in a situation without social norms marking some languages as better or worse off than others. In contrast, the *marked language condition* necessarily includes the discretionary one. When some languages (and their speakers) are marked as, for instance, under-privileged, it creates the conditions for those who are more privileged to exercise their discretionary power.

The marked language condition

The marked language condition relates to my initial Valencian example. It takes place when some languages are situated as more or less socially valuable (i.e. less useful, less polite, less worthy of respect or the opposite), promoting structures of ‘incentives’ (Pettit 2012, 60) and ‘costs’ for individuals that vary depending on the language(s) one happens to speak and value. This is propagated by structural social norms in which individuals have been socialised, ‘that are neither legally sanctioned nor coercively imposed, but are based on informal arrangements within seemingly consensual relationships’ (Laborde 2008, 152).²⁴

Sexist domination in most of our current societies would be similar to what I am explaining here. Sometimes, nobody in particular is personally interfering in the decision of many women to give up their professional careers in order to take care of their families as homemakers, but it is also true that there are some social norms that give stronger incentives to women than to men to do this. Social norms, therefore, create or provide structures of ‘incentives’ (Pettit 2012, 60) and ‘costs’ for individuals ‘to act in certain ways qua rational agents’ (Bonotti 2017, 269).

This entire analytical framework can be applied to linguistic relations, in which the marked language condition is based on well-established social norms that mark some languages as privileged and others as vulnerable. Indeed, this implies an asymmetry, a differential status, between languages and speakers of languages that are, in words of Gädeke (2020a: 206) ‘co-constituted and reproduced by countless other agents, who reaffirm the common interpretations’ of certain social norms. These social norms, as we know, are fundamentally related to one of the dimensions of language that I have exposed earlier: ideology. Linguistic ideologies are about how language (and its speakers) are perceived, understood and represented, and how this representation affects people’s linguistic behaviour and choices via the creation and reproduction of social norms and

dynamics that disempower the speakers of certain languages, endowing them with an unequal status.

Thus, the problem is not only what someone does when learning and/or using a particular language (people are, indeed, free to acquire and use the languages they wish), but the position occupied by this person as a speaker of a marked language or languages: is it a privileged or a vulnerable position? In the end, this condition stems from ‘the systematic disempowerment of the dominated’ (Gädeke 2020a, 209), due to their lack of counteracting power (anti-power) as a socially produced fact of their disempowerment, mediated by social norms and practices that dominated individuals cannot control.²⁵

This implies, at the very least, a social norm regarding linguistic uses, that assumes *that the language(s) of the privileged linguistic group(s) should be the one(s), by default, used in the majority of spheres of social life in a given society*. This, indeed, logically leads to a related social norm that mainly affects linguistic acquisition, which spreads the idea that *speakers of languages that are different from the privileged ones are supposed to acquire and be competent in the language(s) of the privileged group(s), but not the other way around*. How these linguistic dynamics are put in motion varies depending on particular contexts, but they all generate a structure of incentives and costs that, in turn, might affect how individuals perceive the linguistic options they think they have.

Going back to the neighbourhood meeting example, imagine for a moment that Gwen, instead of using Welsh to introduce herself, speaks directly in English. The vulnerable speaker knows she has different linguistic possibilities at hand; for instance, to use her own vulnerable native language. But, even though she knows this, she modifies her linguistic practices to adapt them to what is expected of her linguistically. This, as has been said, might be the consequence of a social norm implying that one language is a more appropriate than another to be used in certain spheres of life, as a symbol of ‘politeness’ or ‘correctness’. In the words of Piller (2016, 17), there are ‘expectations of normalcy’. There is, thus, a good way to behave and trying to do the opposite (i.e. using a vulnerable language in public) could be interpreted as impolite, even if this language is the mother tongue of the demographic majority or is understood by all those present. Everyone, especially the speakers of the privileged language, will expect people to use the ‘polite’ language. As stated by Laborde (2013, 522), ‘members of subordinated social groups typically curtail their aspirations, adapt their preferences to the reduced social options that they (rightly or wrongly) take to be available to them’ because ‘their subordinated status remains deeply entrenched because it is internalised and “naturalised” by them’. In this vein, the vulnerable speaker does not consider using their own language, because it is socially perceived as a ‘bad’ way to behave. Something similar appears to happen concerning linguistic acquisition: there might be a structure of incentives and costs that compel speakers of vulnerable languages to transmit certain (privileged) languages instead of others (to children, for instance, to try and help them avoid higher costs in the future).

This strongly connects with the idea of strategic anticipation (Lovett 2009, 821). That is, in order to avoid costs (for instance, exclusion, seeming impolite, being laughed at, or, worst case scenario, being the target of racist threats and/or exclusion), the vulnerable speaker anticipates what will happen and uses the dominant language(s) without even

attempting to try to speak their own language first. Faced with the uncertainty of suffering interference, I modify my linguistic practices. Of course, the higher the costs, the more problematic this is. Someone being threatened to be excluded from a neighbours' meeting is not the same as being in an important job interview. The costs that you might incur if you challenge the social norms and do not switch language are very different depending on the situation: if the costs are low enough to be skipped (e.g. Gwen keeps speaking Welsh because the only thing that will happen is that Caroline will complain, but her voice will be considered by everybody else) is not the same as when the contrary happens (e.g. if Gwen keeps speaking Welsh she will face an important number of neighbours complaining and threaten her of being excluded from the decision-making conversation).

Of course, speakers of privileged languages are also part of this structure of incentives and costs influenced by social norms, and might benefit from them. The status of linguistic privilege implies being at least minimally aware of it and being able (by intentionality or negligence) to impose one's terms on the linguistic uses of others. For instance, being able to avoid the cost of learning languages different from one's own language (and, therefore, being able to impose one's linguistic terms on others). This might happen even if a privileged speaker does not want to do so, but just because the social conditions make domination possible. Going back to our Welsh example, this might also be the case of Gwen and Caroline's linguistic encounter: Caroline might use the asymmetrical linguistic status to impose her will and modify Gwen's linguistic practices. And if Gwen tries to challenge this (by not switching language when asked to by Caroline), she will probably suffer some social sanctions that she might not be able to skip.

The mere discretionary condition

As already mentioned, the *mere discretionary condition* takes place when a private agent can *deliberately* interfere regarding the linguistic options of other people at no (or a very low) *ex-ante* or *ex-post* cost, independently of the existence of linguistic social norms. This ability to interfere can thus be exercised at will, with impunity because there are some structural factors facilitating this (for instance, demographics or the socioeconomic position of the speakers of each language). Going back to the neighbourhood meeting example, the mere discretionary condition would imply that Caroline is able to deliberately interfere regarding Gwen's linguistic options at no (or a very low) *ex-ante* and *ex-post* cost, and with no need to justify her actions. There would have to be intentionality (or negligence) on behalf of Caroline, either because she has decided not to become minimally competent in the Welsh language (despite the fact she has had reasonable opportunities to learn it)²⁶ or because although she understands the language, for whatever reason she prefers to claim that she does not. And this is possible (i.e. she knows her actions have no cost) due to different possible contextual structural factors such as demography (among many others²⁷). For instance, because the majority of Welsh people are native English-speakers, and Welsh-speakers are a demographic minority that also speak English. Caroline is aware of all of this, so she can behave as she does with impunity.²⁸ She knows, therefore, that if Gwen really needs to be heard in that meeting (e.g. because something important is discussed, such as the amount of money that each

neighbour will have to pay to repair the building's elevator), she will need to switch to English. If not, she might face, for example, the cost of exclusion.

Besides linguistic uses, this could also apply to *linguistic acquisition*. At first sight, linguistic acquisition appears to be a matter that, in practice, amounts to vertical domination. Even though it is difficult to imagine situations in which a private agent might interfere at will in someone's linguistic acquisition, it is still theoretically possible. Take the following thought experiment: imagine a maid who takes care of her employer's house and needs. She happens to have a child, with whom she lives in the employer's house. Imagine that the boss forbids the maid to transfer her mother tongue to her child. Instead, she is obliged to transfer the boss's language to him or her. If she does not acquiesce, she will suffer highly costly consequences.²⁹ To my mind, this case exemplifies the theoretical possibility of exercising horizontal linguistic domination, even though domination regarding linguistic acquisition appears to be more correctly situated as something that happens from a vertical perspective.

Lastly, before continuing, someone might reply that my definition of linguistic domination (including my two conditions) might apply, in some circumstances, to individuals who are not members of long-settled language groups. I agree. This would happen in cases where someone has the capacity to uncontrolledly interfere in other people's private conversations. Imagine a small company of eight workers situated in London. Four of them, including the person in charge of the company, are English speakers. The other four are migrants from Poland, who have a good competence of the English language. In order to facilitate internal communication, imagine that the boss requires all workers to communicate in English when having meetings in common, sending emails or writing reports. Using my theory, this requirement would not necessarily lead to linguistic domination. Considering that this company is situated in England, and no one is expected to know Polish, this interference on the linguistic practices of some persons might be seen as a mere interference without a deliberate intention of uncontrolledly exercising power over their linguistic practices. However, imagine that the boss of this company goes beyond that and require to the Polish-speaking workers to also speak English when communicating in their private conversations at work. For instance, when they are having lunch. Differently from the previous requirement, where requiring English does not necessarily imply linguistic domination, this last requirement it is a clear instance of someone using his power in an uncontrolled way to impose his linguistic terms on others. In this last scenario, there is a *deliberate* attempt to modify people's linguistic practices. This is so because, whereas in the first case, the English-speaking workers are not expected to know Polish so conversations in common might be required in English, in the second one, English-speakers are not involved at all in any conversation with Polish-speakers. Therefore, making linguistic requirements to them seem to be a deliberate attempt to dominate their linguistic practices using the boss's power in a discretionary way.

Facing linguistic domination: is there any way out?

Once the two conditions for linguistic domination have been settled, it might be a good idea to quickly discuss if this issue can be avoided in any way. Going back to our example, the key point with linguistic domination is not the fact that Gwen, the vulnerable speaker,

does not use her language,³⁰ but that Caroline is free to interfere in Gwen's linguistic practices at will and with impunity. All in all, Gwen, as a speaker of a vulnerable language, has three legitimate available options *ex ante*: (a) using her (valued) language; (b) switching to the privileged language; or (c) abandoning the conversation. She would prefer (a). However, she anticipates the possibility of incurring important costs (not being listened to; being ignored and marginalised; even in very bad contexts being insulted or threatened, etc.) if she uses her language and is then prevented from speaking. This modifies her alternatives to (a*) attempting to use her language and consequently being penalised (e.g. dismissed, marginalised, not heard, excluded, etc.). Thus, (a*) is so bad for her (or the aggregate effects over time of always choosing (a*) are so bad for her), that either (b), or (c) become the preferred alternatives. In this way, the uncontrolled power of speakers of the privileged language has influenced her to opt for other alternatives, not by convincing her that it might be best for her after all, but by worsening the payoffs of the choice so that she aligns her incentives with their sociolinguistic interests.

The fact that (c), the option to leave, exists could be used as an argument to say that there is no domination here. However, I disagree. Domination is always a matter of degree (Lovett 2010), and the leaving option would depend on the costs that the dominated individual would be able to take on. Imagine that Gwen is at this neighbourhood meeting to discuss an important common concern regarding her apartment building (repairs to the elevator, for example). Then let us apply my example. Is leaving the meeting an option? As a last resource, yes it is. But maybe the neighbours could then decide something that is against her interest because she is not there (for example, making her pay a larger share of the repair bills). It is like the worker who has to decide between taking a very bad job or remaining unemployed and with no income. The option of leaving (or remaining unemployed) is always there, but the consequences of that option might be prohibitively high. Of course, there are situations where leaving would suppose a relatively low cost. In these cases, the degree of domination would be lower or even null. Following, Lovett (2022, 39; words in italics are mine), 'when exit costs are very low, A [*the dominated*] will not tolerate many interventions, and thus it will rarely be rational for B [*the dominator*] to exercise his powers, no matter how much he may care to. Conversely, when exit costs are high, A may suffer many interventions before leaving, and thus B will have much freer hand in exercising his powers'. So, if Gwen would not care that much about what is going on in the neighbours' meeting, the cost of leaving would be an option. Thus, it would seem that domination is not part of the picture. At the same time, though, it is important to make clear that this might change because domination is not about one particular action or event, 'domination refers to a position or state of affairs' (Lovett 2022, 34). If the conditions for linguistic domination (the marked language and/or the mere discretionary) are there, Gwen would continue to be in a vulnerable position. In this story, she is now part of that neighbourhood scheme and, maybe, some day she will need to stay (because something relevant is being discussed) and face important costs when making linguistic choices.

All in all, linguistic domination might contribute to creating (1) linguistic insecurity and (2) a subordinate perception of one's own status as a speaker of vulnerable languages.³¹ This perpetual feeling of insecurity, of never being sure when one is entitled to

use a language that is different from the dominant language, and the idea of having an inferior status, are precisely at the core of any republican theory and its concern about domination (Pettit 1997, 85–89). This fear of paying higher costs if one acts in a particular way is a relevant reason (among others, of course) that people might not use their own language (or not even consider using it in many situations). Additionally, these phenomena might also affect the perceived utility of any language, reinforcing the status of the privileged ones and weakening the status (and utility) of the vulnerable ones. The less useful a language is perceived to be, the lower social status it would probably have, promoting further linguistic domination.

Indeed, linguistic domination might be put in motion in different ways depending on the context and, of course, would require empirical work in order to detect it.³² How do we know if someone (e.g. Gwen) is using the privileged language because she really wants to or due to social norms that promote linguistic domination? This would be very difficult to test and would require considerable empirical research, a task being undertaken by some sociolinguists. In this regard, I hope to have offered some new conceptual tools useful for this kind of empirical endeavour.

Conclusion

In this article, I have tried to answer two fundamental questions that have barely been addressed by political philosophers to date: *what is linguistic domination and when does it take place?* I have answered the two questions by using the analytical tools used by both sociolinguistics and normative political philosophy, especially the overlap between two literatures: the republican literature and work on linguistic justice.

There is *linguistic domination*, I argue, whenever a person or group is subject to the uncontrolled capacity for interference regarding their *linguistic uses, ideology and acquisition* by some other individual, group or political institution. Additionally, I distinguish between two kinds of domination: that exercised by political institutions over individuals or groups (vertical linguistic domination) and that exercised between individuals or groups (horizontal linguistic domination). This article concentrates on the latter, arguing that horizontal linguistic domination takes place if, and only if, there is an individual or group that has the capacity to exercise uncontrolled interference over the linguistic uses and acquisition of another individual or group. This capacity to interfere is uncontrolled, I argue, when there are imbalances of power based on at least one of the following two conditions: (1) *the marked language condition* and/or (2) *the mere discretionary condition*. Broadly speaking, the conditions go hand in hand. However, it is theoretically possible to distinguish them.

I hope I have been successful in providing an adequate general and descriptive conception of linguistic domination concerning interpersonal linguistic injustices. The question would now be what measures could be taken to address the injustice of linguistic domination. I hope this first step to developing a general theory of linguistic domination might serve as a basis to support empirical research in the field and to develop a normative account of what (if anything) we ought to do about it. Linguistic domination is an injustice that, unfortunately, may have silenced many people's languages in their historic

homelands. Addressing this blind spot in political philosophy, I have tried to move the normative debate forward by examining a problem – that of linguistic domination – which occurs in several places all around the world and should concern everyone worried about injustice(s) (both republicans and liberals alike).

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Notes

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1. In the Valencian Country, Catalan is usually referred to as Valencian.
2. This is usually defined as diglossia (Ferguson 1959). It occurs when 'speakers of the marginalized language use their own language in contexts of intimacy— with family, friends, and close associates— but switch to some other, higher-status language in more prestigious public domains'.
3. Bodoque Arribas (2011, 161–63) explains how Valencian language policies have so far promoted a supposedly more widespread knowledge of Catalan but also a permanent diglossia and a decrease in the intergenerational transmission of Catalan. Flors-Mas (2017, 453–522) points out this tendency regarding Catalan-speaking teenagers in the Valencian Country, while stating that this is not necessary the case in Catalonia. Attitudes similar to the Valencian example are also reported in the case of the Basque Country (Ortega et al. 2016, 81–90).

4. Riera-Gil has provided a complete definition of these cases in her empirical work. She defines a linguistically mixed society as ‘a linguistically plural society where significant numbers of the long-settled population belong to different language groups and live intermingled, and where (to a great extent as a consequence of their mixture) there is a significant percentage of bilingual (or polyglot) individuals, some (or many) of whom could be ascribed to more than one language group’ (Riera-Gil 2016, 176).
5. A distinction needs to be made here: republicanism is a *public philosophy* (or ideology) with a complete scale of values, while linguistic justice is not. While linguistic justice is only a single field of discussion, much like socioeconomic justice or environmental justice taken individually, republicanism is a comprehensive ideology that can deal with all fields of conflict and discussion, including linguistic justice or socioeconomic justice.
6. It is important to remark that, in this article, I am not dealing with what is morally wrong with linguistic domination and domination in general. As most republicans argue, my assumption is that domination is morally wrong (and should be avoided) because it undermines the opportunity of individuals to live equally decent lives. In other words, republicanism endorses the idea that being dominated puts those under the yoke of domination in an undignified position that does not allow them to pursue free lives. Neither do I address the merits of republicanism and non-domination as a proper conception of freedom. To my mind, republicanism is the best suited theory to deal with linguistic domination because how interprets freedom: republicanism can explain why subtle dynamics of (linguistic) subordination compromise the freedom of linguistic groups, especially minorities. Meanwhile, the liberal conception of freedom (as non-interference) is less sensitive to these dynamics, and only condemns formal interferences (e.g. laws restricting the use of certain languages). Instead, as has already been explained, the goal of this article is more modest: to develop a solid general conception of linguistic domination.
7. See Patten (2014, chapter 6) as a paradigmatic scholar who defines linguistic justice in institutional terms.
8. For other scholars who criticise the linguistic justice literature for being too focused on how institutions should deal with linguistic diversity, without sufficiently considering daily linguistic interactions, see Shorten (2018) and Robichaud (2020).
9. Réaume (2015) also engages with Van Parijs’s micro-mechanisms, saying that they are also characterised by power imbalances that should be taken on board. However, she does not operationalise this idea either.
10. See Honohan (2002), Maynor (2003), Laborde (2008), Lovett (2010) and Gädeke (2020a). For an insightful criticism of the republican tradition, see Patten (1996).
11. Even though all republicans share similar concerns (freedom, civic virtues, political participation, etc.), the tradition has been divided theoretically between neo-Athenian and neo-Roman republicans (Laborde 2008, 2). The former group, currently represented by John Pocock (2016) and Michael Sandel (1996), holds that human beings can only flourish through active engagement in a free self-governing polity. The latter, more concerned with the concept of *libertas* (an ideal of the free citizen living in a free republic under the rule of democratic law), has been expounded by Quentin Skinner (2002) and Philip Pettit (1997). For them, freedom is not intrinsically related to individuals flourishing via political participation. In contrast, neo-Roman republicans endorse a non-perfectionist account of freedom as non-domination.

12. The exact meaning of the concept of ‘own valued language’ might be controversial. When talking about one’s own valued language, I mean the language or languages that one deems to be valuable and decides to use because doing so promotes some important interests.
13. For further details of the leading positions in the linguistic justice literature, see [Barry \(2001\)](#), [Réaume \(2003\)](#), [Weinstock \(2003\)](#), [De Schutter \(2007\)](#), [Stilz \(2015\)](#), [Van Parijs \(2011\)](#), [Patten \(2014\)](#), [Peled and Bonotti \(2016\)](#), [Morales-Gálvez \(2017\)](#), [Oakes and Peled \(2018\)](#), [Riera-Gil \(2019\)](#), among many others.
14. This is not to say that speakers of other languages (i.e. migrant groups) should not benefit from the same status. There is literature that defends the equal status of migrants’ language claims (see [De Schutter 2022](#)). Nonetheless, this would be more controversial assumption (see [Morales-Gálvez 2022](#); [Patten 2006](#)) and would complicate my argument in an unnecessary way.
15. This does not pretend to deny that other groups might suffer other linguistically related injustices. They do. However, I would avoid telling it linguistic domination in the way I have described it here (with some exceptions, as espoused at the end of the last section of the paper of this article). They might suffer, for instance, linguistic discrimination. That is, being treated with a relative disadvantage because of their linguistic membership ([Soler and Morales-Gálvez 2022](#)).
16. This is not to say that it is not relevant to operationalise vertical linguistic domination, which is problematic from a moral and political point of view and is highly connected to horizontal linguistic domination. As we have said, the way the state shapes linguistic regimes can highly influence interpersonal linguistic uses. However, considering the approach of this article and the gap I aim to fill, I think it is better to leave it out of the picture for now and try to focus on the interpersonal/horizontal dimension, without the interference of political institutions.
17. Indeed, this uncontrolled capacity for interference can be performed by individuals, linguistic groups and corporative groups (such as companies).
18. To be clear, *linguistic acquisition* tends to be related to the state’s actions, to whether the state decides to promote (or not) the acquisition of languages in public schools (or similar institutions) and how it regulates the transfer of languages in the private realm. Although this is true, it is also possible to imagine situations where someone might suffer from uncontrolled interferences in their linguistic acquisitions carried out by private agents.
19. As you can see here, I have not incorporated the ideology dimension of language yet. This is because, as mentioned before, it is difficult to see how one private agent might uncontrolledly interfere in someone else’s linguistic beliefs in a straightforward way. Ideology, as I will explain later, is a possible vehicle that facilitates domination, but not something under the direct arbitrary control of one particular agent.
20. Social norms are ‘the informal rules that govern behaviour in groups and societies’ ([Bicchieri, Muldoon, and Sontuoso 2018](#)). I briefly tackle the discussion on social norms in the next section.
21. One may legitimately ask why I use the concept of *vulnerable language* instead of the more classical term *minority language*. This is because, first of all, what I am explaining here might negatively affect not only speakers of languages that are usually considered as a demographic minority (e.g. Welsh) but also linguistic majorities. For instance, French speakers in Quebec. Of course, demography might play a role, but there are other contextual factors that might contribute to situate a language and its speakers in a situation of vulnerability. Secondly,

because the idea of vulnerability has a very strong connection with the republican vocabulary of being ‘dependant on and exposed to another agent’ (Garrau and Laborde 2015: 52).

22. There are important disagreements concerning the discussion on ‘structural domination’. See Haugaard and Pettit (2017), Laborde (2008), Lovett (2010) or Thompson (2013).
23. This procedural idea is closely linked to the idea theorised by McCammon (2015, 1046) of deliberative isolation as necessary for domination.
24. Social norms are not, indeed, democratically chosen despite their ‘seemingly consensual’ frame, but are instead collectively built throughout history. This is a history full of formal and informal relations of domination that have highly influenced the socialising roles adopted by both those in the dominant position and those in the vulnerable one, and that still have echoes in our current societies. This does not mean that the system per se is dominating people in some kind of mysterious way. This ‘form of domination emanates from the daily interactions of countless peripheral agents who do not themselves dominate a particular individual, but who reproduce disempowering norms and practices’ (Gädeke 2020b, 35–36) that facilitate domination.
25. This republican approach is very close to Miranda Fricker’s theory of power (2007) and her notion of epistemic injustices. For her, there are situations where ‘power has no subject’, despite the fact that it ‘always has an object whose actions are being controlled’ (Fricker 2007, 13). For Fricker, there are imaginative social co-ordination mechanisms that promote shared conceptions of what it is to be X and to be Y (e.g. a man or a woman), ‘where such conceptions amount to stereotypes’ (Fricker 2007, 15). In the case of language, for instance, we can imagine a society where both speakers of a privileged language and speakers of a vulnerable language assume that everyone should speak in the privileged language in certain situations (for instance, when they go to the doctor) because it is a symbol of politeness.
26. Someone might say that learning an additional language is also a costly task. This is of course true. Learning a language always implies costs, but it is costly for everybody (for both speakers of majority and minority languages). Additionally, my point here is not to argue for a high competence in any language. It is to respect the linguistic choices of individuals, which just requires a minimal passive knowledge of languages (which is far less costly).
27. For instance, another factor might be the socioeconomic position that speakers of each language group occupy in society. Imagine a society where most positions of power in important companies are occupied by members of the same language group. Of course, there might be many more factors, which is something to be considered in future research of a more empirical nature.
28. Some republicans argue that democratic control is enough to avoid this kind of problem. However, I am leaving this to one side, because it is part of how to solve the problem of linguistic domination normatively. In a way, I am assuming a situation where the state has a hands-off position.
29. I thank Eze Paez for raising this point.
30. Doing the opposite would suppose adopting a positive understanding of freedom (‘being free to do something’) instead of the negative one (‘being free from interference’) (Berlin 2013) claimed by republicans (although republicans add ‘being free from *uncontrolled* capacity for interference’).
31. The sociolinguist Albert Bastardas-Boada (2014) uses a similar argument, and explains different situations where minority language speakers switch to the majority/dominant language

even when the state recognises their language, and how this can (negatively) affect their linguistic self-image and self-esteem.

32. Some of these discussions are related to adaptive preferences research. For further research about adaptive preferences from the perspective of political philosophy, see [Terlazzo \(2016\)](#) and, related to republicanism, [Bello Hutt \(2018, 89\)](#).

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