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LANGUAGE CONFLICT AND VIOLENCE:
OR THE STRAW THAT STRENGTHENED THE CAMEL'S BACK

David D. Laitin

David D. Laitin is William R. Kenan Jr. Professor of Political Science at the University of Chicago. This paper is based on a seminar he presented at the *Center for Advanced Study in the*

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Introduction*

The situation of a Tower of Babel within a single country -- in which groups of people speak radically different languages -- is all too often portrayed as incendiary. Selig Harrison wrote ominously about the "dangerous decades" that India would face in regard to its conflicts over language. In his classic *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, on the opening page, Donald Horowitz considers secessionist warfare in Burma, Bangladesh, Sudan, Nigeria, Iraq, and the Philippines in the same category ("ethnic conflict") as the language divisions dividing Canada and Switzerland. And in the iconic "The Integrative Revolution" by Clifford Geertz, language was included with a set of other "primordial" attachments that were seen as threats to civil society. "When we speak of communalism in India," he wrote:

> we refer to religious contrasts; when we speak of it in Malaya, we are mainly concerned with racial ones, and in the Congo with tribal ones. But the grouping under a common rubric is not simply adventitious; the phenomena referred to are in some way similar. Regionalism has been the main theme in Indonesian disaffection, differences in custom in Moroccan. The Tamil minority in Ceylon is set off from the Sinhalese majority by religion, language, race, region, and social custom; the Shiite minority in Iraq is set off from the dominant Sunnis virtually by an intra-Islamic sectarian difference alone. Pan-national movements in Africa are largely based on race, in Kurdistan, on tribalism; in Laos, the Shan States, and Thailand, on language. Yet all these phenomena, too, are in some sense of a piece. They form a definable field of investigation.

Language difference is perceived in these important works as one of those symbolic cultural realms in which conflict can all too easily leave the realm of politics, and become threats to peace. In this paper, I present powerful evidence to the contrary. Language conflict is not of a piece with religious or other forms of cultural conflict; it has its own particular dynamic. Furthermore, conflict over language is not a prescription for violence. In fact, under certain potentially incendiary conditions, language conflict can help to contain violence.[1]

[1] Selig S. Harrison, ed., (1957) *The Most Dangerous Decades: An Introduction to the Comparative Study of Language Policy in Multi-Lingual States* (New York: Language and Communication Research Center, Columbia

The empirical source of my challenge to the conventional wisdom is from the "Minorities at Risk" (MAR) data base developed by Ted Gurr, which analyzes the status and conflicts of 268 politically active communal groups in 148 different countries. Among the 449 original variables included in the data set, there are assessments of cultural, economic, and political differences between minority and dominant groups, of group grievances and organizational strength, of transnational support of minority goals, of polity characteristics, and of protest, communal violence, and rebellion.[2] In the analysis that follows, rebellion of minority groups against the state is the dependent variable. Linguistic differences between minority and dominant group, as well as grievances of minority groups over state language policies are the independent variables.

The plan of this paper is as follows. In section I, I will review the standard theory linking modernization to language conflict, suggesting why conflicts over language issues become incendiary. In section II, I will explore the MAR data base putting a range of hypotheses to test. The findings are quite stunning:

* The greater the language difference between the language of the minority and dominant group, the *less* is the probability of violence.

* Language grievances held by the minority, in regard to official language of the state or in regard to medium of instruction in state schools, are not associated with group violence, but there is a tendency suggesting a weak *negative* relationship between language grievances and interethnic violence.

* Language grievances, even when in interaction with other factors (racial differences, religious grievances, lack of democratic processes), are not associated with group violence.

* Language grievances, under conditions that the MAR data base show are virtually a necessary condition for large-scale ethnic rebellions (when the minority has within the country a hinterland it sees as its historic homeland), have a tendency (though not a statistically significant one) to reduce the expected scale of the violence.

University); Clifford Geertz (1973) "The Integrative Revolution" in Geertz *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books), quotation from pp. 256-57; and Donald Horowitz (1985) *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press).

[2] Ted R. Gurr (1993) *Minorities at Risk* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace).

In section III, starting with a stylized "official language game," I shall provide theoretical speculations as to why the relationship between language grievance and group violence is not positive. Key mechanisms have to do with the ability of the state to commit to compromises and the inability of minority language entrepreneurs to solve collective action problems. Thus a theoretical sketch is provided that shows why language grievances (as opposed to say, religious grievances) tend to redirect conflict from the military to the political/bureaucratic realm. In section IV, I get down to some specific cases -- those in India and Sri Lanka -- in order to show that the statistical and theoretical analyses compel us to see oft-told national histories in new ways. In section V, presenting new data on language policies and their associations with violent conflict, I suggest the relevance of my findings for public policy. Policies that are favorable from the points of view of equity may not, the data show, have equally beneficial consequences in terms of reducing the probability of ethnic violence. To be sure, international intervention may be called for if the implementers of unfair language policies use minority protest as an invitation for all out war against the minority; but the unfair language policies themselves are not a threat to peace. In section VI, I summarize the findings of this paper.

I. The Relationship of Language to Political Conflict

In the premodern era, language was not politicized. As Ernest Gellner has masterfully demonstrated, in pre-industrial times for most people the language of official state business was of no concern.[3] Many states with considerable ethnic (and especially linguistic) heterogeneity within their boundaries legislated official languages of state business without inducing the ire of their populations. This was no different from establishing a basic law of the state, of establishing uniform weights and measures, and other standardizing practices that Max Weber called "rationalization."[4] Furthermore, these states induced (over much longer periods) the vast majority of the population living within their territories to adopt the state language as their own, often with

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[3] Ernest Gellner (1983) *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press)

[4] Max Weber (1968) *Economy and Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 71, 655, 809-38, 1108 for discussions of different forms of rationalization.

objections from the Church, but rarely with strong popular protest.[5] This is part of what is today called "nation building." It was so painless (compared to relations with other states, or religious issues), that many political scientists writing in the 1960s erroneously coded early developers as having "natural" boundaries, linking nation and state. Within-state heterogeneity may have been substantial; but the language rationalization aspect of nation-building was relatively benign.

Take for example the infamous (to contemporary Catalans) Decree of the New Foundation, issued by King Philip V of Spain in 1716. Amongst other articles in a decree that sought to transform Spain from a decentralized kingdom to one based more on Bourbon principles, it would henceforth be required that all legal papers submitted to the king's court be written in Spanish. Late 19th and 20th century Catalan nationalists point to this decree as signalling the death of the Catalan nation. Yet historical reality reveals a quite different picture. A large data base of royal court submissions in Spain from the mid-17th through the mid-18th centuries shows that Philip V was demanding a practice that had already become normal a quarter-century earlier. In the 1660s, when most petitions that were brought to the king's attention were requests for payment in recompense for quartering the king's troops in the war in the Pyrenees against France that ended in 1659, Catalan petitioners hired notaries to translate their requests into Spanish. By the 1680s, virtually all such documents were routinely produced in Spanish. It is no wonder that at the time of the Nueva Planta's issuance, there was hardly a murmur from Catalonia about the burdens that would be imposed upon Catalans by having to communicate with the political center in Spanish.[6] Although revival movements in Catalonia (as well as the Basque Country and Galicia) politicized language in 19th and 20th century Spain, it is historically remarkable how painless rationalization was; and even though nation-building was never a full success in Spain,[7] by the 20th century virtually all Spanish citizens were fluent in Spanish.

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[5] Eugen Weber (1976) *Peasants into Frenchmen* (Stanford: Stanford University Press); Abram de Swaan (1988) *In Care of the State* (New York: Oxford University Press), chap. 3.

[6] This is a summary of David D. Laitin et al. (1994) "Language and the Construction of States: The Case of Catalonia in Spain" *Politics and Society* 22, 1 (March), pp. 3-30.

[7] Juan Linz (1974) "Politics in a Multilingual Society with a Dominant World Language" in J. G. Savard and R. Vegneault, eds. *Les états multilingues: problèmes et solutions* (Quebec: Presses de l'Université Laval), 367-444.

It is for states that consolidated rule in the modern era that language rationalization became a grave political problem. This is in large part due to the fact, as Gellner has highlighted, that in the modern age, social mobility and economic success have been dependent on literacy. Thus clerks replaced peasants as the backbone of modern economies in the industrial age. Furthermore, as states got into the business of providing education, the language of state business became a much broader concern, for far more people, than when states were not in the business of providing such services to individual citizens. Under modern conditions, people have become quite sensitive to the language of state business, and if it is not their own, they feel alienated from the state. They feel as well a sense of unfair competition for those jobs that are more easily garnered by those whose mother tongue is the state language. Indeed the classic case of the unraveling of the Habsburg Empire, where peasants from non-German-speaking areas who became urban migrants were most receptive to pleas for the official recognition of their languages, fits this theory to a T.[8]

Postcolonial states that received independence after World War II, committed to the provision of public education and social welfare, were heavily constrained from following the path of Philip V, and other earlier rationalizers. Newly elected political leaders were handed bureaucracies with a vested interest in the continued reliance on colonial languages, as fluency in these languages differentiated the high paid civil servants from their poorly paid brethren in the countryside. Furthermore, these same national leaders were held under suspicion by leaders from regions in which distinct languages were spoken. To impose one indigenous language on all groups would surely threaten the incumbency of any would-be rationalizer. Yet the goals of many postcolonial leaders included the supersession of the colonial language by an indigenous one. It is this difficult problem of choosing an official language (used for public administration and as a medium of instruction in schools), under conditions in which greater access to the official language translates into higher prospects for social mobility, that has led many analysts (although with a blunt theory, unable to make specific predictions about levels or types of conflict) to link language conflict with the potentiality of inducing ethnic violence.

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[8] The Habsburg case is an archetype for the foundational figures in contemporary theories of nationalism, especially those who lived in it at the time of its dissolution: Hans Kohn, Karl Deutsch, Eric Hobsbawm, and Ernest Gellner.

II. The Route from Ethnic Conflict to Ethnic Violence

As indicated in the introduction, the standard literature on ethnic conflict often conflates all forms of ethnic contestation as a form of zero-sum intractable conflict, all with equally high potentialities for engendering violence. The leading theories provide a basis for understanding why language gets politicized in the modern era, but links to violent conflict are weakly theorized. In this section, relying upon MAR data (supplemented with new variables), I shall show that language conflict does not translate inexorably into a higher probability of ethnic violence. The dependent variable for this section is MAXREB (either MAXREB45 or MAXREB80, depending on context), which is the highest level of group rebellion against the state for any five-year period from either 1945 or 1980 through 1995. The scale goes from 0 (no rebellion) through 4 (small-scale guerilla activity) and up to 7 (protracted civil war). The question I ask in this section is whether language difference, language grievance, or language grievance in association with other factors, helps explain the values on MAXREB.

Language Difference and Violence

The independent variable describing the level of language difference is LANGFAM (simplified to a three value variable LANGSIM). Here I consider the hypothesis that linguistic distance between people living in the same country is a source of tension, and peoples with different languages cannot easily live together in the same political unit. The MAR data base lends some support to this thesis, but (see Appendix) the coding on linguistic distance is invalid. Recognizing the failures of the MAR indicator to assess linguistic distance, James D. Fearon and

I took the world classification of languages, produced by Ethnologue,[9] a society of linguists interested in producing versions of the Bible in all languages of the world. Ethnologue linguists rely upon linguistic trees, classifying languages by structure, with branch points for language family (for example, Indo-European from Afro-Asiatic), language groups, and down to sub-dialects. We have coded the language of the dominant group for each of the minorities in the MAR data base, and counted the branch point from which the minority group's language breaks off from that of the dominant group. If the two languages are of different language families as with Spanish and Basque, the score for language distance is 1, but if they break off on the fifth branch from one another, as do Akan from Ewe, two Ghanaian languages, the score is 5. The higher the number, the greater the language similarity. If the minority and majority speak the same language (for example, Serbs in Croatia), we coded the minority group with the number 20.

This measure of language distance is not without its own problems. First, we faced the same problem Gurr and associates faced, *viz.* that there is no accepted criterion for judging the language of the dominant group or the minority. Our criterion was to code the historic language of the country's political leadership as the dominant language (and thus the dominant language of Kenya changed when Jomo Kenyatta, a Kikuyu, died and power was transferred to Daniel arap Moi, a Kalenjin), and the historic language of the minority (and thus Germans in Russia are coded as German speakers even though most cannot speak German). Second, there are problems in Ethnologue's classification of languages, in part due to the fact that across language families, the data are not equally sensitive to dialectical differences in different regions. Since Ethnologue linguists have a greater interest in preparing Bible translations for heathens, they have been more sensitive to small differences in Papua-New Guinea than in Germany. And so, the data may overstate linguistic differences among non-Christians. A third problem is that structural differences are not a good proxy for communicative difficulties. While Castilian and Mexican Spanish are closely related, and equidistant from English, the interference of English-speakers in Sonora is so great as to make Spanish spoken there sound somewhat like a dialect of English. Despite these difficulties, Ethnologue data are available and give a rough and ready measure of

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[9] Barbara F. Grimes, ed. (1996) *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, 13th ed. Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics.

linguistic difference, and provide an excellent perspective on the problem I wish to address in this paper.

Linguistic difference alone between the dominant and minority groups in a country is not a predictor of intergroup violence. Correlating LANGFAM with MAXREB80 in fact, the trend is opposite to what Gurr's data show and what would be predicted from a theory that cultural difference promotes conflict. In a bivariate relationship between rebellion and linguistic distance, the correlation is positive (.1833, significant at p=.004). Thus, *the data show that greater linguistic similarity raises the probability of violence*.

One way to illustrate this is to sort LANGFAM into three categories, creating the variable LANGSIM: different language family (LANGFAM=1; LANGSIM=1); same family but different languages (LANGFAM between 2 and 8; LANGSIM=2); and same language (LANGFAM=20; LANGSIM=3). I then compared means for MAXREB45 and for MAXREB80, and Table A shows the trend for "LANGSIM" to be a higher mean score for ethnic violence the more similar the languages between the minority and the dominant language of the state. To give added support to this finding, regression analysis shows LANGFAM to have a significant negative coefficient even after including a range of standard controls.

TABLE A. *Language Similarity and Rebellion: Comparison of Means*

A1: Summaries of   MAXREB80
By levels of   LANGSIM   Language Similarity

Variable	Value Label	Mean	Std Dev	Cases
For Entire Population		1.9262	2.5841	244
LANGSIM	1 Different Family	1.6396	2.4450	111
LANGSIM	2 Same Family	1.8280	2.3342	93
LANGSIM	3 Same Language	2.9500	3.2499	40

Total Cases = 268

A2: Summaries of   MAXREB45

By levels of   LANGSIM   Language Similarity

Variable	Value Label	Mean	Std Dev	Cases
For Entire Population		2.4959	2.8204	244
LANGSIM	1 Different Family	2.0631	2.6876	111
LANGSIM	2 Same Family	2.6237	2.7223	93
LANGSIM	3 Same Language	3.4000	3.2090	40

Total Cases = 268

Examination of the list of cases in each of LANGSIM's categories helps to show why an important cultural difference such as language does not provoke violent group conflicts. On the one hand, there are many cases where there are vast differences in language, but where the conditions do not permit large scale rebellion. First, there are cases of postindustrial settlers who settled into urban areas and had no territorial base in which to mobilize for military action against the state. These groups differed greatly linguistically from the dominant groups in control over the state. There are also groups living in states ruled by "settler" populations whose language is different from any of the autochthonous groups--their statebuilding activities achieved success in earlier eras, and are less likely to face ethnic rebellions in the post 1945 period. Third, there are former slave groups, many of them classified as having Creole languages, which are of a different language family from the dominant groups of their societies. Yet former slave groups have not been in a position to stand radically against the state in the post World War II period. Finally, there are nomadic groups (the Romani) who may well be subject to pogroms, but who do not have the resources to challenge the state through violent action. They too differ considerably linguistically from the dominant groups in the societies in which they live. On the other hand, there are many indigenous populations (defined by Gurr as "conquered descendants of original inhabitants of a region who typically live in peripheral regions, practice subsistence agriculture or herding, and have cultures sharply distinct from dominant groups")[10] who speak languages in close proximity to their conquerors, yet harbor long standing grievances, and have a rural base to rebel. Here, despite language similarity, we see a breeding ground for violent

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[10] Gurr (1993), p. 18.

confrontation. Thus, the results shown on Table A should not surprise: the greater the difference in language between minority groups and the state, the lower the level of rebellion!

Language Grievances and Violence

The Gurr data set has two variables measuring language grievance, each measured for two-year time periods (1990-91; 1992-93; 1994-95). The first variable measures the level of demands by the minority to have their language given greater official states. The second variable measures the level of demands by the minority to have its language used as a medium of instruction in state schools. I constructed a composite variable, MAXLANG which is the maximum value of grievance on either of the variables in any of the time periods. The bivariate relationship between MAXLANG and MAXREB80 is -.0449! Not only is the relationship not significant, but the sign is the opposite of what the Gellnerian approach to modernization would have led us to expect.

Perhaps language grievances *alone* are not a causal factor explaining group violence, but in conjunction with other discriminatory elements can raise its probability? The intuition here is that violence is more likely in countries where other grievances are correlated with language differences (the mechanism here is that language similarity lowers the cost of collective action compared with the situation in which the other grievances affect groups that do not share a common language). Relatedly, it might be thought that violence is more likely if language differences in a country are socially defined as marking racial differences -- differences considered to be immutable, as such differences allow majority populations to identify easily and thereby to block mobility strategies by minorities through linguistic assimilation.[11] To test these suppositions, I specified a model where maxima of language grievance, religious grievance, and racial difference along with interaction terms for language grievance and both race and religious grievance are the independent variables. The results are in Table B. Here we see that racial difference is significantly negative, reflecting the historical fact that most racial minorities, however much they are discriminated against, do not have the resources to make a significant rebellion against the state. Religious grievances (at a near significance level) are positively related to rebellion. As for language grievances, Table B shows that there is no relationship at all between language grievances and rebellion (here, again, with a negative sign), and in interaction with religious grievance or racial difference there is no relationship at all in regard to the probability of rebellion. Both of these suppositions concerning interaction terms fail to

challenge the null hypothesis. Adding religious grievance or racial difference straws to the linguistically burdened camel's back does not lead to violent confrontations with the state.

Table B. *Rebellion and Cultural Grievances*

Dependent Variable.. MAXREB80

Independent Variables

1..	LGXRG	Max (language X religious grievances)
2..	RACE	Different Physical Appearance
3..	MAXLANG	Maximum Language Grievance
4..	MAXRELGR	Max Religious Grievance
5..	RACEXMLG	Max (race X language grievance)

Multiple R	.21737
R Square	.04725
Adjusted R Square	.02864
Standard Error	2.54903

Analysis of Variance

	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square
Regression	5	82.49177	16.49835
Residual	256	1663.37083	6.49754

F = 2.53917   Signif F = .0290

------------------ Variables in the Equation ------------------

Variable	B	SE B	Beta	T	Sig T
LGXRG	-.062564	.098189	-.063324	-.637	.5246
RACE	-.442776	.178441	-.194215	-2.481	.0137
MAXLANG	-.128892	.192359	-.062430	-.670	.5034
MAXRELGR	.300774	.161037	.146546	1.868	.0629
RACEXMLG	.092486	.115412	.086589	.801	.4237

[11] Gellner calls these "entropy resistant" cultural traits in Ernest Gellner (1983), ch. 6.

| (Constant) | 2.272492 | .288953 | | 7.865 | .0000 |

Other interaction terms merit consideration. For example, language grievances may well spiral into violent confrontation depending on the level of democracy (in 1974) and the presence of transnational political support for the minority. Table C provides the results. The variable for international political support is strongly positive; that for democracy in 1974 is not significant. But language grievances in interaction with either of them is not significant at all. In sum, the data reveal no statistically significant relationships connecting language grievances (or any combination of language grievances with other forms of group oppression, regime characteristics, or transnational support) to higher levels of ethnic violence.

Rural Base, Language Grievance, and the Amelioration of Violence

For ethnic rebellion to reach a significant level (MAXREB=4, that is, the existence of at least a small-scale guerilla war), the minority needs a hinterland within the country. This hinterland, or historic homeland, is both a reason to fight for rights (to protect sacred territory) and a resource (that is, a place to hide, to recruit, and to tax the local population) making it possible to mobilize systematic attacks on the state. To capture this notion, I created a dummy variable (called RURBASE) from several of the MAR variables.

There is no rural base for rebellion (RURBASE=0) if the group is primarily urban (REG5=1), or if the group is widely dispersed (REG6 0), if the group did not migrate to the country until the 20th century (TRADITN=4 or 5), or if the group (even if it was primarily rural) were the descendants of slaves or are travellers (Romani). Meanwhile, the group was considered to have a rural base (RURBASE=1) if the minority could trace its origins in the country to the period before state formation (TRADITN=1) or if the group had at least a majority concentrated in one region of the state (GROUPCON=2 or 3).

Table C. *Language Grievance in Interaction with Regime and International Support Variables*

Dependent Variable.. MAXREB80

Independent Variables
    1..   LGXTRANS   Maximum Language Grievance X International Political Support
    2..   LGXDEM74   Maximum Language Grievance X Democracy in 1974
    3..   NDEM74   Polity Democracy Index
    4..   ZISPOL9   Summary Index of International Political Support,
    5..   MAXLANG   Maximum Language Grievances

Multiple R	.28074
R Square	.07882
Adjusted R Square	.05913
Standard Error	2.48606

Analysis of Variance

	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square
Regression	5	123.74251	24.74850
Residual	234	1446.24083	6.18052

F =   4.00428   Signif F = .0017

------------------ Variables in the Equation ------------------

Variable	B	SE B	Beta	T	Sig T
LGXTRANS	.088425	.107160	.106943	.825	.4101
LGXDEM74	.026065	.034147	.070910	.763	.4460
NDEM74	-.001284	.054177	-.001907	-.024	.9811
ZISPOL9	.538221	.184526	.251041	2.917	.0039
MAXLANG	-.369492	.248699	-.182354	-1.486	.1387
(Constant)	1.287325	.335218		3.840	.0002

     The MAR data strongly support the hypothesis that groups without a clear rural hinterland within the country in which they live are much less likely to be involved in a rebellion against the state. Where RURBASE=0, MAXREB45=.47, much lower than when RURBASE=1, where

the mean MAXREB45=3.10. As for MAXREB80, RURBASE=0 cases have a mean score of .32; those with RURBASE=1 have a mean score of 2.46. It is clear that an historic rural hinterland for a minority vastly increases its potential for violent rebellion against the state. (It should be noted that RURBASE cannot predict the levels of communal conflict, which do not involve contests against state power. Communal riots are equally likely to engage groups with RURBASE=0 as with RURBASE=1).

While this might suggest that language issues pitting a group against the state might be more incendiary under conditions of RURBASE=1, such a supposition proves to be wrong. In fact, even in these potentially incendiary conditions (that is, in the interaction term of language grievance and rural base, LGXRB), as is clear in Table D, language grievances do not translate into ethnic rebellion.[12]

The data are inconsistent with a model which suggests that language grievances have an incendiary character under conditions of potential ethnic violence. Where there is high ethnic volatility (RURBASE=1), and where there are high powered language demands (MAXLANG=3), 29 out of 43 groups (67.4%) have low levels of violent conflict (MAXREB80 ≤ 4). Meanwhile, where there are no or low language demands (MAXLANG<3) along with high ethnic volatility (RURBASE=1), only 101 out of 159 groups (63.5%) have low levels of violent conflict. Thus, *where ethnic conflicts are potentially incendiary, evidence of expressed language grievances is negatively associated with large scale group violence*. Or to put the issue more figuratively, when there is a rural base of a minority group weighing down on the body politic, adding language grievances to the burden may well be the straw that strengthens the camel's back.

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[12] The data for language grievances are from the 1990s, so I cannot draw a causal inference in this regard.

Table D. *Rural Base a Key to the Possibility of Ethnic Rebellion*

Equation Number 1   Dependent Variable..   MAXREB80

Block Number 1. Method: Enter   MAXLANG LGXRB   RURBASE

Variable(s) Entered on Step Number
    1..   RURBASE   RURAL BASE
    2..   MAXLANG   Maximum Language Grievance
    3..   LGXRB   Maximum Language Grievance X Rural Base

Multiple R   .36091
R Square   .13026
Adjusted R Square   .12018
Standard Error   2.42401

Analysis of Variance
                  DF   Sum of Squares   Mean Square
Regression   3   227.92056   75.97352
Residual   259   1521.83609   5.87582

F =   12.92987   Signif F = .0000

------------------ Variables in the Equation ------------------

Variable	B	SE B	Beta	T	Sig T
RURBASE	2.087228	.40303	.341542	5.179	.0000
MAXLANG	-.250131	.245545	-.121130	-.019	.3093
LGXRB	.437105	.850971	.063988	.514	.6079
(Constant)	.491898	.357344		1.377.	.1698

To give some illustrative cases, we can easily point to several very prominent examples of ethnically volatile situations in which language conflict preceded and played visible roles in the drama of ethnic war. Examples of the Sri Lankan Tamils in Sri Lanka, Abkhazians and Ossetians in Georgia, Slavs in Moldova, Tibetans in China, Mons in Burma, Kurds in Turkey, and the Tuareg in Mali and Niger are well known. But there are many cases as well in which language conflict occurred with only low levels of ethnic violence. The Basques in France, the Catalans in Spain, the Turks in Bulgaria, and the Romani and Serbs in Macedonia are prominent examples. Perhaps more importantly, when RURBASE=1, the number of cases of high historic violence (MAXREB80 $\geq$ 4) under conditions of low levels of expressed language grievances (58) far outnumbers the cases of high violence with high levels of expressed language grievances (14). Among the fifty-eight are the Serbs and Croats in Bosnia, the Kashmiris in India, the Kurds in Iran and Iraq, virtually all the minorities in Lebanon, the Isaaqs in Somalia, the Karens, Kachins, Zomis, Shans and Ruhingyas in Burma, the Pashtons and Sindhis in Pakistan, and the Hazaras and Tajiks in Afghanistan. In other words, tracing the implications of language grievances in ethnic violence in the case study literature misses the possibility that the expression of language grievances may have reduced the scale of violence, while not of course eliminating the possibility of violence.

Turning the Question on its Head: Explaining the Modulating Effects of Linguistic Conflict

How to interpret the data so far? Under conditions that are potentially incendiary from a linguistic point of view (RURBASE=1), there is a much higher probability of ethnic rebellion than under conditions that are not potentially incendiary from a linguistic point of view (RURBASE=0). However, language issues themselves play no causal role in group violence. In fact, language conflicts, under conditions where there is high group volatility (RURBASE=1) are associated with somewhat lower levels of ethnic violence than under conditions of high volatility and an absence of overt language conflict. We might therefore turn the usual question on its head: why does language conflict have a moderating impact on ethnic relations?

III. How Can a Straw Strengthen the Camel's Back?

It is a stretch (not justified by the data) to claim that language grievances reduce violence; but since the sign (for most, but not all, specifications) of the coefficient of MAXLANG is negative when regressed on MAXREB, it is useful to ask theoretically why the impact of language grievances upon ethnic rebellion is not strongly positive, and what ameliorative impact language grievance might have on ethnic relations. In this section, I will present a stylized model of an "official language" game. Travelling down its strategic steps will suggest three ameliorative mechanisms that reduce the probability of official language policy turning into violent inter-group conflict. The first centers on the potential subversion of the oppressive language laws by educated members of the dominant group, enhancing the difficulty for a state, amongst its own supporters, to implement a new official language. The second centers on the general bureaucratic problem, even if there is substantial support from government and business elites in the dominant group, of changing language norms. These problems ironically enable the government to make credible commitments in bargaining with the discriminated-against minority language groups. The third centers on the problem of collective action that is faced when language entrepreneurs of the minority language groups seek to recruit warriors to fight on their behalf.

Consider the stylized "official language game" represented in Figure A. Suppose a popular postcolonial government is being pressed by its ethnic constituency to pass language laws in favor of the dominant national group. It can either accept the status quo (say, continued use of the neutral colonial language) or press for the majority group's language as the official language of the state. If the government does the latter, the leading bureaucratic and business elites among the majority must decide individually whether to subvert the law they had demanded or to accept it and begin operating in the new state language for their official duties. If they accept the law, the burden is put onto the minority population, which can learn the newly official language (that is, assimilate) or defy the government, either by migrating out of the country, or organizing politically for linguistic autonomy within the state.

Figure A: *Official language game*
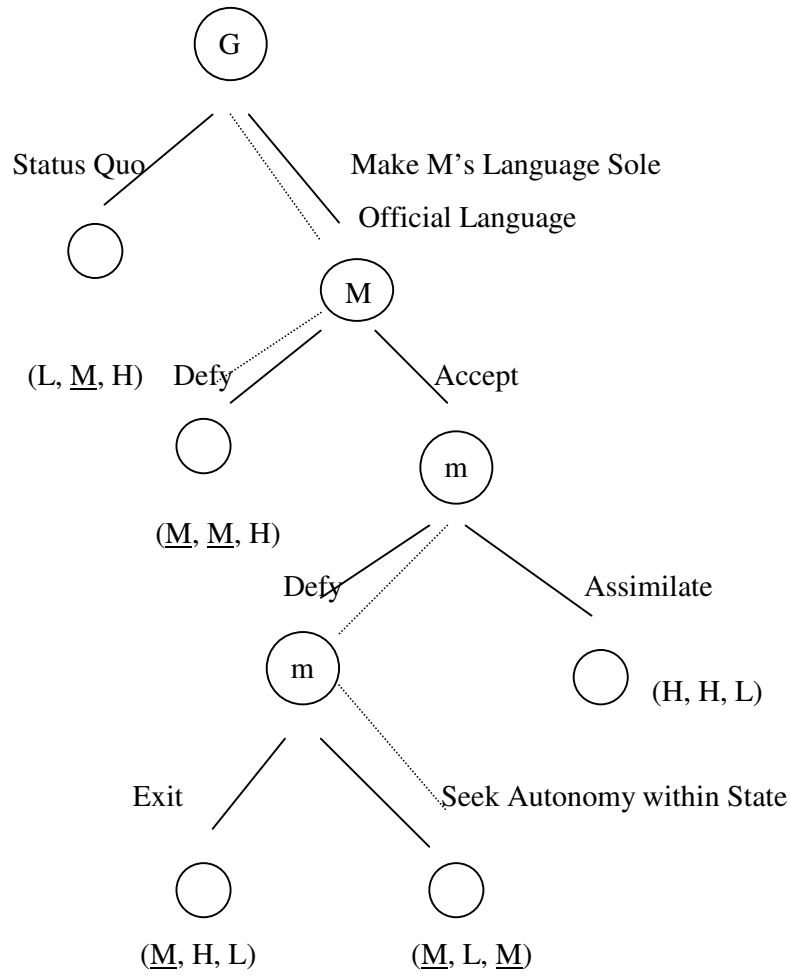
G = Government

M = Majority Group

m = minority group

Values (G, M, m); H = High; M = Medium; L = Low

.... = Equilibrium path

The values for each outcome reckoned in Figure A are as follows. The government would most prefer full acceptance and assimilation by the minority (as this would be a rationalized state); it would least prefer the status quo, as this would be a signal that it is unresponsive to its own constituency. It is indifferent among the three other possible outcomes. The majority group would most prefer either assimilation (as with its government) or minority exit (which would provide purity for the majority at a cost of a lower tax base for the government). It would least prefer minority autonomy, as this would assure protected jobs for the minority population. The majority would be indifferent between the status quo (where they can blame their government) or their own defiance (where they can blame each other). The minority would prefer the status quo or the defiance by the majority, as either would assure them continued use of the colonial language in schools and in state administration. It would least prefer assimilation (as this would be costly, and take generations) and exit (because this would uproot them from their homes). Autonomy for the minority would be better than assimilation but worse than the status quo.

Given this game structure and stipulated values for each player, we can, through backwards induction, see that it would be rational for the government to make the majority language official. But the majority population, should it accept, would see the minority population defy and then seek autonomy. This path would yield the majority its worst outcome. If the majority defied, it could assure itself a medium return, and this dominates the expected return of acceptance. The unique equilibrium here is the officialization of the majority language while the majority population subverts, and continues to rely upon the colonial language.

This equilibrium may help explain the weak negative coefficient for language grievance regressed on rebellion. If rebellion only occurs when the minority seeks autonomy from the state, this would mean that it occurs (only rarely) when the game has gone off of the equilibrium path. Most cases of grievance occur on the equilibrium path after the officialization of the majority language, while the majority is in the course of undermining its provisions. Only in the cases (suppose due to majority uncertainty as to how the minority would respond) of majority acceptance would language grievance have incendiary implications. Thus this interpretation of the weakly negative coefficient: it is not that language grievances cause peace; it is that language

grievances on the equilibrium path are less likely to be so threatening to any party as to make violence a rational response.

Besides the incentive for the backward inducing majority to defect, there are two other mechanisms embedded in this game that merit consideration. Consider first the burden on the elites in the majority (and especially those in the civil service) in accepting the new language laws they claim publicly to have supported. Civil servants in general oppose the rationalization of heretofore unofficial, and partly in consequence, low status languages, since entrenched bureaucrats initially received their positions by taking examinations in the soon-to-be proscribed language. They will do all they can to make the switchover appear as technically difficult as possible, to delay the time when their special linguistic competence will have little value for promotion.

And thus, one theoretical reason why language conflicts are associated with lower levels of violent conflict is that it is possible for the government in a language conflict to commit to a compromise, without the minority fearing that the commitment hides a secret plan to overturn the status quo when conditions are more propitious for full scale language rationalization.[13] This is largely due to the fact that language shift takes generations, and it is impossible for a state to impose a new language of education, administration or certification without a long lead time.[14] In terms of Figure A, this means that the move "accept" by the majority group is not a simple choice, but a coordination dynamic among fellow majority language speakers that might take a generation to complete. Thus the breaking of a commitment by an emboldened rationalizing state would require a myriad of new regulations and teaching programs, consuming years of effort, thereby enabling the affected linguistic regions a chance to mobilize in opposition. Language compromises -- amenable to commitments -- are therefore less incendiary than other types of center/periphery agreements (for example, the commitment of a weak state that it would never disband a regional parliament).

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[13] Under such conditions as James D. Fearon argues in (1994) "Ethnic War as a Commitment Problem", [paper presented at the 1994 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, New York], violence is more likely.

[14] This is the source of the humor in Woody Allen's "Bananas", when the leader of a Latin American guerilla army, at the moment of victory, with cigar in mouth, announces that from that point on, Swedish would be the sole language of all communication in the island nation.

A second theoretical reason why language conflicts are associated with lower levels of violent conflict has to do with collective action problems faced by the minority groups. Once a language rationalization program gets legislated in the modern era, minority language entrepreneurs in the periphery of the state invariably get activated, and usually join in alliance with their own poets, philologists, lexicographers, and international activists (often with financial support from UNESCO) in order to save "their" languages from extinction due to the projected effects of a rationalization program. Language is so intimately connected to group identity that these entrepreneurs have little trouble in articulating a powerful collective grievance if their language is being threatened. But these very language entrepreneurs have a problem: while it would be to everyone's interest for collective refusal to assimilate, it would be individually rational for any particular member of the minority to assimilate.[15]

Due to the relative ease of linguistic "defection," that is the choice by some subset of the minority population to assimilate, it is much more difficult for language entrepreneurs (even if funded by emigrés and international organizations) to organize collectively against linguistic discrimination than it is for religious entrepreneurs to organize collectively against religious discrimination. To be sure, students and the educated unemployed who are not literate in the newly upgraded language will be gravely affected by language regulations in a rather immediate way, without a long lead time that would protect entrenched bureaucrats. Absent the chance for middle class jobs, these youths are easily mobilized into militant opposition groups. The founding leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), as we shall see, is an example of such a reaction. But these youths, employment-threatened through discrimination, may find many of their compatriots (or their younger siblings) developing competence in the state language and thereby decreasing the solidarity of a minority linguistic group in opposition to the state.

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[15] My research career has been devoted to this dilemma. I focus upon the identity aspects of language in David D. Laitin (1977) *Politics, Language and Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press). I focus on the strategic rationality of defection in David D. Laitin (1988) "Language Games" *Comparative Politics* 20:289-302. I focus on the "Janus-facedness" of culture which has both an identity and a strategic component in David D. Laitin (1986) *Hegemony and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press). In this paper the identity aspect of culture plays only a bit part because the dependent variable is "violence" (where strategic action is more important) rather than "assimilation" (where identity issues play a major role).

Here it might be useful to distinguish language from religious grievance. Compared to religion, language groups never have organizational hierarchies with powers to police members. In fact, language discrimination (because of the social reality of multilingualism) easily permits those who are discriminated against to invest in their children's expanded language repertoires, so that intergenerationally the linguistic discrimination that they face will become attenuated. Religious organizations are much more attentive to bi-religiosity, and strongly sanction such behavior. Conversion often entails high costs in social status from within one's former religious group. This show up clearly in the MAR data base. Under conditions of RURBASE=1, the mean score for MAXREB80 when MAXLANG=3 is 2.5. Meanwhile, the mean score for MAXREB80 when MAXRELG=3 is 3.0. Compared to religious grievance, under conditions of high ethnic potential for violence, language grievances are more conducive to peace than rebellion.

In sum, the official language game, once specified, makes the relationship between oppressive language laws and violence to be weakly negative. The language game encompasses features that show how available solutions to the commitment problem, and the difficulty faced by language entrepreneurs to punish defectors, work to reduce the incentives for inter-group violence over language issues. These are plausible reasons why language grievances do not add fuel to the ethnic fire.

IV. Comparative Speculations

The statistical and theoretical expositions on the ameliorative effects of language oppression (compared to the expectations of a strong positive coefficient) remain difficult to accept. But a perusal of well-known cases in the OECD states on language conflict and its supposed disruptive influences on the integrity of the state -- in Quebec, Norway, the Jura, Catalonia, and Belgium -- gives an ex post obviousness to my claims. What is noteworthy about these cases is that none of them was linked in any way to significant guerilla activity. While many political analysts have treated these conflicts with a combination of exaggerated fears that

may come to pass with the fulfillment of the program of the linguistic nationalists (as in Quebec) and mockery at the passions that apparently tiny slights can raise (as in Belgium, with the fall of governments on such slights), few have recognized that language conflicts in the west have been far more peaceful than industrial conflicts. In comparison, the cases in the western democratic states which have captured the greatest attention in regard to ethnically based violence are those of Northern Ireland and the Basque Country in Spain. In both of these cases, language issues (vis-a-vis the state) were not central to the violence.

In this section, my argument is best developed not by examining the peaceful versus the violent conflicts in OECD states (as in the MAR data base, all those conflicts are on a world standard quite peaceful), but rather by looking closely at two well known cases (one where violence was predicted; the other where it occurred) in order to identify in the real world some of the mechanisms that were theoretically elaborated in section III.

Language Policy in India and the Movement for State Status in Andhra Pradesh

India, as indicated by Harrison's ominous prediction of violent confrontation, cited in the introduction, upon independence, faced the problem of language heterogeneity under conditions of a modern state project. Yet slowly, but inexorably, a peaceful equilibrium developed, one which I have called a 3 ± 1 language outcome. In it, the colonial language maintains its status within the bureaucracy, in international business, and in higher education. Meanwhile, an indigenous lingua franca plays a supportive role as the national language, more important in popular culture (TV, music and the movies) than in the corridors of political power. At the same time, regional leaders are able to consolidate local power by developing realms for state languages, and a civil service operating in that language. Local services would thereby require literacy in the state language. Finally, minorities in any region have demanded protection from the center to receive education and services in their language. Thus, for many Indians, trilingualism is normal for people seeking a wide range of mobility opportunities: English, Hindi and the state language. For Indians living in states where Hindi or English is the state language,

only bilingualism (3-1) is required. Finally, for minorities within non-Hindi and non-English states, who themselves are not Hindi speakers, a fourth language (3+1) is required. If this formula gets fully institutionalized, all Indians would be able to communicate with one another, and individual multilingualism would allow for constantly changed language use depending upon circumstance and interlocutor. In this section, I shall first look at language grievances articulated by the Telugu speakers (who did not have initially a state of their own) in reaction to the emergence of government-supported state languages throughout the Indian federation. I will then look more generally at the relatively peaceful consolidation of the 3 ± 1 equilibrium in India as a whole.

Nationalist leaders in the Telugu-speaking areas of Madras, Hyderabad and Mysore states at the time of Indian independence hoped to gain recognition for their homeland as a linguistically-based state. Despite a thirty year commitment by the Congress Party to reorganize India's states on the basis of language, however, in the postindependence period two commissions demurred on this promise, arguing that national integration, efficiency of administration, and protection of minorities all argued for the preservation of linguistically mixed states. The second commission (the so-called "JVP" Committee) left the door open a crack for a future Telugu-speaking state, and it helped induce a Gandhi-style movement of protest, culminating in the death through fasting in 1952 of Potti Sriramula. The Congress government was shocked, and a new state was granted in 1953.

The movement for Telugu autonomy, organized in the 1930s, was induced in part by the rabid nationalism and the strong cultural revival of the Tamil speakers in the Madras Presidency. This movement struck a positive cord among early nationalist leaders in Telengana, an economically backward region of Telugu speakers in Hyderabad State, and in alliance with the Madras Telugus, a notion of "Vishalandhra" (Greater Andhra), recalling the greatness of the ancient Nizam kingdom, became a mobilizing idea. Linguistic unity prevailed and Andhra Pradesh became a state, though the working out of an official list of translations for standard Telugu was a bureaucratic nightmare.[16]

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[16] For a compilation of the details for this aspect of corpus planning, see Government of Andhra Pradesh (1968) *White Paper on Official Language (Telugu): Preparation of Authoritative Texts* (Hyderabad: Government

However, one of the greatest obstacles to the peaceful emergence of an Andhra state was intra-linguistic (though Telengana Telugu is more heavily Urduized than the Telugu in Andhra), due to a popular sense in Telengana that Telenganas would lose out in job competition from the more highly educated Telugu speakers from Madras. Telengana leaders therefore got a "sons of the soil" agreement from Delhi protecting their right to government jobs in the Telengana region of Andhra Pradesh. None the less, communal riots in 1969 and 1972 undermined the peace. Although dialect issues brought some tensions, and the much higher percentage of Muslims in Telengana raised the specter of religious conflict, the issues that sparked these agitations had to do with economic development funds, the use of revenue surpluses generated by Telengana local government, the purchasing of Telengana domicile certificates by Andhras (allowing them to get reserved jobs), and in the composition of the state cabinet. The proximate cause of the 1969 violent agitation was the decision by the Andhra Pradesh High Court that the job reservation system did not apply to the state Electricity Board; and the 1972 violence erupted after the Indian Supreme Court decided to reverse the state court decision. Andhra leaders propagandized that all state jobs (as the capital, Hyderabad, was in Telengana) would go to Telenganas. Agitation in Andhra began with the goal to sever the link with Telengana. In both 1969 and 1972 there was destruction of property and killings, far more disruptive than the one death associated with the movement to create a linguistic state in the first place. Intra-linguistic agitation over job reservations was at least as violent if not more so than inter-linguistic agitation.[17]

The concession to Andhra for statehood induced yet a third language commission in India, the States Reorganization Commission, which now had to develop a revised long term policy in regard to language and state boundaries. It faced demands and pressures from all over the country, but there was no violence. Once its recommendations were published, however, riots broke out in Bombay (as Marathis and Gujaratis each wanted their own state with Bombay as its

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Secretariat Press)

[17] R. V. R. Chandrasekhara Rao (1979) "Conflicting Roles of Language and Regionalism in an Indian State: A Case Study of Andhra Pradesh"; Dagmar Bernstorff (1979) "Region and Nation: The Telengana Movement's Dual Identity"; both in David Taylor and Malcolm Yapp *Political Identity in South Asia* (London: Centre of South Asian Studies, SOAS, University of London), pp. 138-150 and 151-169. See also Myron Weiner (1978) *Sons of the Soil* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), chap. 5.

capital) in which eighty people were killed. In 1961, the States Reorganization Commission granted separate statehood to Nagaland, where Naga speakers would no longer be under the grips of Assamese-speaking leadership. This helped end a nasty war in the northeastern provinces of India. It also helped establish a linguistic criterion for statehood which, when minorities were given protection by the central government, consolidated the 3 ± 1 equilibrium, an equilibrium which has been uncontested for over thirty years.

Two leading students of Indian politics have remarked on the pluralist, democratic-enhancing, and violence mitigating language policies that developed in the wake of the Andhra agitation. In Paul Brass's distinguished work on language and religion in north India, a basic set of rules concerning ethnic politics is outlined. Most important, he points out, due in large part to the murderous secession of Pakistan, the Indian government does not entertain demands based upon religious membership or demands for any form of secession. The government does not make concessions to any ethnic group, Brass further finds, if the result is unacceptable to a rival group. Finally, no concessions are made to an ethnic group unless it proves itself by being able to mobilize the masses in favor of leadership goals. What follows from this is that linguistic entrepreneurs who can successfully mobilize constituents, and do so without raising the specter of secession from India or war from neighboring groups, get recognition, and with that recognition comes a package of group rights and protected jobs.[18] The legitimacy of language claims made on behalf of groups has brought language demands into the realm of normal (nonviolent) political conflict.

Jyotirindra Das Gupta has also emphasized the pluralist and associational logic of the implicit rule legitimating language demands by disaffected groups. While the bulk of his book considers the political implications of the constitutional stipulation of Hindi replacing English as the All-India language (projected to occur in 1965), the final chapter addresses some broader questions concerning language, democracy, and violent conflict. With the reduced political power of the Hindi proponents within Congress after the 1962 elections, Das Gupta writes, Congress proposed an Official Languages Act in 1963 that would remove the requirement that English give

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[18] Paul R. Brass (1974) *Language, Religion and Politics in North India* (London: Cambridge University Press), p. 430.

way to Hindi for all administrative affairs by 1965. While anti-Hindi forces from the south were dissatisfied (due to a loophole), the Hindi supporters within the administrative services began implementing the switch-over to Hindi with all too much gusto. In Madras, where graduates were more successful than any other state in gaining entrance in the prestigious Indian Administrative Service due to the excellent English instruction in state schools, students reacted with protests, which were repressed by government. Two nationalist party leaders in Madras publicly burned themselves to death in protest against government repression. Agitation, claiming the lives of sixty-six people, continued for two months, until the government basically gave in to all student demands. Das Gupta judges that the deaths were not caused by language activism, but rather by the police in repressing normal political protest.

In recounting the language battles of the 1960s, including the Report of the Education Commission of 1966 which gave a much greater role to the state languages in higher education (leading in 1967 to a situation where thirty-five universities allowed the regional language to be used in examinations, and in fifteen universities, a majority of students opted for their regional language as the medium of lectures), and including as well the Official Language (Amendment) Bill of 1967, which legally entrenched English to stand with Hindi as the link languages between the Union and the states, Das Gupta is most impressed by the give and take of normal democratic politics.

"Given the nature of the Indian language situation," Das Gupta concludes, "it is hard to imagine a more acceptable solution than this compromise" which in its specifics is summed up by the 3±1 formula. But for Das Gupta, not only was the outcome relatively peaceful and satisfying to all parties, but the politics itself "offered a way to diversify the structure of the political movements through autonomous, modernized, interest associations." Forced to form coalitions to succeed politically, language associations according to Das Gupta have contributed to "the initiation of large numbers of people in organizational modes of participation," and language politics itself "has proved to be one of the most important positive democratic channels for pursuing political integration as well as political development."[19]

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[19] Jyotirindra Das Gupta (1970) *Language Conflict and National Development* (Berkeley: University of California Press), pp. 259, 266, 268, and 270.

In terms of my theoretical argument, language politics in India have been subject to pluralistic bargaining (without zero-sum, non-negotiable issues). Indeed, language issues quickly moved from the streets to the arenas of bureaucratic regulation, defusing their symbolic power. Unlike issues that escalate into warfare due to the inability of either side to commit to its agreements, the Indian government (after some halting efforts) was able to commit to the continued reliance on English as long as the southern states wanted to communicate with the center in the colonial language; they did so by building into law civil service examination procedures that were self-enforcing, in that senior civil servants (many from Madras) had an interest in their continuation. Finally, through all the protest, while the central government was giving assurances that Hindi would not replace English, more and more southerners, working in the north (and watching northern TV sagas and movies), became well acquainted with Hindi. Due to increased knowledge of Hindi by southerners, it will surely be more difficult for anti-Hindi forces to mobilize a united front against future small moves to increase the realms of Hindi use. For all of these reasons, language politics in India were not the cause of the dangerous decades that Selig Harrison feared. Nor were they anti-civil, as with all primordial ties, as Geertz foresaw. Rather, language in India has been an arena of conflict that is fought politically rather than militarily. And as the Telugu discussion emphasizes, the battles to overcome language grievances can be far less incendiary than those resulting from job reservation grievances (with language not being a factor at all). The route to the 3±1 equilibrium in India was in no way without the possibility of violence; but as I have argued, there are many attributes of language politics leading up to 3±1 or related equilibria that politicize rather than militarize ethnic conflict.[20]

The Language-Based Violent Confrontations in Sri Lanka

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[20] David Laitin (1989) "Language Policy and Political Strategy in India" *Policy Sciences* 22:415-36.

In Sri Lanka, of course, judgments of scholars lead to the opposite conclusion, *viz*, that language conflict can play into economic, religious, and territorial conflict to exacerbate tensions, making violence more likely. Language-based conflict in Sri Lanka is certainly associated with the highest scales of ethnic violence. Indeed, all the ingredients for such violence were in the stew by the mid 1950s. In my recodings of the MAR data base, the Sri Lankan Tamils receive a RURBASE=1, suggesting high potential for violence. The Tamils are ethnically distinct from the Sinhalese (but nothing close to the "racial" division often portrayed in the press),[21] and have a distinct region of the island (the northeast) which they conceive of as part of a Tamil homeland. With this demographic situation, postcolonial Sri Lankan ethnic violence has the ethnic dimension suggested by the rationalization logic, with an apparent language motivation.

The violence in Sri Lanka has been egregious. In the MAR six level scale (from acts of harassment to communal warfare), communal conflict involving the Sri Lanka Tamils was at level 5 (communal rioting) in the 1950s, went down to 4 (anti-group demonstrations) in the 1960s, went up to 5 in the 1970s, and achieved a 6 with the riots of the 1980s. In the 1990s, the level is recorded at 5. In terms of rebellion, and on a seven point scale, going from the very lowest scores in the 1950s-1970s, the score goes to 7 in the 1980s, making the Tamil rebellion among the bloodiest of all ethnic wars of the post World War II era.

The MAR violence scores cannot be accounted for by any notion of ancient hatreds. Sinhalese and Tamils had been living in peace with one another for centuries. To be sure, there were religious riots in 1883 (Buddhists versus Catholics) and much more violently so in 1915 (Buddhists versus recent Muslim migrants from South India). These riots, however, had almost nothing to do with the so-called "ethnic" division between Sinhalese and Tamils. Therefore a contemporary explanation for ethnic violence is in order; and language appears to have played a central role in fostering the tragic postcolonial conflict between Tamils and Sinhalese.

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[21] Stanley J. Tambiah (1986) *Sri Lanka: Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), pp. 5-7 and Gannath Obeyesekere in a letter to the *New York Times* (April 24, 1984) hopefully lay to rest any lingering notion of such a divide in Sri Lanka.

In fact, the very first violent riot of the postcolonial period in 1956 followed directly from an intense battle over language policy. As a result, Sri Lanka has become a paradigmatic case for illustrating the relationship of language rationalization and ethnic war. The explanation follows the logic of late state consolidation. Under British colonial rule, English was the language of social mobility, and Sri Lankan Tamils (many taking advantage of missionary education), despite colonial restrictions putting geographic and demographic constraints on Tamils from achieving as many coveted positions as they might have gotten by merit alone, achieved excellent government positions and settled into good middle class lives in Colombo.

But with independence in 1948, there was increasing pressure by the majority Sinhalese voters to limit the Tamil presence in high political and bureaucratic circles. Here is where political Buddhism comes into the picture. Leading Buddhist monks began to portray the Sinhalese as being a "beleaguered majority" at the hands of the Tamils. Part of their story was the ideology of a new Buddhism, in which "to be Buddhist is to be Aryan Sinhalese by 'race' and 'language,' and to be Sinhalese by race gives the right to exclude, perhaps even exterminate, other 'races' in Sri Lanka, especially the Dravidians." Buddhism in Sri Lanka since the 1950s, in Tambiah's judgment, has therefore centered upon cults that emphasize the Sinhalese people's distinction from the Tamil population. Political Buddhists deny the historical fact that many of the cults were of Hindu origin incorporated into Buddhism and in the 19th century were jointly worshipped by Tamils and Sinhalese.[22]

In the context of religious fanaticism and political independence, a new coalition formed. On one side were the politicized Buddhists. On the other side were the rural elites, teachers, indigenous doctors, traders, merchants, all educated in Sinhalese and opposed to the English speaking elites in the capital. They were exclusivist in their nationalism, in combining Buddhism, Sinhalese 'people', and myths of their belonging to an 'Aryan race'. These politicized Buddhists and rural nationalist followers joined to overturn the first government of the United Nationalist Party (UNP) and brought to power S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, the leader of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP). Shortly thereafter, in 1956, the "Sinhala Only Act" was passed with a promise that the society would be Sinhalized within twenty-four hours. In terms of Figure A, this

was the first move in the official language game, which made the majority language the sole official language of the state, supplanting English, the colonial language.

As the Parliament was voting on this Sinhala Only Act, the Tamil-led Federal Party leaders (who got little support in 1952, but had much greater success in 1956 as its leaders in response to UNP promises spoke out for parity status of the Tamil language) successfully organized a work stoppage in Tamil majority areas and a Gandhi-inspired sit-in in front of the House of Representatives in Colombo. A confrontation emerged between the sit-inners and the police, and eventually bands of Sinhalese youths, who engaged in vandalism throughout Colombo. There were no deaths, but only injuries as a result of these confrontations; but the sit-ins and the subsequent melee induced a second wave of violence in the Eastern Province where Tamils and Sinhalese lived intermingled, in which there were over 100 deaths.

Another round of riots in 1958 followed, despite a pact between Prime Minister Bandaranaike and S. J. V. Chelvanayagam, the leader of the Federal Party, which provided for official use of Tamil and the creation of regional councils in Tamil-populated areas. UNP politicians opportunistically saw this as an opening for their return to power. They joined forces with the monks to decry the peace pact as a "betrayal of the Sinhalese," and staged provocative pilgrimages to mobilize support. With tensions already high, and provoked by news that Tamils in the north had defaced National Transport buses painted with Sinhalese lettering, Sinhalese gangs in the south joined the fray and vandalized the Tamil signs on retail establishments. Politicized monks pressured Bandaranaike to renounce the pact. A series of violent confrontations ensued, and which continued for two weeks in a chain reaction, first to the eastern coast and linked to anger over population resettlement schemes, then to Sinhalese vandalism of Tamil property in the south, and finally to Tamil attacks on Sinhalese minority communities in the north and east, until martial law was finally imposed.[23]

Tamil/Sinhalese relations after 1958 teetered on the brink of civil war. Some solution appeared in sight, however, when President Jayewardene won the election in 1977 with great

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[22] Tambiah (1986), pp. 58-60.

[23] Stanley Tambiah (1992) *Buddhism Betrayed?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), pp. 49-57.

support from the Indian Tamils. He recognized their Ceylon Workers' Congress, the union of the plantation workers. He got Tamil to be awarded the status of national language (though not the official language). He negotiated with the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) for District Councils in the regions. And he negotiated to lessen the impact of the educational "affirmative action" programs that favored Sinhalese youth. Yet in 1981 and much worse in 1983, large scale violence erupted between Tamils and Sinhalese. The 1983 violence had some important features that Tambiah emphasizes. It was the product of "organized mob" work as the rioters had detailed knowledge of Tamil homes through access to voter lists, and this made their destruction quite specific. There was systematic vandalism aimed at Tamil businesses, and factories, but targeted were not only Sri Lankan Tamil interests, but "*all* Indian enterprises". The motivating idea was "that every Indian is a Tamil, and that every Tamil is a terrorist." The police and army either actively participated or passively encouraged the rioting. Worse, the President allowed the rioting to go on too long before declaring a state of emergency. He asserted then that "the time has come to accede to the clamor and the national respect of the Sinhalese people." He therefore banned the TULF. Neither he, nor his Minister of Security, had a word of sympathy for the condition of the Tamils. It is clear that they were playing to the hardline racists in the government and army. In Tambiah's assessment "those who stood to gain most were, firstly, middle-level Sinhala entrepreneurs, businessmen, and white-collar workers, and secondly, the urban poor, mainly through looting." The result of this pogrom was that from 350-2,000 were killed, with about 100,000 refugees.[24]

Tambiah's accounts of the bases of this violence are fair minded and judicious. He elegantly weaves the language issue with the religious problems of the newly politicized Buddhists, the demographic challenges in the Eastern Province, and the economic problems of scarce jobs in a post-colonial economy. One of his important insights emerged when he asked why the riots, presumably caused by a language law, spread with such ferocity to the rural areas, where social mobility and government jobs were hardly the burning issues facing the peasants. The answer that Tambiah provides is that in this area, the government was resettling Sinhalese in such numbers as to make the Eastern Province into a Sinhalese majority area, with vast consequences

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[24] Tambiah (1986), pp. 20-27; Stanley Tambiah (1996) *Leveling Crowds* (Berkeley: University of California Press), p. 100.

for any future federal design.[25] Fear of becoming a minority in one's region rather than loss of civil service opportunities was surely a more important motivating force for peasants. In no sense does Tambiah even suggest that the language issue was a principal cause of the riots; rather, from his point of view, it contributed to the layers of mistrust and threat that divided Sinhala and Tamil in the postcolonial era.

Yet a few facts make one wonder if Tambiah's accounts hold together. Why, if it were the Tamils who were most threatened by the language policy, was most of the rioting in Colombo in both 1956 and 1958 initiated by the Sinhalese with virtually no Tamil violence aimed at Sinhalese until 1975?[26] Or again: why did the most horrifying riots in terms of deaths (those in 1981 and 1983) and the formation of a full scale rebellion occur after Tamil got accorded nearly equal status in Sir Lankan law? Or finally: why did the language issue disappear from public debate in inverse proportion to the level of escalation of violence on the island? The theory I presented earlier, along with the comparative data on language conflict, suggest a different story from the one Tambiah and most of the objective observers of the Sri Lankan conflict tell. My alternative story line is that the language conflict was one of the factors that worked to ameliorate violence, but other factors outweighed the language issue to drive Sri Lanka into large scale ethnic war. Let us now return to the language issue, with an eye toward its bureaucratization.

The Bureaucratization of Language Policy in Sri Lanka

A British commission in 1833 recommended that English become the language of public proceedings in Ceylon, though it took a half century before a Sri Lankan actually qualified for high level service. A new governing elite of English speaking Sri Lankans was thereby created, only to be challenged by populist politicians campaigning in the 1940s under conditions of universal suffrage. In 1943-44, the State Council adopted a motion introduced b J. R.

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[25] Tambiah (1986), pp. 71-8; Tambiah (1996), p. 86.

[26] M. R. Narayan Swamy (1994) *Tigers of Lanka: From Boys to Guerillas* (Delhi: Konark Publishers), p. 21.

Jayewardene to replace English by Sinhalese and Tamil (overcoming the original motion which mentioned only Sinhalese). It was only after three years of independence that the Governor General put the whole language issue under the auspices of the Ministry of Finance, and appointed an implementing commission for this motion, and five Interim Reports from 1951 through 1953 were issued before the Final Report came in October 1953, which essentially subverted the bill by claiming that the introduction of such ill-developed languages such as Sinhalese and Tamil into official life was unrealistic. One hundred and nine recommendations followed for a future introduction of the national languages into official life. Some of the commission's recommendations, such as the issuance of official terms (developed by "Official Terms Committees of Sinhala and Tamil," which by 1955 had indexed 43,000 Sinhala and 48,117 Tamil terms and phrases used in the public sector),[27] training in stenography and typing (as reading shorthand in Sinhalese turned out to be quite difficult, and for which was published *A Guide to the Reading of Handwritten Documents* in 1955), and the organization of language schools for civil servants not competent to write either Sinhalese or Tamil, were already being addressed. In order to coordinate all the implementing activities, an Official Languages Bureau was made a special unit within the Ministry of Finance. Annual reports of the Bureau pointed to wide areas of progress, but in its begging for more funds, more personnel, more official terms in Sinhalese and Tamil, and more laws written in those languages, success seemed eons away.

Due to political pressures described earlier, in 1956 the government changed course and with the Official Language Act No. 33, gave official status only to Sinhala, in a bill that is popularly referred to as the "Sinhala Only" Act. It was a brief act, just giving a few principles, with no official regulations. But however threatening this act was to the Tamil community, it was not self-enforcing. A variety of subsequent government memoranda set out general guidelines. First, to keep the civil service operating, the Cabinet determined that "old-entrants" (those who were currently in the civil service) joined the civil service "on the assumption that the language through which their duties have to be carried out will be English." Determining that "It does not appear to be fair...that an officer recruited in this way should be forced to adopt Sinhalese," the

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[27] S. G. Samarasinghe (1996) "Language Policy in Public Administration, 1956-1994" in R. G. G. Olcott Gunasekera, S. G. Samarasinghe, and V. Vamadevan *National Language Policy in Sri Lanka* (Kandy: International Centre for Ethnic Studies), p. 98.

Cabinet determined that English-speaking old-entrants would not only not be fired, but would never be forced to use Sinhalese to carry out their official duties, could not be subject to fines, and would be given cash bonuses for learning Sinhalese. Even "new entrants" would be able to take civil service examinations in English, but would be required to learn Sinhalese in a three year grace period. Gunasekera concludes from his analysis of the legal situation that "in effect, although the election pledge of government was to make Sinhala the official language within 24 hours, the policies that were enunciated were quite inconsistent with that pledge."[28] What Gunasekera does not mention, however, is that the entire upper level bureaucracy (including Sinhalese) throughout this period in utter disregard for the spirit of the law relied almost solely on English.[29]

Partly in reaction to Tamil outrage, and the subsequent riots, the government passed the Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act No. 28 of 1958 (with no implementing legislation until 1966, when the UNP replaced the SLFP in the government) providing for the use of Tamil as a medium of instruction in the schools and as a medium of examination for public service jobs. But better than Tamil resistance to the Sinhala language was popular indifference and bureaucratic inertia. Training classes in the official language were abandoned due to low attendance and lack of interest by both Sinhalese and Tamils. Meanwhile, the Commissioner for Official Languages issued circular after circular, demanding that government contracts develop a plan to switch over from English, that retirement schemes be worked out for non-Sinhala speakers still in the service, and that proficiency tests in Sinhala get standardized. The Department operated in an environment almost unconnected to the society. In one report the Commissioner wistfully asked "whether the hoped-for objectives could be realized."[30] Subsequent circulars sought to round the square of a Sinhala Only orientation tempered by the promotion of Tamil as a national language. An official "clarification" of the rules in 1969 provided (to simplify a gaggle of regulations whose relevant sections are reproduced in full in Gunasekera)[31] that Sinhala was a necessary

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[28] R. G. G. Olcott Gunasekera (1996) "The Implementation of the Official Language Policy, 1956-1970" in Gunasekera (1996), p. 32.

[29] S. G. Samarasinghe (1996), p. 105

[30] Gunasekera (1996), p. 45.

[31] Gunasekera (1996), pp. 58-62

language for all official matters, but in the northern and eastern provinces, where Tamil could be used for official purposes, a Tamil version must be attached. This new orientation led to utter stasis, and in 1970 the SLFP (in coalition with two Marxist parties) regained state power with an ideology of returning to the principles of the 1956 Sinhala Only Act.

The politics of language has continued to zig-zag in the way of all pluralist conflicts. The 1972 constitution basically gave the 1969 clarifications the status of basic law. Yet, in 1973, the Official Language Department was taken out of the hands of the Ministry of Finance, and parcelled out to a variety of ministries. The Department itself fell into desuetude, and its offices were cleared out. In 1977, in a Sinhalese attempt to put meat on the Sinhala Only skeleton, a de facto quota system for Tamils was legislated, such that only 30 percent of university admissions would be based upon merit, the rest based upon population categories. The 1978 constitution essentially gave parity to Sinhala, Tamil and English (which had previously been *the* language of elite communication, and most bureaucratic activity, but with no official recognition). Thus the status of Sinhala was lowered (it was to be the official language but not the "one official language") and correspondingly the status of Tamil was raised (it became "an official language"). Both were given equal status as national languages, and all citizens had the right to a basic education in either of the national languages. Each language was envisioned to be prominent in its own regions, but now with English as the link language between them, and a language that could be designated for higher education and for courts of law.[32] Legal change easily outpaced sociolinguistic reality. And in 1978 an Official Language section was reconstituted, with the hope that coherence could be restored. In 1991 a new Official Language Commission was appointed, with wide theoretical powers. It again sought to develop policies and incentives that would make the official languages the principal means of official communication in their respective regions, but its impact on sociolinguistic reality can only be regarded as minimal. In Sri Lanka, the ethnically charged politics of language had become the bureaucratically entrenched subversion of state language policy.

Towards a Reinterpretation Consistent with the Macro Data

There can be no doubt that the language issue provided a powerful symbolic rallying cry in 1956. The so called Sinhala-Only Act was more of a public humiliation than an implementable statute. The riots in Colombo were clearly the secondary consequence of the tensions that bedeviled the island in the weeks of debate leading up to the historic vote. There can be no doubt either that the language act of 1956, and the subsequent riots, helped strengthen the Federal Party, and made it exclusively Tamil. And the sources of the separatist movement, marked by the rise of the LTTE in the mid 1970s, can be traced to a set of humiliations one of which was the Sinhala-Only Act.[33]

However, the bureaucratic tale told above suggests that taken alone, the language issue unleashed a powerful non-symbolic dynamic. The need to make rules for the use of Sinhalese, and to make provisions for both non Sinhalese and Sinhalese to use it in official domains, created a vast administrative task. The Department of Official Languages was beset with pressures from a variety of interests, and required hiring many Tamils for purposes of writing translations of official terms. Setting standards for Sinhala writing competence too high could backfire, as it could have jeopardized the tenure of many Sinhalese. Language politics, if implementation were to occur, moved into the realm of pluralistic give-and-take rather than symbolic pronouncement.

Furthermore, because of the inability to implement the Sinhala-Only Act in twenty-four hours, the government found itself able to commit to Tamils in the bureaucracy that they would not be out in the streets jobless by decree. The regulations for the fulfillment of Sinhala-Only gave assurances to Tamils in the civil service that their jobs and promotions were secure. This helped defuse the anxieties and anger of the Tamil elite. It might also help to explain why there never occurred an alliance of Jaffna autonomists with Tamil professionals in Colombo. The latter

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[32] Samarasinghe (1996), pp. 79-91.

[33] The Houdini-like leader of the Liberation Tigers, V. Prabhakaran, became a militant largely due to the "standardization" decrees that were designed to compel all Sri Lankans to take official examinations in Sinhalese. In this way, language laws took young Tamils out of the educational stream and into the guerilla river. This relationship is incomplete, however. First, Prabhakaran had a fixation for explosives well before he thought about Eelam. Second, recruitment into militant groups was extremely slow until 1983, when the LTTE had fewer than fifty hardcore members. But when rumors spread in 1983 that the Indian government was funding and training Tamil guerillas, recruitment skyrocketed. At that time, however, standardization was hardly an issue. See Swamy (1994), chap. 4, and pp. ix, 96.

group preferred cosmopolitan life in Colombo or emigration to the West over migration to the Northern Province to give intellectual leadership to Tamil Eelam. In 1988, with the Indian government's intervention, a North Eastern Provincial Government was constituted, and it was during its honeymoon period able to recruit leading Tamil civil servants. But there is no indication in my sources that Tamil officials from the south were moving to Jaffna.[34]

While it is not possible in this context to prove a conclusive counter-factual, it seems at least plausible to argue that with the politicized Sinhala Buddhists in alliance with the rural Sinhalese elites, there would easily have been induced pogroms against both Sri Lankan and Indian Tamils as both religious and economic threats. The populating of the Eastern province with Sinhalese peasants would have been threatening to the Tamils' hope for a federation and conducive to a national separatist movement, with or without the language issue. Meanwhile, in the arena of language politics, there was a considerable amount of political interaction between Sinhalese and Tamils, with common interests in the development of a reasonable language policy that served both communities' interests.

A final question: if the Tamils were so willing to negotiate peacefully over language, what explains the systematic refusal by Sinhalese to abjure violence in the 1970s and negotiate a fair language policy? This refusal to negotiate, in Tambiah's judgment, was a major source of the violence.[35] The standard answer to this question is that the Sinhalese were themselves divided into two parties, representing different dynastic families. Each sought dominance by promising the same electoral base the job opportunities that would become theirs should the Tamils get excluded from the white collar job market. Either party in power that sought reconciliation was challenged by the other party, waiting in the wings. To establish their anti-Tamil bona fides, leaders of both parties underwrote young thugs to victimize innocent Tamils. Here we can say that the Sinhalese language policy of 1956 was an instrument of oppression; but it would be wrong to say that the Sinhalese language policies created grievances that led into ethnic war.

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[34] Swamy (1994), p. 294.

[35] Stanley Tambiah, comments at the NAS seminar reviewing an earlier draft of this paper, October 22, 1998.

While I must concede that the language issue sparked some of the early rioting by Tamils (and the defacing of some Sinhalese signs), a comparativist's perspective leads me to hold that over the past forty years its impact has been more ameliorative than exacerbating. *Here is an example where even the best and most informed case studies may be wrong on the very sign of a key independent variable.*

Can Language Oppression Really Reduce the Probability of Violence?

The thesis of this paper, even with the historical reinterpretations of India and Sri Lanka, is so counter-intuitive as to leave any reader with a sense of deep skepticism. Many readers will have cases in mind where language decrees fomented popular demonstrations, which brought in the police, and spilled over into violence. The Russification decrees in Poland in the 1870s, the promotion of Afrikaans in South Africa's township schools in 1976, and the law on language in Moldova in 1989 are all associated with riots and revolution by the oppressed. I submit, however, that a careful reconstruction of these cases, similar to what I have done with Sri Lanka, will give support to my thesis. In Poland, the revolution against Tsarist Russia preceded the language decrees rather than resulted from them; in South Africa, the riots in Soweto brought accommodation on the linguistic front, and the subsequent war was fueled by the denial of political rights to Africans; and in Moldova, the law on language that was said to provoke the Transdneistran rebellion was indistinguishable from the language laws in the thirteen other non-Russian republics, with none of the others bringing the Russian-speaking populations into arms.

Let me once again return to the official language game, with two questions in mind: how might this game play out in the real world? And why is it different from strategic interaction in the wake of religious oppression? Suppose (in a stylized portrait of Sudan) a Muslim dominated country where Arabic is the official language dominates over a region that is both Christian and whose people speak a variety of languages, but none of them with Arabic as their mother tongue. Further suppose that the majority imposes Sharia (that is, Muslim) law on the minority, activating regional entrepreneurs to use the churches as recruiting grounds for a rebellion, overcoming the

logic of collective inaction. Finally, suppose that the majority adds fuel to the fire by imposing Arabic as the sole official language for schools throughout the country. (Because the dominant region already was relying upon Arabic, there is no problem of defiance by the majority). Now not only the priests but the schoolteachers are mobilized. But this need not add fuel to the revolutionary fire. First, there will be an incentive for some southerners to learn Arabic and get prized jobs, without a school hierarchy policing their linguistic defection. Second, the aggrieved school teachers face a difficult choice situation: whether to fight in the guerilla camps (with the anti-Sharia forces) on the religious front or in the state bureaucracies on the linguistic front. To the extent that they can win delays and concessions on the latter front, the oppressive language laws may take some fuel out of the rebellion.

The comparative speculations that have informed this section, however counterintuitive, should be sufficient to undermine any claim that language grievances are a spark that can all-too-easily set off incendiary ethnic wars. Good policy cannot ignore this finding.

V. Policy Analysis

In this section, I shall analyze official language policies of states, to see if there is a clue as to which policies are associated with the lowest levels of violence. To do so, I coded all countries in the Gurr data set based upon their language policies, in a variable I call "LANGREGIME", short for "Language Regime". There are five values for this variable: 1=Single official language corresponding to the ethnic majority or dominant settler group (such as English in the U. S. and Austria; Hungarian in Hungary; Malay in Malaysia; Spanish in Argentina); 2= Single (or two) official language(s) corresponding to a language (or languages) not associated with a major ethnic group in the country (such as Bahasa in Indonesia; French and English in Cameroon; English in Kenya); 3= More than one official language combining an indigenous and non-indigenous language as official (such as English, Hindi and state languages in India; Hebrew, English and Arabic in Israel); 4= More than one official language corresponding to the leading ethnic groups of the country (such as German, French, Italian and Rhaeto-Romance in Switzerland; Pashto and Persian in Afghanistan); and 5= One official language with recognized regional languages (such as Spanish, with Catalan, Basque and Galician in Spain; Arabic with Kurdish in Iraq).

I then compared in Table E the mean MAXREB80 scores for each policy, under all cases, and under cases where RURBASE=1. It is clear that the 3±1 model (here coded as LANGREGIME=3, where there is more than one domestic language as official plus a nonindigenous lingua franca), however attractive it is from a welfare or identity point of view, is associated with higher levels of violence. Although this surely is the result of the fact that minority violence impelled states to accept such language regimes, it would be foolhardy from the point of view of policy prescription to advertise this policy as a model for other states. Meanwhile rationalization with concessions to minorities for regional languages (a policy increasingly apparent in western democracies) has the lowest mean score for MAXREB80, and perhaps this is a clue as to how best to handle language grievances when they become heavily politicized (though this is what Sri Lanka did eventually, but not successfully).

Table E. *Language Regime and Rebellion*

Summaries of   MAXREB80

By levels of   LANGREGIME   Language Regime

Variable	Value Label	Mean	Std Dev	Cases
For Entire Population		2.0548	2.5552	219
LANGREGIME	1 Rationalization of Domestic	1.7717	2.5980	92
LANGREGIME	2 Official Non-domestic Lingua Franca	1.8043	2.3249	46
LANGREGIME	3 >1 Domestic + Lingua Franca	3.4878	2.5211	41
LANGREGIME	4 Co-official >1 Domestic	1.9000	2.8848	10
LANGREGIME	5 Rationalization + Regional Languages	1.4000	2.1107	30

Finally, I examined only those minorities with a rural base and in accordance with Gellner's theory, only from countries that entered into the community of states after 1945. These are the states most subject to problems establishing an official language, many having relied upon the colonial language as the official language of modern government. From this set, the mean score for MAXREB80 is 2.93. But for those with LANGREGIME=3 (the set with India as paradigm), the mean score is higher at 3.53; those with LANGREGIME=1 (rationalization) had a mean score of 3.3; meanwhile those with LANGREGIME=2 (the set with Kenya as paradigm), the mean score is lowest at 2.1. This suggests that a single neutral lingua franca has been more peaceful than the indigenous-promoting multi-lingual schemes, and more peaceful as well than the rationalization policies. More interesting still is the comparison of the thirty-two cases where LANGREGIME=3, and examining whether the minority group living under such a language regime has its language recognized in the official language formula. The result is that groups whose languages are recognized (n=17) have a mean score of 3.6; those whose languages are not recognized (n=15) have a mean score of 3.5. Thus there is slightly more violence associated with recognition of a group's language in a multi-lingual scheme than in keeping the language group out of the scheme altogether. In those thirty-two cases, only 7.3% of the groups had any recorded language grievance; meanwhile in the cases where there was acceptance of a foreign lingua franca (that is, where LANGREGIME=2), 13.3% of the groups articulated language grievances. This means that bringing groups into the official language formula is no prescription for peaceful ethnic relations; and that fomenting language grievances (by ignoring a group's plea for official recognition of its language) is no prescription for violence.[36]

VI. Summary and Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to explore the relationship between language based political conflict and ethnic violence. The standard view in the literature is that language issues, especially

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[36] There are insufficient number of cases to analyze LANGREGIME=4 or LANGREGIME=5 for groups with RURBASE=1 living in countries that entered the world system after 1945 (YRENTRY>1945). Even under these conditions, the bivariate correlation between MAXREB80 and MAXLANG is weakly negative.

when a nationalizing elite in control of a state in the modern period seeks to rationalize language by imposing its language as the principal means of state business and social mobility, play a contributing role in the exacerbation of ethnic tensions, with potential for ethnic violence. An examination of the available data on ethnic violence associated with minority groups against the forces of the state, collected by Ted R. Gurr and associates, does not support this standard view. Instead, the data support a view that language distance (between groups) and language grievances (by minorities) play no causal role in the emergence of rebellion. In fact, there is some support for the counter hypothesis, *viz.* that language grievances when expressed under conditions of ethnic tensions tend to ameliorate violence. Theoretical considerations -- having to do with the bureaucratization of language conflict, the ability of the state to make language commitments, and the difficult collective action problems that are faced by minority language entrepreneurs -- are brought to bear in making sense of the statistical findings. With the surprising statistical results and the new theoretical considerations brought to mind, a re-examination of two well-known cases of language politics -- in India and in Sri Lanka -- gives added support to the data and the theory seeking to make sense of those data.

A necessary condition for violence to be averted, it should be emphasized, is that the state must be willing to bargain over demands articulated by language activists in society. In India, the central government's unwillingness to provoke the Telugu speakers into unyielding opposition is a key to the peaceful resolution of that conflict. Violent confrontations between Marathis and Gugaratis in Bombay, and between Nagas and Assamese in the northeast were also defused in part because the central government went to the bargaining table and was willing to make concessions. In Sri Lanka, government's passage of the Tamil Language Acts of 1966, as well as the constitutional guarantees of 1972 and 1978 helped to limit the range of the civil war mostly to the northeast of the island. My argument is not that even with government intransigence, language conflicts will reduce the likelihood of large scale violence; rather my argument is that language conflicts allow for extensive and successful bargaining without making it seem as if either side is a traitor to its group's interests. But absent utter intransigence by government authorities, the hypothesized route from discriminatory language policy to ethnic civil war and state breakdown is not supported by the comparative data.

Even more surprising, there is no evidence that sensitive language policies are nostrums for ethnic arousals. For countries that received independence after World War II, bureaucracies usually operated with the colonial language. Leaders of many groups expressed firm desires to have their languages recognized as official, and relied upon as media of instruction in state schools. Yet the sensitive granting of these desires did not lower the likelihood of violent rebellion and the failure to do so for some groups did not raise that likelihood. Grievances over language were expressed under all forms of policy; they were expressed as well whether or not the group's language was represented in multi-lingual official formulae. Yet when those grievances were expressed, the trend was not to enhance the chances of violence, but (insignificantly) to reduce it. Inducing groups to express language demands on the political stage (and making sure the dominant group does not take that as a pretext for genocide), rather than choosing a particular language framework, is the policy recommendation of this paper.

Policy makers -- for states that face language conflict and for states that provide support for an international gendarmerie when ethnic conflict spills over into ethnic violence -- should be made aware that language conflict, while not threatening states or democratic regimes, can be extremely dangerous for incumbents. Leaders of disaffected language groups have the skills and intellectual resources to mobilize constituencies that are outraged by current language policies. Incumbents on the unpopular side of a language conflict can be ruthlessly thrown out of office. But this does not mean that language conflict is dangerous to democratic governance, or dangerous to civil peace. In fact, language conflict, when not directly and brutally repressed by fearful incumbents, tends to be fought out in translation committees, school boards, and bureaucracies. If language entrepreneurs are given the chance to mobilize their constituencies, incumbents might lose their positions, but partisans of other languages are not likely to lose their lives.

Of course, when other motivations exist for civil war, these factors might outweigh the ameliorative effects of language conflict. But this does not make language conflict dangerous. Many people have died of infection while taking penicillin. This does not mean that antibiotics were a contributory cause of their death. Similarly, people have died while participating in language based riots. This does not mean that the language conflict itself contributed to their

deaths. Politics is the realm where intense conflicts can get resolved peacefully; accepting that language conflicts are ideally resolved in the political realm and the politicization of language issues helps keep other ethnically based conflicts in that realm as well, would be an important step in our understanding of language, of politics and of ethnic violence.

Appendix: Methodological Issues with the Use of the MAR Data Base

However useful the MAR data base is in being the first large-n data base on minority groups in conflict with their neighbors and the forces of the state, there are many problems with these data that should be brought to the attention of all users. The principal problem, not easily solved, is that of selection bias, in that minorities, ceteris paribus, were more likely to be included in the data base the more "visible" they were to analysts. Visibility is in part a function of being engaged in conflict. It is therefore probable that the selection of cases gives greater weight to minorities that are involved in higher levels of protest against their states than to those which have been thoroughly quiescent. A second problem is that many of the variables were based upon judgment, but inter-coder reliability was not optimal. I found this to be the case for a key variable for the present analysis -- the degree of language distance between the minority and the dominant group. I spell out this problem in some detail below. James D. Fearon and I have received a grant from the National Science Foundation to work with Ted Gurr and his associates with the goal of substantially improving the quality of the data (and the selection of cases) in the MAR project.[37]

In the MAR data base, there is evidence to think that linguistic pluralism within a country is a prescription for violence. In his "Minorities at Risk" data set he has a variable called CULDIFX2, which is supposedly a measure of linguistic difference between an ethnic minority in a state and the dominant ethnic group of the state. As can be seen from the regression analysis on Table A, regressed against MAXREB80 (the maximum value of the five year periods from 1980 through 1994 on level of violence between the minority group and the state) and controlling for Gross National Product (LOGGNP60) and the level of group's geographic concentration (GROUPCON), two of the most powerful predictors of group/state ethnic violence, culdifx2 is significant at T=.0076.[38] This is the most cogent evidence to date linking language difference to violent conflict.

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[37] See James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin (1998) "xxx", NSF Grant No. xxx

[38] For the power of GNP and group concentration in explaining ethnic violence, see James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin (1997) "A Cross-Sectional Study of Large-Scale Ethnic Violence in the Postwar Period" Mimeo, University of Chicago.

Examining the data points on this measure, however, led me to reject this finding. CULDIFX2 does not reflect any standard definition of language distance. Gurr's scale is not specified in either his book *Minorities at Risk* or in the users' manual to the data set. Yet, one might legitimately ask, how does one code for a variable such as "language difference"? By what criteria does one judge the language of either of the groups, the minority or the dominant group in the society? For example, as discussed in the paper, what is the language of the dominant group in Kenya? At the time of writing, the President's ancestral language is Kalenjin. The Kalenjin have garnered considerable resources due to President Daniel arap Moi's power to influence the distribution of resources. Yet he might speak Swahili -- a lingua franca throughout much of East Africa -- more often than he speaks Kalenjin; but on most official matters, concerning business and high government affairs, he is more likely to speak in English.

One might consider substituting "official language" for "language of dominant group", but that opens more problems than it solves. Many countries do not legislate an official language; and many that do give official recognition to (but no *de facto* role for) several languages.

Coding on the linguistic differences between dominant and subordinate groups gets compounded by the problem of classifying both languages. Let us go back to our Kenya example, and think about the Luo, who are a minority group vis-a-vis the now-dominant Kalenjin. For culdifx2, should we code the linguistic difference between Luo and Kalenjin, Luo and Swahili, Luo and English, or English (which the Luo elite speaks quite well) and Kalenjin, English and Swahili, or yet again English (for the Luos) and English (for the Kalenjins)? The value (2=high) to (0=low) for culdifx2 varies depending on the coding rules of what the language of each group is, and the answers are not obvious.

Not only is there a problem of classifying the language of any group, but there is the second problem of assessing the differences between them. On what metric? For example, the linguistic difference between northern and southern Chinese may be greater than between two distant Romance languages, yet because of a common schema of writing, intellectuals from all regions in China can communicate rather easily with one another. This is not because their languages are similar, but because they share an ideographic system that substitutes for speaking.

Insufficient attention to these details, or in fact to any clear coding rules, led Gurr and associates into some glaring anomalies in their MAR codings. Here are a few:

a. Chinese in Malaysia get a 2, while they get a 0 in Indonesia; but the official languages of Malaysia and Indonesia are virtually the same.

b. The Hindus in Pakistan get a 0; but the Muslims in India get a 1. If the dominant language of Pakistan is Urdu, the dominant language in India is Hindi, the Hindus in Pakistan are assumed to speak Hindi, and the Muslims in India assumed to speak Urdu, this coding is inconsistent.

c. In Ghana the Ashanti (Akan speakers) get a 2; while in Kenya the Kikuyu get a 0. They are both from a minority language group yet one with the highest percentage of speakers compared to all others in the country, and both were, at the time of coding, out of power. In both countries, English is the major language of power. The leaders of the country came from minority language groups (Ewe and Kalenjin). Since Ewe and Akan are both closely related Niger-Congo languages (Atlantic Congo branch; Volta-Congo sub-branch; Kwa sub-sub-branch; and Left Bank Kwa, sub-sub-sub-branch), while Kikuyu (Niger-Congo) and Kalenjin (Nilo-Saharan) are from completely different families, one might have expected the Kikuyu to get a 2 while the Ashanti a 0. But the reverse is the Gurr coding. This leads the analyst of the data to ask what these figures represent.

d. In South Africa, the Europeans get a 2; but the Asians a 0. This leaves one wondering what the language of the dominant group might be. If it is Xhosa (the language of the President's ancestral group), then the Asians and Europeans are equidistant. If it is English or Afrikaans, the languages of economic power, then the Europeans should be receiving the lower score.

e. In Nigeria, the Ibos get a 2, while the Yorubas get a 1. If the dominant language is either Hausa (an Afro-Asiatic language) or English (an Indo-European language), Yoruba or Ibo (both Niger-Congo languages) should be equidistant from either of these two dominant languages.

f. In the United States, African-Americans get a 0 (reflecting full assimilation) while Native-Americans get a 2 (reflecting maximal difference). It seems that in the former, the criterion was the actual language practice of the group, while in the latter it was the historical language of the ancestors of the actual population.

It is for these coding irregularities and the lack of a clear coding rule that James Fearon and I substituted LANGSIM, as described in the text, for CULDIFX2.