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Linguistic Human Rights in Education?

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One of the **basic linguistic human rights** of persons belonging to minorities is – or should be – to achieve high levels of bi- or multilingualism through education. Becoming at least bilingual is in most cases necessary for minorities to exercise other fundamental human rights, including the fulfillment of basic needs. But today the education of both majorities and minorities in most western countries (and also elsewhere) functions in conflict with most scientifically sound principles about how education leading to high levels of multilingualism should be organized. As has been shown, education participates in attempting and committing linguistic genocide in relation to minorities. In relation to linguistic majorities, with the exception of elites, education today in most cases deprives them of the possibility of gaining the benefits associated with really high levels of multilingualism.

Sometimes linguistic human rights in education are, falsely, in my opinion, posited as being in conflict with other human rights.¹ Admittedly situations of great linguistic diversity combined with meager financial resources are complex – but on the other hand there is ample evidence from Africa and Asia and from multilingual immigrant minority education of the fact that unnecessary either-or stances (which the false positioning is often based on) are in the long run both costly and misguided, and tend to perpetuate elite dominance.

If multilingualism is more positive than monolingualism for the patients/victims and for the society as a whole, how can educational language planning help in getting rid of monolingualism? How should education be organised, so as to make **everybody** bilingual or multilingual at a high level? What is important is to develop models which combine the positive

aspects of at least three experiences. Firstly, the positive strand in the education of minorities, namely strong forms of ‘multilingual’ education. Secondly, the positive aspects in the education of both minorities and majorities, involved in anti-racist ‘intercultural’ education. These two have so far, curiously enough, often had competing goals (see, e.g. Lo Bianco, 1994). Thirdly, they should be combined with the positive aspects of elite education. Present monolingually oriented reductionist educational language choices seem rather to combine the negative sides of the first two and none of the positive ones of the last. Today’s educational models, with few exceptions, do not support the diversity which is necessary for the planet to have a future.

After defining bilingualism as an educational goal, I first list some of the key fallacies which lead to lack of language rights in contemporary educational language planning for some main groups. Then I present educational models which do not lead to high levels of multilingualism (non-forms and weak forms of bilingual education). They will be related to literacy and the lack of Universal Primary Education (UPE), and it is claimed that use of the wrong medium of education (i.e. not using the mother tongue) is the main **pedagogical** reason for lack of success of ‘literacy’ campaigns in the world (political, economic, and many ideological reasons have been discussed earlier). This is followed by a presentation of strong models of multilingual education. Finally, on the basis of the strong models, I will draw conclusions about prerequisites (also bilingual teachers) and principles which are important to follow if high level multilingualism is the educational goal.

Since hundreds of books and thousands of articles have been written about the subject (I have myself contributed a fair number), I will

not give many specific references here and will keep the presentation at a fairly general, programmatic level. There are many specialised bibliographies in the area; several volumes of readers, encyclopedias, web-sites, etc. – and the reader is asked to consult them.

What Kind of 'Bilingualism' is the Goal in 'Bilingual Education' Programmes?

We have seen that formal education can play a decisive role in killing minority languages. But is the opposite also true? How important is formal education in maintaining a minority language, in supporting threatened languages, in reversing language shift, or in reclaiming a language? Opinions differ. What we can say, though, is that educational conditions, and changes in the educational system, have often made a community aware of the need for other changes. Some of them the communities may be able to make themselves – for instance, decolonise their own attitudes and reorganise community life so as to use the minority language more among themselves, including in the family – there are many examples of this all over the world. Often most of the changes needed are political and economic, and the minority community cannot effect these on their own. Schools cannot save a language on their own (see Fishman, 1989, 1991, 1995, 1996b, 1998) but schools can be an important change agent. When assessing the many factors which influence the successful reproduction of a minority group, one conclusion is that education is often easier to change than many still larger-scale macro-societal and political structures, even when a major struggle is needed for educational change. The medium of education is one, if not the most, decisive factor in the multilingualism and the school achievement of the children of dominated groups – and, again, easier to change than some of the other major factors (the parents' socioeconomic status or their level of formal education, or the child's gender, age or length of stay in the country in the case of immigrant minority children). One recent example of the influence of education is from Wales. Farrell *et al.* (1998) analyse census data (1981 and 1991) from anglicised areas of South East Wales and show that 'education has been an effective agency of Welsh language production' (1998: 494). There are 'net gains in the percentages of younger Welsh speakers' (p. 489), and it can be shown that these are connected to the presence of Welsh-medium education. Other examples will be provided below.

In the following sections I will classify edu-

cational models in general in relation to what is called bilingual education. The classic definition of bilingual education (Andersson & Boyer, 1978) requires that the educational system uses two languages as media of instruction, in subjects other than the languages themselves. I will follow Colin Baker's classification into weak and strong forms of bilingual education (e.g. 1993). I have also added a third category, non-forms of bilingual education. Neither weak forms nor non-forms succeed in making children high level bi- or multilingual, whereas strong forms **have** succeeded in this. Since the three categories are based on to what extent the models succeed in enabling children to become **high level bi- or multilinguals**, we have to define this goal first.

When I use the term 'bilingualism', this should generally be understood as 'bi- and multilingualism'. Bilingualism as a goal implies by definition that (at least) two languages are involved. When dominant language representatives use the concept, they seem mostly to confine their interest in bilingualism to one of the languages and one of the groups only: the learning of the majority/dominant language by minority children. The mother tongues of the minority children are in most cases tolerated as parts of the curriculum **only** if the teaching of (or in) them leads to a better proficiency in the majority language – and often they are not tolerated at all (see, e.g. Baker & de Kanter, 1982).

As a result of this, it is the minorities themselves who have to put a strong emphasis on the learning of the mother tongue and demand mother tongue learning as a linguistic human right. But minorities do of course want their children to learn the majority languages fully too. We want our children to become bilingual² as a minimum, not monolingual or strongly dominant in **either** of the two languages.

One of the confusing facts has been that many state educational authorities (representing the majority group) also claim that **they** too want our children to become bilingual. But when this claim is analysed, it often transpires that majorities and minorities use different definitions of bilingualism when they speak of it as the educational goal. That is one of the reasons why it is imperative to define 'bilingual' every time the term is being used. There are literally hundreds of definitions (see, e.g. Baetens Beardsmore, 1982; Haugen, 1964, 1972; Hoffman, 1991; Romaine, 1995; Vildomec, 1963; Weinreich, 1967, for presentations and analyses). I organise them

Table 1 Definitions of bilingualism

Criterion	Definition: A speaker is bilingual who
1. origin	a. has learned two languages in the family from native speakers from infancy; b. has used two languages in parallel as means of communication from infancy
2. identification – internal – external	a. identifies herself as bilingual/ with two languages and /or two cultures (or parts of them); b. is identified by others as bilingual/ as a native speaker of two languages
3. competence	a. has complete mastery of two languages; b. has native-like control of two languages; c. has equal mastery of two languages; d. can produce complete meaningful utterances in the other language; e. has at least some knowledge and control of the grammatical structure of the other language; f. has come into contact with another language
4. function	a. uses (or can use) two languages (in most situations) (in accordance with her own wishes and the demands of the community)

Source: Skutnabb-Kangas, 1984a: 91

according to the same criteria which I use in the mother tongue definitions, and give a sample in Table 1. (See Skutnabb-Kangas 1975, 1984a for references on who has used the various definitions.)

When majority group educational authorities talk about bilingualism as a goal for the education of immigrant or indigenous minority children, they often seem to mean either a non-demanding competence definition (for instance 3d or 3e) or the most general function definition (uses two languages). We minorities would prefer to use a combination of 2, 3 and 4, a definition which makes sure that the speaker has the chance to learn and use **both** languages at a very high level and to identify positively with both. The definitions used by the majority authorities confirm the picture of linguisticism, because there are low expectations and almost no demands made on the minority child's competence in her mother tongue. It is often left to the home to teach it, and it is sometimes declared that 'taxpayers' money' should not go into 'supporting private ethnicity', conveniently ignoring the fact that minorities are taxpayers too and that majority children's private ethnicity is supported through all taxpayers' money in schools. Minority taxpayers are required to support majority language and ethnicity in schools, both for majority children,

and for their own (minority) children, even when it is subtractive for them.

My own definition (Definition Box 1) is specifically designed to describe the needs of indigenous and immigrant and other minority children. The goal of minority education should in my view be to enable the children to become bilingual according to this definition.

The implications of this definition for the educational system are far-reaching, and should be compared with the implications of less demanding definitions (for more detail see Skutnabb-Kangas, 1984a).

'Second language' should also be defined for the purposes of the educational models presented below. Except when clearly indicated, I use 'L2' or second language' to mean the language which is the **second in the order of learning for the student** (as opposed to the first language or a third or fourth language).

For some Deaf students a Sign language might thus be their second language in **this** sense.

One of the other common ways of defining a second language is to define it as a language that the student can hear and use in the immediate environment outside the home, a language which is not the student's mother tongue. In this definition the second language is contrasted

DEFINITION BOX 1 Definition of bilingualism as an education goal

A bilingual speaker is one who is able to function in two (or more) languages, either in 'monolingual' or multilingual communities, in accordance with the sociocultural demands made on an individual's communicative and cognitive competence by these communities and by the individual herself, at the same level as native speakers, and who is able to identify positively with both (or all) language groups (and cultures) or parts of them (Skutnabb-Kangas 1984a: 90).

with a foreign language, which one does not use daily in the environment.

In this sense a Sign language might never become a mother tongue or even a second language for a Deaf student who has hearing parents and who never lives in a signing community.

After these clarifications we move to educational models. When these are categorised in terms of whether they reach the goal of **high levels of bilingualism** or multilingualism, what is intended is preferably 'bilingualism' according to my own definition above, or at least something very close to it. In addition, at least one, possibly two, or even several other languages can be learned at a high level. I consider it a realistic and feasible goal. It has been shown that in the education of both national minorities and elites, the goal can be reached, without the costs necessarily being higher than those of present educational models which do not reach these goals.

Key Fallacies in the Education of Dominated Communities

On the basis of his study of factors influencing English teaching worldwide, especially in colonial and post-colonial education, Robert Phillipson (1992; and an earlier version in Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1986a) identified what he calls 'the five key tenets of ESL/EFL'. These are

- English is best taught monolingually;
- the ideal teacher of English is a native speaker;
- the earlier English is introduced, the better the results;

- the more English is taught, the better the results;
- if other languages are used much, standards of English will drop.

As we also showed (e.g. Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson, 1989a), these tenets have in fact guided much of indigenous and immigrant minority education all over the world. All five are scientifically false and can rather be (and have been) labelled as fallacies (for a detailed analysis, see Phillipson, 1992, Chapter 6). These are then

- the monolingual fallacy;
- the native speaker fallacy;
- the early start fallacy;
- the maximum exposure fallacy;
- the subtractive fallacy.

To these, we could add at least the segregation tenet/fallacy:

- if minorities are taught in their own groups or classes or schools, especially through the medium of their own languages, this prevents integration and leads to/is segregation, ghettoisation.

Many of the myths about monolingualism could also be formulated as tenets/fallacies. The 'monolingual' and 'native speaker' fallacies will be commented on below in the section about bilingual teachers.

The '**early start**' fallacy is obviously closely connected to the 'subtractive' fallacy. Several types of programme have shown that if teaching a foreign language as a subject or teaching through the medium of a foreign language is additive, it can start early. Early foreign language teaching in 'mainstream' programmes shows it. On the other hand, a large longitudinal Swedish study (Holmstrand, 1980, 1982) showed that the gains of starting a foreign language as a subject early were minimal. The strong models below, **immersion**, and **two-way programmes** (see the definitions below), also show that additive early start with a foreign medium is perfectly possible. We do not yet know enough about the long-term results of **double immersion** (using two foreign languages as partial media of education; see Artigal, 1995).

On the other hand, if the learning of another language is **subtractive** (as it is in all the non-

... and weak forms of bilingual education), the earlier it starts the worse.

The '**maximum exposure**' tenet (the label comes from Jim Cummins), is maybe the intuitively most understandable of the tenets: the more the child uses L2, the better she learns it. It has also been shown to be a complete fallacy. If the quality of the instruction in L2 is the same on two models, one with maximum exposure, the other with little exposure to a dominant language, and provided that minority children receive high quality mother tongue medium instruction in the model with little exposure to L2, then there have been two types of result.

Either there is no relationship between time-on-task and results in the dominant language, meaning both groups perform equally well in L2, despite the mother tongue medium group having had much less exposure.

Alternatively, there is a reverse relationship: the **less** time is used on instruction through the medium of the dominant language, the **better** the results, again provided that the time is instead used on both good mother tongue medium teaching and good subject teaching of L2, given by bilingual teachers. For instance the Ramirez study in the USA is fairly clear on this (see Ramirez, 1992; Dolson & Mayer, 1992; and Cummins, 1992 and references in them for a discussion of the methods and findings). Several of Jim Cummins' recent publications have given overviews of the research findings in relation to maximum exposure.

The **subtractive fallacy** is an old one. For instance, the Norwegian School Law of 1880 (which has been called the 'Magna Carta of Norwegianisation'), paragraph 3, says: 'Instruction in the school is in the Norwegian language. The Lappish or Finnish languages are used only as a means of helping to explain what is impossible to understand for the children'. Every paragraph after this contains detailed instructions on how to restrain the use of Sámi and Finnish.

Even if the majority of the children in a group do not understand Norwegian, the teacher must always keep the above regulations in mind and remember that it is imperative that the Lappish and Finnish languages are not used more than absolutely necessary . . . When the teacher converses with the children to make them understand, use of the Lappish or Finnish language must be avoided as much as possible; it should be noted in par-

ticular that whole sentences and continuous passages of the Norwegian text must not be translated into Lappish or Finnish unless it is has been shown that this cannot be avoided without harm to comprehension. (quoted in Lind Meløy, 1981: 122-123)

It is instructive to compare this with the policy offered to children in Africa and Asia almost 100 years later, in the pedagogical tradition which still dominates English teaching: 'The teaching of vocabulary should be mainly through demonstration in situations. When, however, a very brief explanation in the mother tongue is sufficient to ensure that the meaning is fully and accurately understood, such explanation may be given.' (Makerere Report, 1961: 13, a report of the Commonwealth conference on the teaching of English as a second language, probably the most influential document on policy and methods for teaching English in ex-colonial countries). For analysis of the monolingual approach in teaching English as a foreign/second language see Phillipson, 1992, Chapter 6.

After the passing of the Proposition 227 in California, minority children will be placed in English-medium instruction after the first school year. If teachers give even the little support in the two examples above, this may lead to trouble because teachers may be fined if they use other languages.

Californian school authorities might learn from the mistakes of the Norwegians. It was important for the central and local authorities in Norway to control in a more detailed manner whether the teachers really refrained from the use of Sámi and Finnish. According to Karl Aas, Superintendent for Schools, in a communication to the Department of Education in 1899, there were many people who thought that the time had come to forbid the use of Sámi and Finnish as auxiliary languages and 'in addition to the teachers, competent men like the business people and civil servants have here voiced that opinion'. Ron Unz, the engineer behind Proposition 227 in California, is a business man . . . In Norway, most of these 'competent men' were ethnic Norwegians. One of the Heads of Department in the Ministry had suggested in 1877 that only 'Norwegian' teachers should be appointed because 'experience seems to have shown that teachers of pure or mixed Sámi or Finnish ancestry are not capable of advancing the Norwegianisation among their compatriots with the

success hoped for' (ibid., 19, 21). The teachers and the staff in the boarding schools were to be 'nationally minded' (Eriksen & Niemi, 1981: 257). In 1931 the then Superintendent wrote that it was 'completely unnecessary for teachers in Finnmark to have any education in Sámi or Finnish' (Lind Meløy, 1981: 27). This seems to be the Californian present stance too.

To counteract the **segregation fallacy** two distinctions are helpful, those between **physical as opposed to psychological segregation/integration** and between **segregation as a goal or a means**. For many dominated groups at least initial physical segregation from dominant group members seems to be a necessity in order to enable later integration psychologically and competence-wise. If physical segregation ensures that the students have a better chance of acquiring the prerequisites for integrating themselves both psychologically and physically later, then the initial physical segregation is used as a positive means towards a later integrationist goal. Minority students are, of course, psychologically integrated in their own classrooms, with other children with whom they share a mother tongue. Here they have a better chance of being appreciated for who they are and what they know, rather than the system defining them as deficient or below the norm, as is often the case when they are physically 'integrated' in dominant group classes. Forced initial physical integration into a dominant language and dominant group classroom may prevent dominated group students from acquiring the competencies they need, in their own language and culture, in the dominant language and culture, and in terms of content matter (I have discussed this in several chapters in my 1984a and, especially, in 1986, a book which has been translated into several languages, English not being among them³).

The beliefs in a monolingual L2-teaching methodology, monolingual teachers, maximum exposure, and the either-or thinking which results in forbidding the minority language or restricting its use, have today developed from the earlier more crude forms to their present more sophisticated forms. These are at least equally effective in committing linguistic genocide as have been shown. It is extremely important to recognise that the ideology is still the same.

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Questions

1. Using examples of people you know, show how bilinguals differ in their origins of language, identities, language competences and language uses. Are there bilinguals you know who fall outside these definitions of bilingualism?
2. What are the fallacies in education that Skutnabb-Kangas discusses? Give an example of a school or classroom (known or imaginary) that exemplifies each fallacy.
3. 'Schools cannot save a language on their own . . . but schools can be an important change agent'. What does Skutnabb-Kangas mean by this statement? Discuss in a small group.
4. What does Skutnabb-Kangas mean by linguistic human rights in education? Why is it so difficult to achieve?

Activities

1. Visit an all-day school or supplementary school in which an ethnic language is taught and which is controlled by the ethnic community. Then visit a public school in which