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EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES IN MULTILINGUAL WESTERN EUROPE

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INTRODUCTION: THE EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGE

When the Danish Foreign Minister speaks to the international press about "... the **so-called** Maastrich agreement...", he unintentionally implies that there was no agreement (through lexical interference from the mother tongue). When another Minister, nearing the completion of a meeting he is chairing in Brussels, says that "... the negotiations are more or less complete - all that is left is **a prick over the eye...**", his unintended obscenity may amuse some of the participants, but it is doubtful whether it seriously increases their respect for his competence. Now these examples of non-idiomatic English could be much more serious. After all, to quote Wilfried Stölting, "a language in international use deserves all it gets". Hartmut Haberland and I wrote, with two colleagues, in the foreword of a 300-page report from RUC which we edited (a result of an international conference we organised in 1978), with participants representing many countries and mother tongues, just as at our Symposium here: "The language of the report is the responsibility of the contributors alone. Any similarity with the English language spoken and written in the U.K. or in the U.S. is purely accidental." (Dittmar, Haberland, Skutnabb-Kangas & Teleman 1978, 4).

Still we know that much higher levels of proficiency in several languages are a **sine qua non** in today's Europe and will be even more so in the future. In a recent article (in Danish; Skutnabb-Kangas 1993, 76-77) I give examples of several leading academics, business people or politicians voicing their dismay at present levels of proficiency, and, especially, the lack in Scandinavia of really high levels of proficiency in foreign languages other than English.

Likewise, the European Union policy calls for more language teaching. The preamble of the decision to establish the LINGUA programme (nr. 89/489, 28.7.1989, Official Journal L239, 16.8.1989) formulates it as follows: "... the establishment of the Internal Market would be facilitated by the quantitative improvement of foreign language training within the Community to enable the Community's citizens to communicate with each other and to overcome linguistic difficulties which impede the free movement of persons, goods, services and capital."

If we want societies where polarization between groups is not going to accelerate even more rapidly and if we want just a little bit of equality, education is the institution which has to deliver the goods.

LINGUISTIC HUMAN RIGHTS FOR ALL IN EDUCATION?

Today the education of both majorities and minorities in most European and Europeanized countries functions in conflict with most scientifically sound principles about how an education leading to high levels of multilingualism should be organized. Education participates in attempting and committing linguistic genocide in relation to many **minorities**, and certainly the bulk of immigrated minorities. In relation to linguistic **majorities**, education today in most cases deprives them of the possibility of gaining the benefits associated with really high levels of multilingualism. Present reductionist educational language choices do not support the diversity which is necessary for the planet to have a future.

In a civilized state, there is no need to debate the right to maintain and develop one's mother tongue. It is a self-evident, fundamental, basic linguistic human right (Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson 1994). Observing linguistic human rights (LHRs) implies at an **individual** level that everyone can identify positively with their mother tongue, and have that identification accepted and respected by others, irrespective of whether their mother tongue is a minority language or a majority language. It means the right to learn the mother tongue, orally and in writing, including at least basic education through the medium of the mother tongue, and the right to use it in many (official) contexts. It means the right to learn at least one of the official languages in one's country of residence. It should therefore be normal that teachers (including ESL teachers) are bilingual. Restrictions on these rights may be considered linguistic wrongs, an infringement of fundamental LHRs.

Observing LHRs implies at a **collective** level the right of minority groups to exist (i.e. the right to be "different"). It implies the right to enjoy and develop their languages and the right for minorities to establish and maintain schools and other training and educational institutions, with control of curricula and teaching in their own languages. It also involves guarantees of representation in the political affairs of the state, and the granting of autonomy to administer matters internal to the groups, at least in the fields of culture, education, religion, information, and social affairs, with the financial means, through taxation or grants, to fulfil these functions. Many majorities enjoy most LHRs. It would be perfectly feasible to grant many of these rights to minorities, without infringing the rights of majorities. What majorities in most countries do NOT have now is the linguistic right to become really high level multilinguals through education. I want to emphasize this: Multilingual in some sense, yes, but NOT **high** level multilingual. Young Danes are among the most multilingual youngsters in Europe according to a recent survey. Their oral linguistic proficiency in English is generally high and many have a smattering of another language, either German or French, and in some cases both. Still, those who have not travelled extensively and lived in other countries for some time, i.e. those whose linguistic competence is a result of education and mass media **in Denmark only**, usually know very little of German and/or French, nothing of other languages, and their English, even if it is fair, is nowhere near the level needed for political or cultural cooperation or trade in a Federal Europe and beyond. 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 a necessary prerequisite for minorities to exercise other fundamental human rights.

HOW SHOULD EDUCATION TOWARDS HIGH LEVELS OF MULTILINGUALISM BE ORGANIZED?

It is possible to make many different kinds of cautious generalization on how education should

be organised in order to enable children and young people to become **high level multilinguals**. I have drawn conclusions about general principles on the basis of (research evidence in) several experiments. These include

- mother tongue maintenance programmes,
- immersion programmes,
- two-way programmes,
- alternate-days programmes,
- The European Schools,
- International Schools,
- early reading programmes and
- Kōhanga Reo.

In **mother tongue medium programmes for minorities**, minority children choose voluntarily to have most of their education through the medium of their mother tongue, in their own classes, with bilingual teachers, and with good teaching of a majority language as a second language, also given by bilingual teachers.

In **immersion programmes for majorities**, majority children choose voluntarily to have most of their education through the medium of a minority language, in their own classes, with bilingual teachers, and with good teaching of their mother tongue, which becomes the medium of education for some of the time later on.

In **two-way programmes for minorities and majorities**, minority and majority children study together in the same class, with a bilingual teacher, through the medium of a minority language, and study the majority language as a second language (in the case of minority children) or a mother tongue (in the case of majority children). The majority language becomes the medium of education for some of the time later on.

In **alternate-days programmes for minorities and majorities**, minority and majority children study together in the same class, with two bilingual teachers, through the medium of both languages, alternating daily. and study the majority language as a second language (minority children) or a mother tongue (majority children). The majority language becomes the medium of education for some of the time later on.

In **The European Schools**, children in every subsection (one for each European Union official language) study with their own language as the main medium of education, with an increasing number of hours spent through other languages (see below).

For presentations of the remaining programmes and details of all the programmes, see e.g. Skutnabb-Kangas 1988, 1990, in press, and the book **Multilingualism for All** (edited by Skutnabb-Kangas, in press).

It seems to me that the principles which have to a large extent been followed in most of those experiments which have reached the best results (i.e. high levels of bi- or multilingualism, a fair chance of success in relation to school achievement, and positive intercultural attitudes), can be formulated as 8 recommendations:

1. Support (= use as the main medium of education, at least during the first 8 years) the language which is least likely to develop up to a high formal level. This is for all minority children their own mother tongue. Majority children can be taught through the medium of a minority language.

2. In most experiments, the children are initially grouped together with children with the same L1. Mixed groups are in most cases not conducive to high levels of school achievement

initially, and certainly not in cognitively demanding decontextualized subjects. (Exception: two-way programmes, but even here the mere presence of majority language children in the same classroom may be too overwhelming for minority children, despite the minority language initially being the main medium of education).

3. **All children**, not only minority children, **are to become high level bilinguals**. This seems to be especially important in contexts where majority and minority children, in conflict with recommendation 2, are mixed.

4. **All children have to be equalized vis-a-vis their knowledge of the language of instruction and the status of their mother tongues**. Nice phrases about the worth of everybody's mother tongue, the value of interculturalism, etc, do not help, unless they are followed up in how the schools are organized. Equality has to show in the demands made on the children's and the teachers' competencies in the different languages involved, so that everybody has the same demands (both minority and majority children **and teachers** must be or become bi- or multilingual). Equality has to show in the place the languages are accorded on the schedules and in higher education, in testing and evaluation, in marks given for the languages, in the physical environment (signs, forms, letters, the school's languages of administration, the languages of meetings, assemblies, etc), in the status and salaries of the teachers, in their working conditions, career patterns, etc.

It is possible to equalize the children vis-a-vis their knowledge of the language of instruction in several different ways:

A. **All children know the language of instruction** (maintenance programmes, European Schools initially);

B. **No children know the language of instruction** or else everybody is in the process of learning it (immersion programmes, European Schools in certain subjects in a later phase);

C. **All children alternate between "knowing" and "not knowing" the language of instruction** (two-way programmes in later phases; alternate-days-programmes).

5. **All teachers have to be bi- or multilingual**. Thus they can be good models for the children, and support them (through comparing and contrasting and being metalinguistically aware) in language learning. Every child in a school has to be able to talk to an adult with the same native language.

This demand is often experienced as extremely threatening by majority group teachers, many of whom are not bilingual. Of course all minority group teachers are not high level bilinguals either. But it is often **less** important that the teacher's competence in a **majority** language is at top level, for instance in relation to pronunciation, because all children have ample opportunities to hear and read native models of a majority language outside the school, whereas many of them do NOT have the same opportunities to hear/read native minority language models. High levels of competence in a **minority** language is thus **more important** for a teacher than high levels of competence in a majority language.

6. **Foreign languages should be taught through the medium of the children's mother tongue and/or by teachers who know the children's mother tongue**. No teaching in foreign languages as subjects should be given through the medium of **other** foreign languages (for instance, Turkish children in Germany should not be taught English through the medium of German, but through Turkish).

7. **All children must study both L1 and L2 as compulsory subjects through years 1-12**. Both languages have to be studied in ways which reflect what they are for the children: mother tongues, or second or foreign languages. Many minority children are forced to study a majority

language, their L2, as if it was their L1.

8. Both languages have to be used as media of education in some phase of the children's education, but the progression seems to be different for minority and majority children.

For MAJORITY CHILDREN the **mother tongue** must function as the medium of education at least in some cognitively demanding, decontextualized subjects, at least in grades 8-12, possibly even earlier.

MAJORITY CHILDREN can be taught **through the medium of L2** at least in some (or even all or almost all) cognitively **less** demanding context-embedded subjects from the very beginning, and L2 can also be the medium of education, at least partially, in cognitively demanding decontextualized subjects, at least in grades 8-12.

For MINORITY CHILDREN the **mother tongue** must function as the medium of education in all subjects initially. At least some subjects must be taught through L1 all the way, up to grade 12, but these subjects may vary. It seems that the following development functions well:

- transfer from the known to the unknown
- transfer from teaching in a language to teaching through the medium of that language
- transfer from teaching through the medium of L2 in cognitively less demanding, context-embedded subjects, to teaching through the medium of L2 in cognitively demanding decontextualized subjects. The progression in The European Schools for minority children seems close to ideal:

The progression IN RELATION TO THE MOTHER TONGUE is as follows:

1. **All subjects** are taught **through the medium of the mother tongue** during the first 2 years.
2. **All important cognitively demanding decontextualized subjects** are taught **through the medium of the mother tongue** during the first 7 years.
3. There is **less** teaching **through the medium of the mother tongue** in grades 8-10, and again **more** teaching **through the medium of the mother tongue** in grades 11-12, especially in the most demanding subjects, in order to ensure that the students have understood them thoroughly.
4. **The mother tongue** is taught **as a subject throughout the schooling**, from 1-12.

The progression IN RELATION TO THE SECOND LANGUAGE is as follows:

1. **The second language** is taught as a **subject throughout the schooling**, from 1-12.
2. **The second language** becomes a **medium of education** already in grade 3, but only in **cognitively less demanding context-embedded subjects**. The teaching can be given in mixed groups, but ideally together with other children for whom the language is also an L2.
3. Teaching in **cognitively demanding decontextualized subjects** only starts **through the medium of L2** when the children have been taught that language **as a subject for 7 years** (grades 1-7) and have been taught **through the medium of that language in cognitively less demanding context-embedded subjects for 5 years** (grades 3-7). Children should not be taught demanding decontextualized subjects through L2 with other children for whom the language of instruction is their L1, before grade 8. In European Schools this is mostly not done even in grades 9-12 in compulsory subjects, only in elective courses.

In the following tables I compare some of the programmes in relation to how well they follow the 8 principles. A Utopian programme has been added, one which fulfills all the requirements. Starting experiments with Utopian programmes is the challenge that multilingual Western Europe has. We do have some (but not enough) language shelter (maintenance) and immersion programmes and almost a dozen European Schools, but no alternate days or two-way programmes, whereas the traditionally monolingually oriented United States school system already has two-way programmes in 176 schools (Christian 1994). If research results were to

guide or at least influence educational choices...

PRINCIPLES FOR MULTILINGUALISM THROUGH EDUCATION

1. Support (= use as the main medium of education, at least during the first 8 years) the language which is least likely to develop up to a high formal level.

LANGUAGE SHELTER	IMMER-SION	ALTERN. DAYS	EUROPEA N SCHOOLS	TWO-WAY	UTO-PIAN
+	+	+/-	MI+ MA-	+	+

2. Group the children initially together with children with the same L1. No mixed groups initially, and especially not in cognitively demanding decontextualised subjects.

LANGUAGE SHELTER	IMMER-SION	ALTERN. DAYS	EUROPEA N SCHOOLS	TWO-WAY	UTO-PIAN
+	+	-	+	-	+

3. ALL children are to become high level bilinguals, not only minority children. (Monolingualism is a curable illness. Bilingualism is to be a goal and a positive model for all).

LANGUAGE SHELTER	IMMER-SION	ALTERN. DAYS	EUROPEA N SCHOOLS	TWO-WAY	UTO-PIAN
+	+	+	+	+	+

4. All children have to be equalized vis-a-vis their knowledge of the language of instruction and the status of their mother tongues:

A All children know the language of instruction

B No children know the language of instruction

C All children alternate between "knowing" and "not knowing" the language of instruction