

144. Phillipson, Robert & Skutnabb-Kangas, Tove (1994). Linguistic Genocide. In **Valodas politika Baltijas Valstīs/Language Policy in the Baltic States**. Rīga: Krājumu sagatavojs. Latvijas Republikas Valsts valodas centrs, 140-150.
145. Filipsons, Robert & Skutnaba-Kangasa, Tuve (1994). Lingvistiskais genocīds (translation of 144). In **Valodas politika Baltijas Valstīs/Language Policy in the Baltic States**. Rīga: Krājumu sagatavojs. Latvijas Republikas Valsts valodas centrs, 23-32.

LINGUISTIC GENOCIDE

Robert Phillipson & Tove Skutnabb-Kangas

Paper at the Conference **LANGUAGE POLICY IN THE BALTIC STATES**, RĪGA, December 17-18, 1992

1. LINGUICIDE AND HIERARCHIES OF LANGUAGE

The evidence from most Western, "free market economy" countries (France, United Kingdom, USA, etc) is that the dominant language has been established, as an essential element in the state-building process, often without any constitutional provisions or legislation specifically decreeing use of an official, state language in particular domains or restrictions on the use of other languages. These have de facto been stigmatized and marginalized, deprived of resources for their development and use. The results of such long-term processes can be seen in the extinction of many of the indigenous languages of North America and some in Europe (linguistic genocide, i.e. the extermination of a group's language, or *linguicide*, i.e. the death of a language), and massive language shift to the dominant language. This is the case with speakers of minority languages, both indigenous and immigrant, in France, Britain and Ireland, and in North America.

This process has often been deliberate and not left to chance. It has not been totally successful, as much of the evidence of ethnic revival and attempts to reverse language shift demonstrate. Linguistic hegemony is not a static phenomenon. It constantly needs renewal and can be contested. Language is a key dimension, along with class, gender and "race", in the complex processes of hierarchising groups in society and maintaining patterns of dominance.

LINGUICISM refers to "ideologies and structures which are used to legitimate, effectuate and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources (both material and non-material) between groups which are defined on the basis of language" (Skutnabb-Kangas 1988). The concept *linguicism* captures both the material dimension, **resources** (for example funds allocated in language

planning to corpus development or status planning - both of which figure prominently in Latvian language laws) and **attitudes**. Dominant languages tend to be projected as the language of modernity, science and technology, success, national "unity", and positive features. The clearest example of this in the contemporary world is English. It has been projected in the colonial and post-colonial world so effectively that English is seen as linked to favourable characteristics, whereas indigenous languages are stigmatized as being traditional, backward, insular and inferior. This of course has nothing to do with the intrinsic nature of these languages or their potential. There are strong similarities in the ways and means by which English was established as the dominant language in the British isles and in North America and the process of consolidating English as the dominant language in the "Third World", in former colonies (Phillipson 1992). In practice the language policies adopted have had not served the interests of the majority of the population in such states. Linguistic underdevelopment parallels economic and political underdevelopment. Culturally the hierarchisation of languages represents a tragic rejection of authentic local values and their substitution by values that are convenient for global incorporation externally and for social stratification internally. Language policy in education (see the other paper by Skutnabb-Kangas in this volume) fits the few to succeed and the many to fail.

2. DEFINING LINGUISTIC GENOCIDE

The state can adopt a variety of policies towards minority languages, among them the following (from the taxonomy elaborated in Cobarrubias 1983):

- attempting to kill a language
- letting a language die
- unsupported coexistence
- partial support of specific language functions
- adoption as an official language

We claim that in a country where obligatory primary education exists, not only attempting to kill a language or letting it die, but also unsupported coexistence can often lead to linguistic assimilation for most speakers within two to three generations, unless the language gets strong support outside the education system in the wider community.

It can be argued though, as Joshua Fishman (1991) does, that regardless of what the state does, the most decisive factor in

determining the life or death of a threatened language is its intergenerational transmission. If a language is not spoken in the homes, by parents to children AND BY CHILDREN TO PARENTS AND OTHERS, it will not live, regardless of educational and other official measures.

When the United Nations did preparatory work for what later became the International Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (E 793, 1948), **linguistic and cultural genocide** was discussed alongside physical genocide, and was seen as a serious crime against humanity (see Capotorti 1979). When the Convention was accepted, Article 3, which covered linguistic and cultural genocide was vetoed by some nation states (the "great powers"), and it is thus not included in the final Convention of 1948. What remains, however, is a **definition of linguistic genocide**, which most states then in the UN were prepared to accept. Linguistic genocide is defined (in Art. 3, 1) as

"Prohibition of the use of the language of the group in daily intercourse or in schools, or the printing and circulation of publications in the language of the group".

The use of a minority language can be prohibited overtly and directly or covertly, more indirectly as our grid (see later) shows. Our claim is that the use of a minority language is in fact prohibited "in daily intercourse or in schools" every time there are minority children in day care centres and schools, but no minority teachers who are legally allowed to use the language of the minority children as the medium of teaching and child care most of the time. This is the situation for most immigrant and refugee minority children in all Western European countries, in the US, Canada and Australia. Immigrant minority education in these countries is thus guilty of linguistic genocide, according to the UN definition.

The difference between the way that such countries as Turkey and Sweden commit linguistic genocide lies in that it is done more openly and brutally in Turkey (see Skutnabb-Kangas & Bucak, in press) whereas it is more covert and sophisticated in Sweden (see e.g. Skutnabb-Kangas 1991). Covert linguistic genocide appears to be extremely efficient, as compared with the overt version. It is easier for the victims to notice the brutal overt violence and put up resistance, while it is more difficult to struggle against covert violence where it takes a longer time to see the results.

Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania currently organise education for many of their minorities through the media of their mother tongues and allow the use of the minority languages "in daily

intercourse", "in schools" and "in publications". They are thus **not** guilty of the linguistic genocide which is a daily practice in Western European countries.

3. MINORITY LANGUAGES IN INTERNATIONAL CONVENTIONS AND NATIONAL CONSTITUTIONS

A study of a range of relevant international covenants and national constitutions (Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson 1989, in press), attempts to gauge to what extent these legal measures provide support for dominated languages. To do so, a grid on which some of the important dimensions of language rights can be captured was devised. The first dimension used, and represented in our grid on the vertical axis, is **degree of overtness**, on which one can mark the extent to which laws or covenants are explicit in relation to the rights of minority languages in education. The second dimension, represented on the horizontal axis, is **degree of promotion**, on which the extent to which a language is **prohibited, tolerated or actively promoted** can be plotted (see Figure 1). We see both dimensions as continua. The promotion continuum starts with **prohibition** of a language, the goal of which is clearly to force the linguistic minority group to assimilate to the dominant language. It continues via **toleration** of the language, a situation where the language is not forbidden (explicitly or implicitly), to **non-discrimination prescription**, where discrimination of people on the basis of language is forbidden, either overtly (discrimination is made illegal in a way which is explicit enough not to cause difficulties of legal interpretation and/or where there may be sanctions of some kind) or covertly (as part of general legislation on countering discrimination). The next point on the continuum would be **permission** to use the minority language. At the other end of the continuum we have **promotion** of the minority language. This is obviously oriented toward maintaining it. The study is concerned exclusively with constitutional **texts** and **not** with their implementation, nor the extent to which the rights are in fact respected. Also not covered is whether there are any sanctions that the individual can activate in the case of non-compliance with legal rights, for instance by recourse to litigation.

In the earlier study we plotted on to the grid a range of *national constitutions*: **Finland**, for both the **Sámi** (No 5 on the grid) and the **Swedish** (No 4) languages); the then **Yugoslavia** (No 3); **India** (No 6); **Turkey** (No 9); and *proposals for constitutional change*: **English Language Amendments** to the **USA** Constitution (Huddleston No 1, Hayakawa No 2; see Marshall 1986,

36); **The Freedom Charter of the African National Congress (ANC) and others, South Africa** (No 7); the **Basque Normalization Law** (No 8). Many national constitutions provide more protection to minority languages in education than the international covenants. Conversely, none of the international covenants overtly prohibits the use of minority languages, as some national constitutions do.

Insert Figure 1 here

We have placed on the grid some of the results of our review of some international and European conventions and decrees. It is the clauses on **language rights in education** that we have placed on the grid, not the general clauses - see figure 1. The covenants are:

- A: The Charter of the United Nations, 1945;
- B: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948;
- C: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1966;
- D: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966;
- E: The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989;
- F: The Council of Europe Convention for The Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, 1950.
- G. The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, 1981
- H. American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man, 1948
- I. American Convention on Human Rights "Pact of San Jose, Costa Rica", 1969

4. WESTERN HYPOCRISY WITH REGARD TO LINGUISTIC HUMAN RIGHTS (LHRs)

When Western countries discuss language rights in other countries, we would suggest that despite good intentions and worthy goals, there is an element of Western hypocrisy. We shall provide four examples of this, and comment on them briefly.

A. Creating a myth that linguistic human rights are respected in the West

The West, implicitly and to some extent also explicitly, likes to create an impression of the West observing most human rights already, and therefore having the right to function as some sort of a human rights police force in other parts of the world. But there have been few if any fact-finding missions to Western

countries to find out whether linguistic or educational human rights are respected there. As mentioned earlier, Western countries are in fact guilty of linguistic genocide in relation to most immigrant and several indigenous minorities. Many Western countries prevent indigenous peoples and national minorities from using their languages in schools.

B. Demanding from other countries that they grant minorities rights, especially linguistic human rights, which Western countries do not grant to minorities in their own countries

There is a pattern of Western powers insisting on minority rights in other countries that they do not require of themselves. In the Peace Treaties at the conclusion of the First World War, the victorious states, among them France, Great Britain and the USA, imposed on the states that emerged from the dismemberment of the Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman and Russian empires, minority protection clauses so that the cultures and languages of the groups in the new multilingual states should be respected. The same principles did not apply in their own states, though a token gesture was made in a League of Nations' Assembly recommendation in 1922:

"The Committee expresses the hope that the States which are not bound by any legal obligations to the League with respect to minorities will nevertheless observe in the treatment of their own racial, religious or linguistic minorities at least as high a standard of justice and toleration as is required by any of the Treaties and by the regular action of the Council" (from Protection of Linguistic, Racial or Religious Minorities by the League of Nations, 2nd edition, Document C.8.M.5 I.B.1, Minorities, Geneva, 1931, quoted in Andrýsek 1989, 20).

The League of Nations had the task of seeking to resolve any conflicts that should appear - and notably failed to do so. The treaties provided for the right of complaint to the League of Nations (which had a Minorities Secretariat, and the International Court of Justice. This right of appeal proved to be of limited value: whereas 204 complaints were filed in 1930-31, only 4 were in 1938-39 (Boudoin & Masse 1973, 19). United Nations efforts to protect minorities have also had limited impact (Capotorti 1979, Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson in press), though much is now under way so as to change this picture. On the other hand history does seem to be repeating itself. In the 1990s fact-finding human rights missions are sent to Baltic countries. Council of Europe membership is being withheld from countries emerging from Soviet dominance on the grounds that the citizenship laws and language laws of the new states are in conflict with international human rights

standards. This is hypocritical in so far as a country like France does not grant any rights to its linguistic minorities. Likewise, Turkey is a member of the Council of Europe, as is Greece, which is also in the European Community, despite blatant human rights abuses and language laws which are manifestly oppressive. Such countries are members of the "Western club" because of "vital" Western interests, military (membership of NATO), political and economic.

C. Hindering or trying to hinder the acceptance of international conventions and charters on linguistic human rights when other countries propose them

Very few Western states have been willing to press for minority protection at the highest international level. Latvia (1922), Lithuania (1925) and Poland (1932, 1933, 1934) proposed universal protection within the framework of the League of Nations, but the Supreme Council rejected all the drafts (Andrýsek 1989, 20). The same pattern holds within the UN system, where failure to approve Article 3 of the draft Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide is just **one** example. Efforts by many non-Western countries to accord minorities more protection, including linguistic rights, have been blocked by the "great" powers (see Capotorti 1979).

It is indicative that when the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages was approved on 22 June 1992 (see Contact Bulletin 9:2, 1992), Britain and France abstained (together with Cyprus and Turkey - Turkey is the country which by the most brutal legal means in the world tries to kill a minority language, Kurdish). This does not prevent Britain and France from presenting themselves as protectors of minorities, and criticizing other countries for their treatment of minorities.

D. Using different standards when defining groups in their own countries and in other countries

The concepts "national minority" and "migrant" seem to be defined according to different standards, depending on which country is being referred to, when linguistic rights are to be granted. **Migrants** are usually explicitly excluded from entitlement. This is also the case in the European Charter. Both **territorial** and **non-territorial groups** can enjoy linguistic rights under the Charter, if they are seen as **national minorities** and not migrants. Some non-territorial groups which have been present in **Western** countries for centuries are, however, not defined as national minorities, and are thus

overlooked. For instance, the Roma ("Gypsies") who have been in Sweden and Finland since at least the sixteenth century, and Finns who have resided in Sweden for an equivalent period (i.e. Finns other than those resident in the Torne valley who have been an indigenous border minority since 1809) are not credited with the status of national minorities to whom the rights of the European Charter should apply.

When it comes to **the Baltic states**, by contrast, a tenth of the time appears to be regarded as adequate for the creation of a national minority. Are post-1945 Russian speakers in Latvia supposed to enjoy more linguistic rights than groups who have been in Western countries ten times longer?

5. ETHNIC CONFLICT

Linguistic and cultural rights are central for maintaining and reproducing a minority group **as a distinct group**. The exercise of linguistic and cultural rights by minorities is often seen by majorities as preventing them from assimilating into what majorities call the "mainstream" society. Many dominant groups see the mere existence of (unassimilated) minorities as a threat to the (nation) state. Within the framework of a nation state ideology where the ideal state consists of one nation only, one ethnic group with one language, fostering diversity is necessarily seen as a threat to the nation state: at some point the minorities start themselves striving towards this "natural", ideal political organisation. Granting linguistic and cultural rights is in this ideology seen as leading to quests for autonomy and independence (first culturally, then economically and politically), and in the end to the disintegration of the nation state because minorities then want their own nation states. Since the political unity and territorial integrity of a state is seen as threatened by the granting of LHRs, many majorities are reluctant to grant "their" minorities linguistic rights.

The gulf between the good intentions expressed in preambles of international and local documents and the de facto dearth of LHRs in the West can be understood as symptomatic of the tension between on the one hand a wish on the part of the (nation) state to secure (or give the impression of securing) human rights to minorities, and on the other hand the (nation) state believing that granting human rights, especially linguistic and cultural human rights, to minorities, is decisive for reproducing these minorities as minorities, this leading to the disintegration of the state. And it is not very likely that any state would voluntarily work towards its own disintegration.

Since many states "have problems" with their own minorities, i.e. do not treat them in a way consistent with all minority and general rights in human rights treaties, they are often reluctant to criticize other states' treatment of their minorities. But this does not seem to apply in the relationship between Western countries and the Baltics - meaning the ethnocentrism and racism of much of the Western ideology can be seen in the glorification of Western norms, concepts and practices in the human rights field, in the stigmatizations of what other countries do and in the rationalisation of the relationship where the West creates the impression of "helping" and "supporting" the "newly independent states" in an unselfish way, without explicating the underlying economic, cultural and linguistic neoimperialistic agenda.

We see **lack** of linguistic rights as one of the causal factors in certain conflicts, and linguistic affiliation as a rightful mobilizing factor in conflicts with multiple causes where power and resources are unevenly distributed along linguistic and ethnic lines. This means that we see language-related issues as potential causes of conflict **only** in situations where groups lack linguistic rights **and/or** political/economic rights, and where the unequal distribution of political and/or economic power follows linguistic and ethnic lines.

"Interethnic cooperation and solidarity" between groups with different languages, "peaceful coexistence", is "at least as common and persistent as interethnic conflicts", according to Rodolfo Stavenhagen (1990, 39).

Granting linguistic rights to minorities **reduces** conflict potential, instead of creating it. An alternative to linguistic genocide is the granting of linguistic human rights. In our second paper for this conference we discuss some aspects of how this can be done in education, so that minorities or speakers of hitherto dominated languages get support for their own languages while becoming high level multilinguals, while speakers of dominant languages also get an opportunity of escaping the monolingual stupidity that most dominant majorities in the world still suffer from.

Bibiliography:

ANDRÝSEK, Oldrich 1989 **Report on the definition of minorities**,
Utrecht: Netherlands Institute of Human Rights

BOUDOIN, Jean-Claude & MASSE, Claude 1973 **Étude comparative et évolutive des droits linguistiques en Belgique et en Suisse**,

Étude E15, la commission d'enquête sur la situation de la langue française et sur les droits linguistiques au Québec, Québec: l'éditeur officiel du Québec

CAPOTORTI, Francesco 1979 **Study on the rights of persons belonging to ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities**, New York: United Nations

COBARRUBIAS, Juan 1983 Ethical issues in status planning, in Cobarrubias & Fishman (eds) 1983, 41-85

COBARRUBIAS, Juan & FISHMAN, Joshua A. (eds) 1983 **Progress in language planning: international perspectives**, Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter

FISHMAN, Joshua A. 1991 **Reversing language shift**, Clevedon, Avon: Multilingual Matters

GARCIA, Ofelia (ed) 1991 **Bilingual education: Festschrift in honor of Joshua A. Fishman on the occasion of his 65th birthday**, Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins

PHILLIPSON, Robert 1992 **Linguistic Imperialism**, Oxford: Oxford University Press

SKUTNABB-KANGAS, Tove 1988 Multilingualism and the education of minority children, in Skutnabb-Kangas & Cummins (eds), 9-44
SKUTNABB-KANGAS, Tove & CUMMINS, Jim (eds) **Minority Education: from Shame to Struggle**, Clevedon, Avon: Multilingual Matters

SKUTNABB-KANGAS, Tove 1991 Swedish strategies to prevent integration and national ethnic minorities, in Garcia 1991, 25-42

SKUTNABB-KANGAS, Tove & BUCAK, Sertaç in press, Killing a mother tongue: how the Kurds are deprived of linguistic human rights, in Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson (in collaboration with Mart Rannut)

SKUTNABB-KANGAS, Tove & CUMMINS, Jim (eds) 1988 **Minority Education: from Shame to Struggle**, Clevedon, Avon: Multilingual Matters

SKUTNABB-KANGAS, Tove & PHILLIPSON, Robert 1989, **Wanted! Linguistic human rights**, Roskilde: Roskilde University (ROLIG papir 44)

SKUTNABB-KANGAS, Tove & PHILLIPSON, Robert (eds), in
collaboration with Mart RANNUT, in press, **Linguistic Human
Rights**, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

STAVENHAGEN, Rodolfo 1990 **The Ethnic Question: Conflicts,
Development an**