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### **Linguistic Human Rights and Development**

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"Language development in India has by and large remained a governmental programme and not people's programme."  
Annamalai, 1994.

"Africans have been psychologically conditioned to believe that only European languages are structured to aid development."  
Mubanga Kashoki, in UNIN 1981, 41.

"Formal education in Africa and Asia in its present form tends to impede economic growth and promote political instability... (it) is an obstacle to development."  
Hanf et al 1975.

In this paper we shall document how language policy has been neglected in mainstream development assistance, which has contributed to the failure of existing policies, in particular in education. This is in large measure due to the influence of key donor and lending agencies. An analysis of linguistic diversity and diagnoses of how linguistic hierarchies are reproduced suggest that principles of linguistic human rights can provide an ethically sounder foundation for future policies.

### **Invisibilization: the role of language largely absent from development policies**

European colonizing powers took their languages with them worldwide, witness the presence of Spanish in Latin America, Portuguese in Brazil and southern Africa, and French and English in many parts of the world. In international relations, particular languages, and mainly languages of European origin, serve as the medium for contacts in the economic, political, military, cultural, educational and scientific fields, just as certain languages are privileged intra-nationally.

Development policies invariably strengthen some languages and weaken others.

However, there seems to be little awareness of the extent to which this reality is in conflict with human rights principles and a causal factor in the perpetuation of global inequities. Development agendas seldom address matters of language policy, linguistic hierarchies, or the intermeshing of language with social, economic and political interests.

The UN **Agenda for development** is intended to promote goals of peace and democratization. It acknowledges the value of cultural diversity, and stresses the importance of culture and

education in development. When the Secretary General spoke at a conference in Australia held to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the UN, Boutros-Ghali affirmed both cultural and linguistic rights in his **oral** presentation. In the written version (1995), linguistic rights disappeared<sup>i</sup>. There is nothing new about development aid to the education sector ignoring the role of language. The World Bank and the IMF take it for granted that it is the dominant language that best serves the interests of "national development", e.g. English in the Philippines (Enriquez and Protacio Marcelino 1984, 3 - but see Dutcher 1982). The complexities of the language in education issue in multilingual societies, for instance in east Africa are neglected in such World Bank reports as Psachropoulos 1990, Galabawa 1990. In a major study of aid to the developing world, and in particular of the role of donor agencies in educational analysis (King 1991), "language" does not figure in the index<sup>ii</sup>. The same blindness to the issue characterizes a comprehensive British study of education priorities and aid responses in Sub-Saharan Africa (Hawes & Coombe 1986), despite attention being drawn to it by Iba Der Thiam, the Minister of Higher and National Education of Senegal (*ibid.*, 26).

This myopia on the part of the donors and the researchers who guide them continues a pattern set at the first UNESCO conference of African Ministers of Education, in 1960, which set a target for universal literacy, but gave no thought to the language in which literacy should be achieved (Cawson 1975, 412-3). The same was true of a succession of British conferences held to "assist" colonies to organize their education systems when they became independent states in the 1960s. Invariably language was given very little attention, and if raised, the focus was only on the learning of English (*ibid.*). Economic underdevelopment has been accompanied by linguistic underdevelopment<sup>iii</sup>.

If we leave aside for the present the efforts of a few countries such as Tanzania to promote local languages (to which we return below), the supranational body that has probably done more than any other organization to promote the cause of "local" languages, particularly African languages, is **UNESCO**. However, although some seminal documents have been produced, starting with a key text on the "vernacular" languages in education (UNESCO 1953), its activities have reflected dominant "development" paradigms, and neither shown strong leadership on matters of educational principle, nor been particularly active in championing language rights (Limage 1994).

An understanding of why this has happened presupposes familiarity with colonial language policy (Calvet 1974), and an understanding of how and why the hierarchy of languages in virtually all former colonies has not merely remained intact but actually strengthened (Mateene 1985). This is substantially due to western thinking setting the agenda for education systems and language policy in development, and this suiting elites in the South (Phillipson 1992). Broadly speaking, development has assisted the **dominant** languages, i.e. the former colonial languages. Most "aid" to education has served this purpose. Hardly any has been directly aimed at supporting local languages.

Thus development assistance has been instrumental in effectuating linguistic imperialism, and been very functional in maintaining the dominance of European languages in former colonies<sup>iv</sup>. The continued reliance on colonial languages in postcolonial education has effectively served to deprive local languages of resources and of the ideological underpinning that extension of their use required (Phillipson 1992, Akinnaso 1994). Linguistic imperialism occurs worldwide, e.g. in the Pacific and Australasia:

Linguistic imperialism is the expansion of a small number of languages at the cost of a large

number of others. Linguistic imperialism is a promoter of one-way learning, the flow of knowledge and information from the powerful to the powerless. (Mühlhäusler 1994, 122).

The results of this policy in Africa are an alarming crisis, as is acknowledged by such bodies as the World Bank and the Haut Conseil de la Francophonie<sup>v</sup>.

For a **UNESCO-OAU** (Organization for African Unity) conference in Addis Abeba in November 1994, on "The definition of strategies for the promotion of African languages in a multilingual environment", country reports were commissioned, and a **survey of language legislation** in most African countries, inspired by work done in Quebec, reviews the constitutional clauses on the legal status of languages and the use of specific languages in administration, the judicial system, education and commerce, with a comparison of equivalent provisions in Canada, India and Switzerland (Twahirwa 1994). The report concludes that:

"... without doubt African leaders have not yet become sufficiently conscious of what is fundamentally at issue in the promotion of African languages and the importance of these in the general development of the country. Such an awareness is the *sine qua non* condition for a true take-off of an effective language policy for the continent" (ibid., 102).

This report echoes much research in assessing that a diglossic<sup>vi</sup> division of linguistic labour condemns African languages to the private domain. Their exclusion from the official domain, and education in particular, serves to deprive the population of access to the modern world, democratization and development, has led to the decline of national cultures and languages and no authentic national development (Bamgbose 1991, Mateene 1985, Ngũgĩ 1987, 1992). The UNESCO-OAU report therefore recommends that African languages be given co-official status. The desirability of this has long been recognized. Acceptance of the principle of promoting local languages and formulating a language policy was approved by heads of state in 1976 in the OAU **Cultural Charter for Africa**<sup>vii</sup>. The **Language Plan of Action for Africa**, 1986, sets out priorities and a programme of action at various levels, aimed at all local languages being seen as a resource and at some languages taking over from European languages as official languages and vehicles of instruction at all educational levels<sup>viii</sup>.

But implementation is another story, and a bleak one in most parts of Africa. There has been some consolidation of dominant African lingua francas and extension of their use in official contexts (e.g. in Tanzania, Botswana and Lesotho), but the primacy of European languages remains virtually unchallenged. It would be more democratic to promote major African lingua francas, as several African scholars have recommended (e.g. Djité 1993a), but there is little sign of those in power or donors appreciating this. In Namibia since independence, a vast effort has gone into expanding the use of English, with a corresponding neglect of African languages (Pütz 1995), though this position may change (Brock-Utne 1995). Donor influence has been substantial. In the new South Africa, language rights issues are being energetically addressed under the stimulus of the draft constitution declaring 11 languages as official (Cluver 1994, Desai 1995). It is possible that change in the direction advocated by the Language Plan of Africa will emerge here.

The picture is not dissimilar in **India**, despite serious attention being given to language matters, in the Indian constitution, and in the "three language formula" that was elaborated so as to facilitate the transition from English to Hindi and strengthen a broad range of regional and local languages. Researchers from the Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL) have identified

some of the weaknesses of implementation of language policy and stress the absence of political will to change the linguistic hierarchy<sup>ix</sup>. Annamalai, until 1995 director of the CIIL, attributes the failure of Indian language policy to four factors (Annamalai 1994):

1. language development was not coordinated with economic development,
2. lack of a unified strategy for the use of Indian languages in a variety of domains (education, administration, law, medicine etc),
3. absence of a coherent strategy to reassure minority language speakers, or to counter-balance Hindi, led to a clinging to English, and
4. development planning was top-down, elite-mass, e.g. massive creation of technical terminology and no implementation or use made of it.

As a result of failures in economic, educational and language policy, it is apparent that the gulf between English-educated elites and impoverished, marginal, under-educated masses is growing in India, as it is elsewhere. In towns a choice is offered between private English-medium schools or public, under-resourced schools with the local Indian language as the medium<sup>x</sup>. The interests associated with the language of power, English, have subtly carried the day. This has major implications both internally and externally. The local linguistic hierarchy is immensely functional in maintaining and facilitating links between English-speaking elites and western interests.

To sum up, the language policies followed in postcolonial states have served the interests of elites and the west rather than the mass of people who were ostensibly to benefit. Education systems, that play a key role in social reproduction, reflect a eurocentric bias which is deeply embedded in donor perceptions of what "assistance" is needed.

## **Send for the World Bank**

Education policy in South states since the mid 1970s, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, has been decisively influenced by the policies of the **World Bank** (King 1991). World Bank publications have presented continent-wide syntheses that lend themselves to broad policy generalizations. There have been critics in North and South, but South policy voices have been virtually inaudible (*ibid.*, xv) and gone unheeded in policy formulation and implementation. The activities of national donor organizations (American, British, Canadian, Danish etc) reflect their specific characteristics, but bank policies have determined investments in primary, secondary and vocational education, science and technology, adult education, etc. World Bank educational policy documents tend to focus on inadequacies of the education system, and failures of implementation (Psacharopolous 1990<sup>xi</sup>) rather than the deteriorating terms of trade which are a major cause of the crisis in South states or the inappropriacy of the prescriptions under-written by the Bank (Brock-Utne 1993).

The Jomtien, Thailand conference of 1990 on "**Education for all**" was hosted by UNESCO, UNICEF and the UNDP as well as the World Bank<sup>xii</sup>. The main thrust of the Jomtien conference was a focus on universal literacy, particularly through the primary school (King 1991). The conference committed donors to longer-term strategy and financing, in broader perspectives than earlier. This is necessary because there are structural weaknesses and failures (declining primary enrolments, over-subsidised higher education, disaffected, underpaid teachers, a drought of textbooks and materials, *ibid.*, 274), and "aid" in the form of more isolated "projects" is often too atomistic and short-term.

Perhaps most important of all, the conference confirms the role of the North as purveyor of development to education in the South. As a result the Bank, along with British, Dutch and Swedish development agencies and several UN bodies, is now engaged in funding and "developing" basic education in India. This is one of the effects of the "liberalisation" and openness to market forces of India in recent years. It is a puzzling outcome of nearly 50 years of "independence".

The spirit of the Jomtien conference is seen by the Indian government as involving "donor assistance for basic education on terms which do not compromise national autonomy in policy and programme formulation and implementation... and not lead to a dependency syndrome" (Department of Education, Government of India 1993, 27)<sup>xiii</sup>. But the Bank, as its name implies, lends money and will be expecting repayment in due course. It also seems unlikely that funds are provided for purposes that western donors do not approve of or influence.

A study of World Bank policy in education in **eastern Africa** by the Norwegian scholar, Birgit Brock-Utne (1993) regards it as a direct channel for western interests, via control of content, examinations and infrastructure; the "assistance" is in effect a recipe for education for under-development<sup>xiv</sup>. Brock-Utne reports that African scholars are unlikely to be so forthright in their criticisms because they are "too dependent on getting consultancies from the donor community." (ibid., 99). Aid projects funded by Nordic governments which articulate a rhetoric of priority for the poorer sections of society and especially the female half are irrelevant when privatization and liberalization strategies do not protect the poor (ibid., 130). "Aid" activities in the textbook field are likely to be harmful to local publishers and profitable for Western publishers (Bgoya 1992), as happened in India two decades earlier, in what Altbach (1975) called "literary colonialism". A later paper (Brock-Utne 1996) cites a range of Scandinavian, German and British researchers who criticize the ethnocentric way in which "internationalization" and "quality" are understood in the development assistance business.

Brock-Utne was resident for several years in Tanzania, where Swahili has been successfully implemented in many domains. The dominant role of English in secondary and higher education, on the route to upward social mobility, remains unchanged, with substantial "aid" from British donors consolidating the position of English. As a result, there is a growing mismatch between actual language use in the society, societal goals and educational means, with the result that education is largely failing to deliver the goods (Rubagumya 1990). The picture is broadly similar in most former colonies (World Bank 1988, Haddad et al 1990). Symptoms of crisis and financial straits make injections of cash from the World Bank more attractive.

There are grave grounds for doubting whether such development assistance can be appropriate. Why should the western world, in which mass education is fraught with unresolved problems<sup>xv</sup>, be able to resolve acute problems elsewhere? Where is there evidence that educational "assistance" hitherto has been culturally, linguistically or pedagogically appropriate? How can decentralized education correspond to local needs when the "distance educators" who pull the financial and ideological strings know neither local cultures nor local languages? These are fundamental ethical questions. Accountability must relate not merely to budgets but to a wide range of cultural and ecological concerns.

## **Development or linguistic genocide in education**

Historically, both **development** and **human rights** are central to UN activities, and figure in

innumerable declarations, beginning with the Charter of the United Nations<sup>xvi</sup>. There is though an inherent contradiction between the commitment to development (as promoted by the UN's agencies, and multilateral and bilateral donors) and to human rights, since much of the evidence is that development programmes, e.g. the structural adjustment policies of the World Bank and the IMF have "been found to harm rather than promote human rights" (Tomaševski 1993, 45). It is an additional paradox that much mainstream "aid" in the late 1980s was made conditional on human rights observance, particularly political rights, at a time when such "aid" was jeopardizing human rights. Criticism of the neglect of human rights in development aid has often been expressed by NGOs which, for instance, have documented that the interests of indigenous groups have been sacrificed on the altar of "economic progress" (ibid., 51; see also Stavenhagen 1990, 1995).

The development model exported worldwide has operated in a similar fashion domestically in the North's own marginalised, "underdeveloped" areas. A description of the process in the Arctic areas of the rich Nordic countries (Jussila & Segerståhl 1988, 17) could just as well relate to Africa: "Economic growth and its implications are present in the modernization process ... in the marginalised areas. All productive activities have been gradually geared towards markets after the emergence of money economy in these areas. The use of local resources is today a means for acquiring both financial and social prestige, which in turn sets aside ideas of a sustainable use of resources, although the knowledge of sustainability would exist". The market economy, and the creation of larger and more centralized economic, administrative and political units has, despite a rhetoric of democracy and local participation, been the order of the day, in the "first" and "third" worlds. It also seems to be re-emerging in the former "second" world.

The socio-economic, techno-military and political, structural changes inevitably connected with the "modernization" process cause stress on both **nature** and on **people**, their socio-economic conditions of life, and their languages and cultures. These processes have resulted in an accelerated **environmental degradation** (= nature under stress), and **growing gaps** between the haves and the have-nots (or never-to-haves as many of our Indian colleagues say) and in **linguistic and cultural genocide** (= people under stress). Education systems, as currently run, contribute to committing linguistic genocide.

A definition of **linguistic genocide** was included in Article III in the final draft of what became The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (E 794, 1948) of the United Nations. Even if Article III was voted down in the General Assembly and is not part of the final Convention, most countries who were members of the UN in 1948 agreed on how to define linguistic genocide:

"(1) Prohibiting 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."

Clearly "prohibition" can be direct or indirect. If there are no minority<sup>xvii</sup> group teachers in the preschool or school, or if the minority language is not used as a medium of education, the use of the language is indirectly prohibited in daily intercourse/in schools, i.e. it is a question of linguistic genocide (Skutnabb-Kangas in press a,b,c).

In North countries, this is generally the way minorities, indigenous and immigrant, are educated. In most underdeveloped, multilingual countries, most of the domestic languages are treated in the same way as minority languages in European/ized countries (Brock-Utne 1993, 39)<sup>xviii</sup>.

## Language and control

Underpinning the asymmetrical allocation of resources to the dominant language is an ideology of linguistic imperialism. Choice of terminology when labelling languages as local, national, official, foreign or world languages is ideologically determined. "National" languages can be taken as referring to all the languages spoken by the various ethnic groups which are found within a state. On the other hand we know that some languages tend to be regarded as more national than others, and that minority languages tend not to be seen as contributing to state identity or even national identity (Mateene 1985). When differences of language have been exploited for purposes of ethnic divisiveness, as under colonialism and apartheid, change may involve eschewing the term "national" languages (Webb 1994), though clearly particular languages are selected for state-building purposes. In former colonies the official language is generally a "world" language rather than a local one, serving to maintain links with the external world and internally to exclude the many from power and influence by processes of elite closure (Myers-Scotton 1990).

The concept of a "world" language is hierarchical in that non-world languages are by implication stigmatized as inferior and less useful. An apparently neutral ascription like "world" language presupposes that its users share a commonality of interest, whereas globalisation and development processes not only affect the North and the South differentially, they also impact on people differentially, favouring men rather than women, for instance, in schooling and literacy skills. The concept of English as an "international" or "world" language is so intuitively commonsensical that the fact that it serves particular interests can easily be concealed<sup>xix</sup>. Global control is exercised to an increasing extent by means of language (Table 1). This involves the ideas of dominant groups colonising consciousness via consciousness industries (education, mass media, religions), with less need to resort to more brutal means of control (though these are still very much in evidence), and rather than or in addition to using more expensive means like remuneration. Language has become absolutely vital in facilitating such control. Language itself can serve hegemonic or counter-hegemonic purposes: it can prevent or permit analysis of struggles, it can serve to intensify control or resistance to it.

Table 1 approximately here

The Ghanaian scholar, Gilbert Ansre, describes linguistic imperialism as:

The phenomenon in which the minds and lives of the speakers of a language are dominated by another language to the point where they believe that they can and should use only that foreign language when it comes to transactions dealing with the more advanced aspects of life such as education, philosophy, literature, governments, the administration of justice, etc... Linguistic imperialism has a subtle way of warping the minds, attitudes and aspirations of even the most noble in a society and of preventing him from appreciating and realizing the full potentialities of the indigenous languages. (Ansre 1979, 12-13).

To permit an increased exercise of control through the consciousness industry is the main reason why dominated groups are forced or enticed into learning the dominant languages at the cost of their own, rather than in addition to their own, i.e. by means of subtractive rather than additive

language learning. This is why everybody is enticed into learning English. When this is achieved subtractively, the dominant ideas can more easily penetrate the minds of the dominated, and the full development of other languages is forestalled, impeding the development of the diverse counterhegemonies that are necessary for querying the rationality of a monocultural, monolingual cosmology based on economic "efficiency".

In these McDonaldization processes, in which pop culture is "America's hottest export item", the trend is towards production for global markets, so that products and information aim at creating "global customers that want global services by global suppliers" (Hamelink 1994, 110).

McDonaldization means "aggressive round-the-clock marketing, the controlled information flows that do not confront people with the long-term effects of an ecologically detrimental lifestyle, the competitive advantage against local cultural providers, the obstruction of local initiative, all converge into a reduction of local cultural space" (ibid., 112). Most of the processes involved, investment, production, marketing, consumption and interpretation, involve the use of language. The dominance has economic, technological, cultural and linguistic strands to it.

McDonaldization is in conflict with principles of fundamental human rights, which can serve to ensure the maintenance and promotion of cultural diversity. Counter-hegemonic resistance involves strategies to empower consumers of media products so that they/we are better-informed and can participate more actively in communication patterns worldwide and locally, as propounded in the People's Communication Charter (Hamelink 1994)<sup>xx</sup>.

One of the strategies in the unequal global distribution of power and resources involves the invalidation of the non-material resources of dominated groups, including their languages and cultures (Figure 1).

Figure 1 approximately here

This invalidation transmits one of the important messages of the process of colonising consciousness, namely that subordinated groups should internalize the legitimacy of their subordination. Non-material resources can be invalidated by making them invisible, as are for instance African languages in much development discourse. They may also be stigmatized as handicaps or problems, rather than resources, as in development discourse, educational discourse, and in minority discourses in Euro-American contexts. Such processes of invalidation follow the model of racist discourse, with "language" replacing "race": dominant languages and cultures are glorified, dominated languages and cultures are stigmatized, and there is a rationalisation of the act of glorifying and stigmatizing and of the relationship between the languages and cultures (see Table 2).

Table 2 approximately here

The stigmatization, glorification and rationalization processes are fundamental to the reproduction and hierarchization of groups on the basis of "race", ethnicity/culture or language. Racism, ethnicism and linguicism can be defined as

"ideologies, structures and practices which are used to legitimate, effectuate and reproduce an unequal division of power and (both material and non-material) resources between groups which are defined on the basis of "race" (biologically argued racism), ethnicity and culture (culturally argued racism: ethnicism), or **language (linguistically argued racism: linguicism)**" (Skutnabb-



Kangas 1986, 1988).

Linguistic imperialism is one form of linguisticism (Phillipson 1992). Much of the evidence seems to indicate that development policies may reflect linguisticism.

### **Alternatives: high levels of multilingualism through education**

If the stranglehold of European languages in non-European contexts is to be broken, there is a need for alternative development strategies that build on local resources and take into account the realities of globalization and the forces of McDonaldization. One goal for education systems should therefore be to make citizens multilingually competent, whether they live in Asia, Africa or Europe (which the states of the European Union are now committed to).

Attaining a high level of multilingual competence has been common among *élites* in most countries in the world. For them, multilingual proficiency has been part of the symbolic linguistic and cultural capital necessary for maintaining and reproducing their material and political capital (wealth and power). For them, multilingualism is a question of enrichment and benefits, validating their non-material resources.

By contrast, the attempts of dominated/subordinated linguistic (minority) groups to become high level multilinguals through education have in most parts of the world met with considerable difficulty and often direct or indirect resistance and sabotage from the educational system. Even so, for them to become bilingual and biliterate is generally necessary for survival, economically, culturally, psychologically, even politically. For them, high levels of multilingualism, or at least bilingualism, involve the assertion of basic human rights (Skutnabb-Kangas 1990).

It is clear that very few countries follow educational principles in their state-financed educational systems that would make all pupils high-level multilinguals. Instead of high levels of multilingualism and multiple literacies (Skutnabb-Kangas 1995), schools participate in committing linguistic genocide in relation to linguistic minority groups and violate their linguistic human rights. Linguistic majority groups are confined to monolingual reductionism, with the exception of elites and a substantial proportion of the people in places like the Netherlands and Scandinavia, whose dominant language is not a "world" language.

Language in education policy in most European/ized countries, for both majorities and most minorities, is not guided by scientifically sound principles for the achievement of high levels of multilingualism. Elsewhere there is a need to democratize the education system, and this can only be achieved through the promotion of the languages of Asia, Africa, and other parts of the world, and concomitantly "reducing English to equality", as Neville Alexander has put it in South Africa (in Bhanot 1994).

There is a considerable body of scholarship on the complexity of multilingualism in underdeveloped countries and strategies for successful education. Some of the dimensions that need to be attended to are the fact that children are frequently bi- or multilingual when they start school, and this source of richness needs to be built on, to the point of regarding bilingualism as the child's mother tongue, as Mohanty, the Indian psychologist, puts it (1994). Initial literacy in the mother tongue or in a lingua franca that is related to the mother tongue, or is one of the languages that the child is already familiar with, is a pedagogically suitable route to follow in contexts where it is likely that local languages have a rich oral tradition but limited literacy utility beyond initial reading skills (Akinvaso 1993), though it needs to be recalled that there are

many different types of literacy (Street 1993).

It is insights of this sort, mainly provided by scholars from South countries, that ought to form part of the essential professional competence of those working in development assistance/cooperation. Unfortunately this is very unlikely to be the case at present, either in initial training or in the relevant professional discourse. Development educationalists, from North and South, are not generally well informed about multilingualism or language rights. Language specialists tend to be versed in cerebral linguistic theory of dubious relevance (Dasgupta 1993, Parakrama 1995) or else are steeped in an eurocentric Teaching English as a Second Language paradigm which is progressively under attack (Phillipson 1992, Pennycook 1995):

The role of English in the sociolinguistic context of each English-using Third World country is not properly understood, or is conveniently ignored. The consequences of this attitude are that the Third World countries are slowly realizing that, given the present attitude of TESL specialists, it is difficult to expect from such specialists any theoretical insights and professional leadership in this field which would be contextually, attitudinally and pragmatically useful to the Third World countries. (Kachru 1986, 101)

There is some awareness of this among scholars in North countries, but it is likely that other factors weigh more heavily. Lo Bianco (1994) points out that there may be a clash between "national" needs in a given (South) country and the "international" interests that an "expert" is employed to promote. He warns, in relation to an aid-hungry state, Vietnam, how aid to one aspect of language development, e.g. the promotion of English or French by the Australians or the French, may well mean that equally deserving causes, such as children's literacy or a diversification of foreign language learning, are neglected. His view is that the external input ought to be subordinated to more overall language policy concerns.

## **Towards linguistic human rights in development**

In a survey of how far cultural rights have been protected through human rights instruments, Stavenhagen concludes:

"The power structure of modern society, the economic structure, the way the mass media are controlled and used, and the way in which publications are produced and educational policies are carried out, all of these factors tend to destroy minority cultures, even when there is no wilful intention to do so." (1995, 75).

Minority cultures have been the victims of ethnocide. Linguicide is part of this.

Universal covenants and declarations are limited in the extent to which they provide support for speakers of minority languages (Capotorti 1979)<sup>xxi</sup>. In particular the right to learn and use the mother tongue as the medium of education is not guaranteed<sup>xxii</sup> (Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson 1994, Skutnabb-Kangas, in press b).

The most far-reaching Article in (binding) human rights law granting linguistic rights is Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966):

"In those states in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, or to use their own language."

Hitherto the Article has been interpreted as

- excluding (im)migrants (who have not been seen as minorities);
- excluding groups (even if they are citizens) which are not recognised as minorities by the State;
- only conferring some protection against discrimination (= "negative rights") but not a positive right to maintain or even use one's language;
- not imposing any obligations on the States.

On 6 April 1994 the UN Human Rights Committee adopted a General Comment on Article 27 which interprets it in a substantially more positive way than earlier. The Committee sees the Article as

- protecting all individuals on the State's territory or under its jurisdiction (i.e. also immigrants and refugees), irrespective of whether they belong to the minorities specified in the Article or not;
- stating that the existence of a minority does not depend on a decision by the State but requires to be established by objective criteria;
- recognizing the existence of a "right";
- imposing positive obligations on the States.

The UN Draft Universal Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples formulates language rights strongly and explicitly and with the state required to allocate resources. But the fate of the Draft is still unsure - the latest version was completed 25-29 July 1994 and forwarded to the UN Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, which in its turn has submitted it to the UN Commission on Human Rights for discussion in February 1995. Major changes can still be expected (Morris 1995) and there is some suspicion that indigenous peoples themselves may be left without adequate influence on them (Daes 1995).

As it is the rights of speakers of dominated languages which are being violated, the **elaboration of a universal declaration of linguistic human rights** is an urgent task. A good deal of the preparatory work for such a declaration has been undertaken, in professional associations, with some support from UNESCO (Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson 1994). A World Conference on Linguistic Rights is being held in Barcelona in June 1996, organized by the International PEN Committee and a European Union-funded centre for linguistic legislation, based in Barcelona. At this a proposed Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights, a comprehensive document covering conceptual clarification, rights in public administration, education and the media, culture and the socio-economic sphere will be passed and then submitted to governments and international organizations.

While such a document stresses the rights of the mother tongue, and proficiency in an official language, it is clear that western notions of language are not universally applicable. There is increasing documentation of the complexity of multilingualism worldwide<sup>xxiii</sup>, that education systems should be more responsive to and build on. Work on such a declaration should therefore involve scholars from a multiplicity of geographical, cultural and disciplinary backgrounds. A considerable amount of experience worldwide is now available.

If the world's languages are to contribute to social change and improvement, and their speakers to experience basic social justice, language policies in each state are needed that aim at building

on their linguistic resources, deciding which languages can contribute best from the bottom up to facilitate elementary education, participation and democratisation, and addressing the reality of multilingualism. (Structural changes in global relations are of course a necessity).

Such a policy will only emerge when there is a change of heart on the part of South leaders, many of whom endorse such principles in their rhetoric but fail to act on them. It also requires a change of policy on the part of the North development business, in trade and "aid".

As an absolute minimum for development work, it should be a requirement that any donor agency elaborates and follows a language policy that conforms to principles of linguistic human rights. Just as some development agencies aim to incorporate a gender dimension or a human rights dimension (e.g. many government departments and NGOs in Scandinavia), the language dimension should also be made explicit. This would imply, for instance, that any poverty-oriented projects would necessitate support to local languages. It would require that in aid to education there should be a major shift to teacher training, curriculum work and materials production in local languages rather than European languages. It would involve development personnel learning and using local languages to a much greater extent. Ultimately it is possible that the South could set the agenda for development work, and that this would lead to "the idea of diversified development as the prime goal instead of monocultural efficiency" (Jussila & Segerståhl 1988, 20).

While the historical record inevitably makes one sceptical about the quality and relevance of World Bank and other North development agencies' work, we would not wish to give the impression that all aid projects are necessarily doomed, nor that individual participants are unwitting stooges in a structure of North-South exploitation. The reality is more complex. There are doubtless many development projects that achieve some success, but few if any in top-down educational reform. There are elite education institutions in many South states which offer high quality education, but this invariably consolidates the linguistic hierarchy. There are scholars, for instance in India, who feel they are setting the agenda for externally funded projects. There are also NGOs which are attempting to resist the pattern of North-South dependency, sometimes with success<sup>xxiv</sup>. However, the position of such bodies tends to be marginal, with concomitant problems in "scaling up" their successes. There are also many individual scholars in the South who have analysed the failings of development efforts and some from the North who are working for change. A greater focus on ethical aspects of development would be a good starting-point.

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i To be exact, Boutros-Ghali **said and wrote**: "The right to live one's culture is among the most basic rights of life." (p. 3). Then he **said**: "Article 22 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone is entitled to realization of the cultural rights indispensable for dignity and the free development of personality. Thus, the Charter and the Universal Declaration establish culture and language as fundamental human rights" (our underlining). But the **written** text has nothing about language (p. 4): "... establish culture as a fundamental human right". And again, p. 8. "This, then, is the fundamental approach to culture as found in basic documents of the United Nations: every person has a fundamental right to his or her culture".

ii When considering the quality of science education, King refers (1991, 51) to a study of

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education in Tanzania which indicated that learners had too little English to enable them to benefit from the instruction, but this does not lead him to investigate language in education policy. See also our analysis of King's monolingual vision in an earlier study of African education, in Phillipson 1992, 240.

iii "Underdeveloped" is here used as in Walter Rodney's **How Europe underdeveloped Africa**, i.e. the development of the rich industrialized "North" entailed the conscious underdevelopment of the "South", a pattern that is generally still in place.

iv In linguistic imperialism, the dominance of a given language is asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between that language and other languages. Structural refers broadly to material properties (for example institutions, financial allocations) and cultural to immaterial or ideological properties (for example, attitudes and beliefs). Asymmetrical exploitation involves language learning and language use being subtractive rather than additive, for instance when competence in a dominant language entails the marginalization and loss of others (Phillipson 1992).

v See for instance its Annual Reports, and Djité 1993b.

vi Diglossia is a term used by linguists to describe the use of different languages or different variants of the same language (e.g. demotic or classical Arabic or Greek) for different social functions. Thus most Africans are ruled in a former colonial, European language, command of which is essential for functions in the "modern" economy and state, whereas other languages serve most other social purposes.

vii Article 17: The African States recognize the imperative need to develop African languages which will ensure their cultural advancement and accelerate their economic and social development and to this end will endeavour to formulate a national policy in regard to languages.

viii The **Language Plan of Action for Africa** was approved by African Heads of State in 1986, referring in its preamble to UNESCO expert advice. Article 17 states:

"a) to encourage each and every member state to have a clearly defined language policy;

b) to ensure that all languages within the boundaries of Member states are recognized and accepted as a source of mutual enrichment;

c) to liberate the African peoples from undue reliance on the utilization of non-indigenous languages as the dominant, official languages of the state in favour of the gradual take-over of appropriate and carefully selected indigenous African languages in this domain;

d) to ensure that African languages, by appropriate provision and practical promotions, assume their rightful role as the means of official communication in the public affairs of each Member State in replacement of European languages which have hitherto played this role;

e) to encourage the increased use of African languages as vehicles of instruction at all educational levels; ...".

ix This is a detailed study involving field work in several states (Jayaram & Rajyashree 1994). The authors regret the lack of coordination between language specialists, the private sector and politicians, and make suggestions for the kind of training that would assist policy implementation. They regard popular pressure and the involvement of intellectuals and journalists as important in facilitating executive commitment and the necessary political will.

x "More and more English medium schools are opened every year in the private sector including kindergarten schools and even poor parents pay high premium to get admission to their children in these schools. The students who opt for Indian language medium in higher education are a small minority and are poor scholastically and economically." (Annamalai 1994, 6; see also

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Annamalai 1995)

xi This summarizes a series of country-by-country reports in the World Bank series on Comparative African experiences in implementing educational policies. A World Bank survey of the failure of African governments to achieve declared educational goals stresses that understanding of the issues bearing on the implementation of educational policies in Sub-Saharan Africa remains seriously deficient (Craig 1990, 59).

xii UNICEF's main contribution was to warn that the policies were not serving the needs of all children, and to stress that use should be made of instruments of mass communication so as to make appropriate education available to all (King 1991, xiii). UNICEF is involved in several Indian projects as follow-up to the Jomtien conference, see details in "Education for all: the Indian scene", Department of Education, Government of India, 1993, a publication that UNICEF helped to fund.

xiii The same Indian policy document states that only 4.22 % of anticipated public expenditure on elementary education is externally funded (Department of Education, Government of India 1993, 27). For a country the size of India, this is a substantial figure, though it needs to be seen in the light of the funding of all levels of education and the priorities that the figures represent. Higher education is funded relatively more generously. According to World Bank figures, the cost of one tertiary education student in sub-Saharan Africa is, on average, equivalent to the cost of 60 primary school places (Foster 1989, 108).

xiv World Bank policy is "a tool to pave the way for western socio-economic and political structures. It envisions a poor and just rudimentary education for the great masses of Africans, the cheap labour force, and even wants to have poor parents subsidize the production of this labour force. It envisions private schools for the children of the elites. It wants Euro-American culture to be adopted as "academic standards" and have examination system developed in the west determine the "quality" of African students. It suggests "expert" assistance to Africa to work out educational plans in line with the recommendations of the WBG and insists that studies in over-seas countries undertaken by African students must be continued. When such an insistence is coupled with the reluctance to build up institutions of higher learning in Africa, to enable Africans to become producers of technology and knowledge instead of merely users, the World Bank Document may also be termed a recipe for: EDUCATION FOR UNDERDEVELOPMENT (Brock-Utne 1993, 87).

xv See Kozol 1991 on schools in diverse areas of the USA. In Britain the pattern is equally patchy: "Half the primary schools and two-fifths of secondary schools are failing to teach children to a satisfactory standard, the Office for Standards in Education said in its annual report on the condition of schooling in England". (*Guardian Weekly*, 11 February 1996).

xvi Article 55 commits its members to the promotion of higher standards of living, solutions to international economic, social, health and related problems and international cultural and educational cooperation, and universal respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. The same article also outlaws discrimination on the basis of language.

xvii "Minority" is a notoriously difficult concept. Partly, because there is, despite many attempts (see e.g. Capotorti 1979, Andrysek 1989, Packer 1993; see also Eide 1990, 1991, 1995b, Palley 1984) no legally accepted universal definition; partly because of the many connotations which place the concept differentially in several hierarchies. Many groups therefore do not wish to be called "minorities" but prefer other terms.

xviii See e.g. Akinnaso 1993, Brock-Utne 1993a,b, Obura 1986, Rubagumya 1990, 1991.

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xix The former colonial languages have indigenized and taken on new forms, functions and discourses, in variants of Indian English, Nigerian English etc. There is an extensive literature on this, see for instance the journal **World Englishes** and Kachru 1986. If local norms are accepted, in language as well as culture, the agenda is being set in the Periphery rather than the Centre. On the cultural politics of English as an international languages, see Pennycook 1994. On the myth of "one world", see Sachs 1992.

xx The objectives of the People's Communication Charter (see appendix in Hamelink 1994) are "to contribute to a critical understanding of the significance of communication in the daily lives of individuals and peoples... to bring to (national and international) policy making processes a set of claims that represent people's fundamental right to communicate" (ibid., 153).

xxi A major survey of the rights of minorities and their protection in universal covenants was conducted for the UN in the 1970s (Capotorti 1979) to analyse juridical and conceptual aspects of protection against discrimination, and to solicit information from governments worldwide so as to assess how minorities are treated *de jure* and *de facto*. Immigrant minorities were explicitly excluded from consideration. The report concluded that most minorities, not least linguistic ones, were in need of much more substantial protection. It stresses the key role of education through the medium of the mother tongue for linguistic and cultural maintenance and vitality.

xxii Capotorti and Stavenhagen's findings are confirmed in a study conducted by us of a range of relevant international covenants and national constitutions, to gauge to what extent these legal measures provide support for dominated languages, in particular in education. We devised a grid on which some of the important dimensions of language rights can be captured, in particular degree of overtness and degree of promotion, i.e. the extent to which a language is prohibited, tolerated or actively promoted, see Figure 1, Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson 1994, 80. What emerges is that in the covenants, the education clauses represent merely covert assimilation-oriented toleration of minority languages. Minorities are allowed to use their languages in private (or in non-specified settings with other members of the group), but not in schools. But see below for more promising "soft" law.

xxiii Akinnaso 1994, Desai 1995, Djité 1993a, Mohanty 1994, and contributions to Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson 1994 (eds.), etc.

xxiv For instance, Danish NGOs report success in land titling projects for indigenous Latin American peoples, and innovative reform of earth sciences in secondary schooling in Namibia.