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[This has both Amir Kalam's Introduction to the book and TSK's part]

Who's Afraid of Multilingual Education?

Four Conversations with Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, Jim Cummins, Ajit Mohanty, and Stephen Bahry about the Iranian Context and Beyond.

**Edited by
Amir Kalan**

Introduction

Since the 1970s mother tongue-based multilingual education has been a serious focus of attention in educational research communities and among policy makers in most countries in the world. With the failure of European colonial discourses—which resulted in tragedies such as slavery in North America and mistreatment of aboriginal populations in different parts of the world from Canada to Australia—educational leaders, researchers, and educators have become sensitive to the importance of the cultures, languages, and identities of minority students. Moreover, with globalization gaining momentum, unprecedented waves of immigration have turned most large cities into multicultural societies dealing with multilingualism as the normal linguistic status in urban life. Also, digital devices and the Internet have smoothed exchange of culture and language in ways never experienced before. With all these developments, a question of the place of students' cultural, literate and linguistic backgrounds in education, including their mother tongues, is indeed a very relevant question. Mother tongue-based multilingual education, accordingly, has been an important topic of conversation in most parts of the world.

Iran, nevertheless, has been an exception. Although multiculturalism and multilingualism—with more than 70 languages spoken in Iran (Ethnologue, 2015)—are crucial elements of Iranian life, there has been very little attention to multilingual education in Iran both in Iranian academia and Western academic centres. The political and financial isolation of Iran, partly as a result of Iranian foreign policy and partly because of Western sanctions, have closed academic channels of communication between Iran and the West. Also within Iran, despite the demands of minorities and the endeavours of language activists, serious explorations of issues regarding multilingual education have been hindered for political reasons. The Iranian political system is highly centralized and speculations about using students' mother tongues as the

medium of instruction have typically been silenced and treated as separatist desires. This book attempts to underline the importance of creating mother tongue-based multilingual schools in Iran by adding the voices of established international scholars and academics to the mother tongue debate in Iran.

Importance of More Serious Attention to Multilingual Education in Iran

Much has been written about the importance of instruction in mother tongues as subjects and teaching through the medium of mother tongues. Scholars and educators have discussed multilingual education particularly with a focus on social justice and the empowerment of minority students (García, Skutnabb-Kangas, & Torres-Guzmán, 2006; Schecter & Cummins, 2003; Skutnabb-Kangas, 1984; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2009; Skutnabb-Kangas & Heugh, 2012). Researchers have also frequently written about the importance of using students' home languages in the process of teaching and learning in conversations about bilingual education (Baker & García, 2006; Soltero, 2004), heritage language education (Cummins & Danesi, 1990; Polinsky, 2011), and minority education (Skutnabb-Kangas & Cummins, 1988).

Since the 1970s, issues and challenges involved in multilingual education and multilingualism have been discussed in the Anglo-American world with their problematic colonial legacy, histories of slavery, mistreatment of aboriginal populations, and continual waves of immigration; in post-war European countries, negotiating new identities after the failures of modern nation state discourses; in postcolonial nations such as countries in Africa and Asia in order to revive native identities; and in multiethnic multilingual civilizations such as India and China. Iran, nevertheless, has had very little share of this exchange of ideas and experiences.

Much, for instance, has been written about multilingual education in the US (Crawford, 2000; Dicker, 2003) and Canada (Allen & Swain, 1984; Shapson & D'Oyley, 1984). There are also many publications about multilingualism in Europe. Next to the literature that discusses multilingual education in Europe in general (Busch, 2011), specific contexts in Europe have also been focused on. For example, Björklund, Björklund, and Sjöholm (2013) wrote about multilingualism in the Nordic Countries. In another example, the Basque Country with its intense struggles for linguistic rights and rich experiences with reviving the Basque language has also received much academic attention (Cenoz, 2008; Cenoz, 2012; Urla, 2012).

In a similar fashion, postcolonial nations have a significant share in the literature about multilingual education. Much has been published about multilingual education in Africa (Alexander, 1989; Bamgbose, 2014; Hibbert, 2014; Kamwangamalu, 2005; McIlwraith, 2013; Okedara & Okedara, 1992). South Asian countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, and Sri Lanka have also shared their experiences in this regard with the international research community (Benson & Kosonen, 2013; Bokhorst-Heng & Caleon, 2009; Chong & Seilhamer, 2014; Davis, 2012; Gill, 2013; Lal & Xiaomei, 2011).

India and China, historical civilizational cousins of Iran, have not been left out of the international debate about mother tongue-based multilingual education either. Similar to Iran, India and China have always been multiethnic, multicultural, and multilingual civilizations. They also have long histories of educational practices dealing with multilingualism as well as rich multilingual literatures reflecting their experiments with multilingual education in different historical periods. Also, like Iran, India and China borrowed models for their modern educational systems from the West at the peak of the dominance of the European “nation state” discourse with its emphasis on “one language” for a “unified nation” and have had to deal with its

unpleasant consequences for native tongues in education systems (although Indian policies regarding multilingual education have been much more flexible than Iran and China even during the colonial period). Unlike the academic silence about multilingualism in Iran, much has been said about multilingual education in India (Khubchandani, 1981; MacKenzie, 2009; Mohanty, 2010b; Mohanty & Skutnabb-Kangas, 2013; Pattanayak, 2014; Rao, 2013). China also has had its share of this conversation (Feng, 2007). A serious focus on multilingual education, mother tongue instruction, and linguistic human rights in Iran, however, seems to be almost entirely absent in academic literature written in English—and similarly in Farsi for limitations imposed by politics.

Although the rich diversity of Iranian languages and their historical developments have been studied by linguists (Ingham, 2006; Windfuhr, 2009), there has been significantly less attention to the linguistic rights of speakers of minority languages in Iran, Iranian languages in educational contexts, the place of students' modern tongues in Iranian classrooms, the struggles of modern tongue activists in Iran, and the debates over the above issues in academic in Iran. There are some publications with references to multilingualism in Iran (Bayat, 2005; Hayati & Mashhadi, 2010; Perry, 1985; Sheyholislami, 2012), yet the contents of these publications—which are typically broad and introductory—have hardly been reflected in mainstream literature about multilingual education. In my review of literature for this book, I failed to see reports of any empirical studies conducted in Iranian schools—neither large-scale quantitative studies nor qualitative ethnographic cases. It should, however, be mentioned that recently a small number of (often unpublished) graduate dissertations have reported results of empirical studies conducted by Iranian students studying in European and North America universities (Hoominfar, 2014).

Considering the meagreness of literature about multilingual education in Iran, lack of attention to the issue, and serious challenges for conducting empirical projects, this book tries to breathe some life into the mother tongue debate in Iran by inviting some experienced and established international scholars to share their thoughts about multilingual education and linguistic human rights in Iran in four interviews. This interaction could be useful for both Western academics interested in multilingual education and Iranian researchers, educators, and mother tongue activists.

The Iranian Context

In contemporary Iran more than 70 languages are spoken (Ethnologue, 2015). One of today's variations of the Persian language, Farsi is believed to be the mother tongue of almost half of the population of Iran (around forty million people). Next to Farsi, other Iranian languages with large number of speakers include Kurdish, Luri, Baluchi, and Gilaki. Among these languages, Kurdish and Baluchi loom large in the mother tongue debate in Iran. The majority of speakers of these two languages are Sunni Muslims, religious minorities in a country run by a Shiite government which considers Shiism as one of its ideological pillars. In this context, reflections about linguistic discrimination against Kurdish and Baluchi speaking minorities are inextricably intertwined with other political, social, and cultural problems.

In addition to Iranian languages, there are two other linguistic families in Iran. First, different variations of Turkic languages are widely spoken in Iran. The best representative of the Turkic languages in Iran is Azari Turkish (or *Torki* as pronounced in the language). Although a non-Iranian language, *Torki* should hardly be considered a minority language in today's Iran; almost 30 million people speak the language both in Iran's Azerbaijan and in Persian areas of central Iran through mass Azari migration especially to Tehran, the capital. In comparison with

the Kurds, *Torki* speakers have been more visibly assimilated into the mainstream cultural and political circles; nevertheless, like other minorities they have never been allowed to use *Torki* in schools as the medium of instruction.

Second, although with fewer speakers, Semite languages (such as Arabic, Assyrian, and Hebrew) are also spoken in Iran. Among these languages, the situation of speakers of Arabic in Iran is rather complicated. Although Arabic is spoken by a relatively small population (less than 2%), the impact of Arabic on Iranian culture through the Muslim invasion and the uncomfortable history between the Persians and the Arabs have left the speakers of Arabic in Iran in a sensitive and vulnerable situation. Iranian Arabs have been exposed to racial and linguistic *othering*, being regarded as cultural invaders. Despite the complexities of the histories and conditions of the languages mentioned above, the speakers of all these languages face a common problem:

Although Iranian minorities have clearly articulated their concerns about their linguistic human rights, they have never been able to use their languages in schools as medium of instruction since the establishment of the modern Iranian education system, whose models were borrowed from the West at the beginning of the twentieth century.

All the civilizations in the long history of the Iranian Plateau, including today's Iran, have been essentially cultural and linguistic mosaics. Despite the visible impact of a variety of linguistic contacts—the most important of which might be the influence of Arabic vocabulary on Persian (and other Iranian languages) after the Arab invasion in the seventh century—the peoples of Iran have managed to protect many of their languages.

A social concern surrounding the importance of mother tongue in education became a distinct sociocultural and political discourse in Iran when, roughly after the Constitutional Revolution in 1906, the Iranian governments adopted a policy of centralization following the

European political philosophies that advocated the creation of nation states. The contemporary problem of the dominance of the Persian language in Iran mainly started due the policies of Reza Shah, the founder of the Pahlavi Dynasty (1925-1979). During Reza Shah's reign, Farsi became the dominant language of the country, the medium of instruction in schools, and the only channel of linguistic communication in governmental offices. In this period although the Fundamental Law (*Qanun-e Asasi-e Mashruteh*) did not declare Farsi as the official language, Farsi literacy became a requirement for civil service and official positions. Since Reza Shah's days, the mother tongue problem has remained practically the same: Farsi is the only official language with tens of other languages that are, openly or covertly, deemed less important than Farsi.

After the Iranian Revolution in 1979, led by Ayatollah Khomeini, Reza Shah's nationalist narrative was replaced by Khomeini's idea of an Islamic civilization whose borders, he had hoped, would not remain limited to today's Iran. Khomeini had explicit intentions of exporting the revolution to all nations in the Islamic world. This plan might appear to have required more linguistic flexibility than Reza Shah's attempt to create a uniquely Persian identity; nevertheless, the policy of one language for a united nation remained intact and the speakers of minority languages hardly experienced more linguistic freedom.

In today's Iran the only legal shelter for Iranian minority languages is a section in the Constitution commonly referred to as Clause 15. Clause 15 can be summarized as follows: (1) The Farsi language is the official language of the country; accordingly, all governmental correspondence and educational textbooks should be written in Farsi. (2) Ethnic minorities can use their own languages in the local media and press. (3) The children of the members of ethnic minorities can study their own literatures at school. "Literatures" in this sentence is generally interpreted as folk literature and arts as a core subject in schools rather than an indication of the

legality of receiving education through the medium of the mother tongue. Some, also, argue that “literatures” can include students’ mother tongues but as long as they are taught as core subjects and independent courses and not used as the medium of instruction.

There is a general consensus among Iranian historians and intellectuals that despite the colonial tendencies of Persian civilization and evidence of discrimination against minority cultures in the region, the experiences of minority populations in Iran have not been as bitter as the experiences of minorities in the West. For example, Iranian minorities have never experienced anything similar to Residential Schools in Canada. Iranian ethnicities, moreover, have not been moved out of their lands and, despite numerous military conflicts, there are no examples like slavery in the US or forms of ethnic cleansing such as the Holocaust in Europe. On the other hand, however, children have been prevented from speaking their own languages at school (and sometimes have been punished for that), gatherings of people to protect minority cultures have been seriously interrupted, and language activists have been arrested.

Methods

In everyday speech the words “Farsi” and “Persian” are usually used with the same meaning. However, in more careful writing and speech the choice between “Farsi” and “Persian”—and its other contemporary variations such as *Dari* spoken in Afghanistan and *Tajiki* spoken in Tajikistan—might be motivated by political sensitivities and historical power relations, a detailed description of which would be beyond the scope of this book. All through this book the words “Persian” and “Farsi” have been used to mean the following.

“The Persian language” in this book refers to the main linguistic body used by the Persians and other nations, peoples, and ethnicities that have borrowed and used the language in any form. In this sense, “Persian” can include different variations of the language including Old

Persian, Middle Persian and *Pahlavi* (a Middle Persian language and script), Classic Persian (Persian used after the Arab Invasion), *Dari*, and *Tajiki*. “Farsi” in this book refers to the contemporary Persian spoken in the Persian areas of Iran. Also, in the context of education policy, “the Farsi language” in this book refers to the contemporary Persian, which is to be taught, by law, to all K-12 students in the country and to be used as the main medium of instruction in any classroom in Iran regardless of what students’ mother tongues are. Standard Farsi in this sense is generally deemed the Farsi spoken by educated middle-class people mainly in Tehran and the Farsi broadcast from nation-wide state TV and radio stations.

The mother tongue debate in Iran is extremely insular and has remained far from the international scholarly and educational exchanges of ideas about multilingual education. This isolation has impacted the Iranian intelligentsia so much that at times their conversations sound as if the problem of the mother tongue in Iran were an entirely Iranian issue and there were nothing they could learn from international experiences. Moreover, because of the political restrictions, not many empirical studies have been allowed to be conducted on multilingualism and the experiences of multilingual students in Iran. As a result of this scarcity of empirical research, academic communication between Iranian and international academics and educators has not been established in stable and meaningful ways. The above circumstances have rendered the mother tongue debate in Iran very local, which consequently has left Iranian language activists in a vulnerable position inasmuch as their arguments are treated as separatist desires rather than linguistic rights that have similarly been fought for in different nations all over the world. This book is an attempt to bring the debate in Iran onto the international academic stage by inviting four prominent international scholars to add their thoughts, their experiences, and

their voices to the mother tongue debate in Iran. The four interviews in this book were conducted as follows.

Over three hundred documents were combed in order to identify the arguments used in Iran against the use of mother tongue as the medium of instruction in the classroom. These documents included policy documents, bylaws, and statements published by governmental institutions, chief among them the Ministry of Education and the Academy of Persian Language and Literature, whose members have been very vocal against any form of mother tongue-based multilingual education. As importantly, the publications and public statements of influential intellectual and cultural figures who opposed the use of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction were also studied in search for their arguments in favour of Persian-only schools. Since there are few empirical studies on multilingualism in Iran, most these arguments were extracted from the media and the press—mainly in newspaper article and TV interview formats. Regardless of the academic rigour observed in these conversations, these ideas have been extremely impactful since they have reached a wide audience through the mass media. In the last step of the process, these arguments, sorted in themes, were critically discussed in interviews with four international scholars, of whom I will talk later in more detail.

Broadly speaking, there are four main groups of arguments against mother tongue-based multilingual education in Iran: (1) the necessity of one single official language for unifying numerous ethnicities in the country, (2) fears of separatist movements encouraged by foreign powers and neocolonial designs, (3) the unique linguistic and cultural advantages of Farsi over the other languages spoken in Iran, and (4) logistical challenges making an actual change towards multilingual education practically impossible.

Using a single language for a unified nation might be one of the oldest arguments against multilingual education, but it is still widely popular in Iran not only among policy makers but also among academics, intellectuals, and even within influential figures in the opposition and the diaspora. The supporters of Farsi as the only official language and the only medium of instruction refer to the experiences of other nations in the world and argue that many other multilingual nations have also accepted the dominance of one official language as a pragmatic measure. They, for instance, refer to Spanish speakers in the United States and claim that they have accepted English as the official language as a natural move in the process of assimilation for the sake of the unity of their country. Farsi supporters invite the speakers of minority languages in Iran to accept the status of Farsi as the official language of the country as a pragmatic move to unify the nation as has been, they claim, repeatedly practiced in other parts of the world.

The second group of arguments warns against separatism. The supporters of Farsi as the only medium of instruction fear that providing linguistic rights will strengthen separatist desires within minorities. They particularly emphasize that the separatist movements in Iran have been guided—or at least taken advantage of—by external neocolonial and regional powers.

Third, the supporters of Farsi as the main medium of instruction argue that Farsi has unique linguistic characteristics that make Farsi the best language in the country for education, science, and commerce. They argue that Farsi is a linguistic amalgam of all the languages spoken in the Iranian Plateau and thus belongs to every minority. In other words, they claim, Farsi is the Iranian Esperanto constructed by all minority languages. Moreover, with an emphasis on the long history of written Persian and its wide repertoire of different genres, they claim that no other language in the country can facilitate expression and communication better than Farsi.

Using Farsi with such an intellectual infrastructure, they maintain, guarantees the success of both the individual and the society.

The final theme in the arguments against replacing the current Farsi-only system with multilingual schools includes views holding that multilingual education is not a bad idea but it is impractical. They argue that employing different mother tongues in the educational system is not feasible because of two reasons. It is an unbearably expensive affair, which will make the provinces with minority groups, generally living in less prosperous areas than Persian areas, even more destitute. Also, considering the large number of languages spoken in Iran and also the multilingual nature of each province with different languages and dialects and accents, it would be impossible, if not unfair, to elevate status of a few languages like Turkish and Kurdish to pretend that the mother tongue issue has been solved.

Although these arguments, and their variations, are discussed in this book as local concerns in Iran, they indeed echo universal views that have not been friendly towards bilingualism and multilingualism for different reasons and in different places. In the US context for instance, the same ideas have been prevalent among the advocates of English-only schools all through American history (Crawford, 2000; Wiley, 2007) and have continued up the present with great impact on policy making. One regularly cited example would be the California Proposition 227 (1998) bill, by whose mandate most bilingual education was dismantled in the State of California (Crawford, 2007). The conversations in this book thus might appeal to a larger audience than Iranian academics and educators including anyone interested in issues regarding multilingual education and multilingualism. This appeal to an international audience might be felt better by the knowledge of the fact that the experts who I have interviewed, in their response to the Iranian situation, have touched upon a large number of topics concerning multilingual

education in a variety of places including North America, Europe, India, China, and Central Asia.

The arguments for Frasi-only schools in Iran, extracted from articles, documents, and interviews in the manner described above, were discussed in four conversations with the following scholars: Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, Jim Cummins, Ajit Mohanty, and Stephen Bahry. In our conversations, these scholars were invited to comment on the arguments made by the supporters of the supremacy of Farsi and its role as the only medium of instruction in all Iranian schools drawing upon their research and experiences. In order to create a logical progression of the topics in the books, the interviews are presented in the following order. First, in an interview with Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, we focus on policy and legal complexities regarding linguistic human rights. This conversation helps the readers continue reading the book with theoretical frameworks that can shed light on the rest of topics, which are more pedagogically oriented and focus on certain geographical places. In the second interview, Jim Cummins responds to the questions with a pedagogical edge. While reflecting on policies regarding multilingual education in Iran, Jim Cummins also speaks about the pedagogies that can foster educationally nurturing conditions for speakers of minority languages. In the two final chapters, Ajit Mohanty and Stephen Bahry, in response to the Iranian situation, focus on multilingual education in two civilizations that bear close historical, cultural, and political similarities to Iran. In the third interview, Ajit Mohanty speaks about multilingual education in India and in the last interview Stephen Bahry shares his views about multilingual education in China and Central Asia.

Tove Skutnabb-Kangas famously conceptualized the idea of linguistic discrimination as *linguistic human rights* and *linguistic genocide* (Curdt-Christiansen, 2004; Skutnabb-kangas, 2012; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2006; Skutnabb-Kangas, Phillipson, & Rannut, 1994; Skutnabb-

Kangas, 2000). She has been a prominent figure in creating the foundations of what is known today as mother tongue-based multilingual education. Her endeavours have been extremely instrumental in creating frameworks that can empower minority groups and disadvantaged populations by valuing their mother tongues, local languages, and consequently their identities and cultures (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2009; Skutnabb-Kangas, 1994; Skutnabb-Kangas & Cummins, 1988; Skutnabb-Kangas & Heugh, 2012). In this book, Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, shares her evaluation of the Iranian policies on multilingualism and multilingual education and responds to the advocates of the dominance of Farsi in schools.

Jim Cummins' contributions to multilingual education have been substantial and far-reaching (Cummins, 2001a). His impact can be quite visibly seen all over the world. Next to the creation of theoretical frameworks that have been borrowed by researchers and academics, Jim Cummins' work has informed and has highlighted best examples of multilingual pedagogy. He has showed that additional language learners in monolingual schools are at a disadvantage because learning academic linguistic skills takes significantly more time than developing basic communication skills (Cummins, 2008; Cummins, 1981). He has written about student identity emphasizing the necessity of the presence of students' mother tongues—as an essential component of student identity—in the process of teaching and learning (Cummins, 1994; Cummins, 2011a; Cummins, 2001b). He has talked about *literacy engagement* and how important access to print, including multilingual texts in diverse schools, in the process of literacy learning is (Cummins, Mirza, & Stille, 2012; Cummins, 2011b). Also, he has created the concept *identity texts* to underline text production activities that can incorporate students' identities, backgrounds, cultures, and literacies into the process of learning and that can challenge the power relations that tend to keep minority students disadvantaged and in a

vulnerable position (Cummins et al., 2005; Cummins & Early, 2011). Jim Cummins in this book critiques the arguments that support Farsi-only schools and offers recommendations for improving the situation of minority languages in Iranian schools.

Ajit Mohanty is a well-known Indian scholar who has been researching on and writing about multilingualism in general and multilingual education in India in particular (Mohanty, 1990; Mohanty & Perregaux, 1997; Mohanty, 2006; Mohanty, Mishra, Reddy, & Ramesh, 2009; Mohanty, 2010a). He has written about the dynamics and challenges of creating multilingual educational systems in India. He, for instance, has been heavily involved in supporting multilingual schools in India's Odisha. Iran and India share many cultural and historical similarities. These civilizations have always been multilingual, multiethnic, and multicultural societies. Also, both of these countries have had to struggle with the legacy of importing modern Western educational models, which were not particularly considerate of students' native languages and cultures. A conversation with an Indian scholar of the stature of Ajit Mohanty, thus, can indeed inform any study of multilingualism in Iran. The same is also true about multilingualism in China and Central Asia, which motivated me to invite Stephen Bahry to contribute to this project.

Stephen Bahry has extensively researched and written about language education in China and Central Asia (Bahry, Niyozov, & Shamatov, 2008; Bahry, Darkhor, & Luo, 2009; Bahry, 2005; Niyozov & Bahry, 2006). The mother tongue debate in Iran has surprisingly remained out of touch with language issues in China, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, and Azerbaijan. In the same manner, multilingualism in most of the above countries has remained under-researched in Western academia. Stephen Bahry's research reveals histories and experiences that can enrich the mother tongue debate in Iran and at the same time inform Western readers interested in

multilingual education about topics not typically covered in mainstream multilingual education research. Stephen Bahry's contribution to this book is very important in that historical developments in China and especially Central Asia are directly related to sociocultural and sociopolitical life in Iran.

After the concluding chapter that follows the interviews, Jaffer Sheyholislami also adds an afterword to the book. Sheyholislami is a Kurdish linguist teaching and researching at Carleton University in Canada. He has publications on the Kurdish language and Kurdish identity. He has particularly written some important articles about Iranian Kurdish.

Mother tongue-based multilingual education, similar to other dimensions of multicultural education, is tightly connected to critical pedagogy, anti-racism, and social justice (Nieto & Bode, 2008). The topics discussed in this book are crucially important for the education of millions of children in Iran, particularly at this historical crossroads when the Middle East is rapidly transforming. The dedication of the above esteemed scholars to multilingual education and their generous response to my invitation for supporting this project emboldened me to think of publishing this book. I hope these interviews can open new horizons in the mother tongue debate in Iran, establish better communication between Iranian and international educators, and contribute to the ongoing conversation about multilingualism in the international research community.

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**Mother-Tongue Based Multilingual Education: Legal Frameworks, Theoretical Legacies,
and Historical Experiences**
A Conversation with Tove Skutnabb-Kangas

Amir Kalan: You have studied different forms of *linguistic genocide* and violations of *linguistic human rights* in a variety of geographical contexts. Both of these concepts have been borrowed and applied to Iranian languages by ethnic human rights activists, which has received much criticism from writers and policy makers who regard these frameworks as unfit for Iranian civilization.

- 1. Do you see instances of linguistic genocide or abuse of linguistic human rights in the Iranian context as a result of the spread and dominance of the Persian language and its contemporary variation Farsi?**

TSK: Yes, there are clear instances of violation of educational rights, violation of linguistic human rights in education, and linguistic genocide, both in the history and today, even if Iran can be said to fare a bit better in comparison with Turkey. It should become clear when looking at *the right to education, linguistic human rights in education, and linguistic genocide*. Skutnabb-Kangas & Dunbar (2010), Chapter 2 (especially 2.2), and Chapter 6 give thorough definitions and descriptions of them, with many empirical examples from all over the world, relating them to international law. Here I give a very short summary of the main points, based on Skutnabb-Kangas & Dunbar 2010. Most of this is direct quotes where I have only changed a few expressions like “in this book” (referring to the Skutnabb-Kangas & Dunbar 2010, hereafter TSK & RD 2010).

The *right to education* was referred to in Article 26 of the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** (the “Universal Declaration”) (<http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>), adopted on 10 December 1948 by the United Nations General Assembly: although the Universal Declaration is not a treaty and, like other General Assembly declarations, not strictly binding, it is nonetheless a fundamentally important international instrument. Paragraph 1 of Article 26 guarantees the right of everyone to education. Paragraph 2 provides that such education “shall be directed to the full development of the human personality”, and “shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial and religious groups”.

Like other provisions of the Universal Declaration, the right to education was given a binding legal basis in one of the two major United Nations human rights treaties of 1966:¹ it is set out in Article 13 of the **International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights** (the “ICESCR”) (<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/cescr.htm>). Paragraph 1 adds reference to “ethnic groups” as well as all nations, racial and religious groups. It also notes that education shall also “enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society”.

Of perhaps even greater importance than Article 13 of the ICESCR are the provisions on education in the United Nations’ **Convention on the Rights of the Child** of 1989 (the “CRC”), the other major UN treaty which makes reference to the right to education. The CRC is the most

¹The **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights** (the “ICCPR”) (<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/ccpr.htm>), and the **International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights** (the “ICESCR”).

widely ratified of all the UN human rights treaties; the only states that have not ratified it as by 20 November 2014 are Somalia and the United States of America. The basic right to education is set out in Article 28, paragraph 1, in which the States parties to the CRC recognise the right of the child to education. Article 29 goes beyond Article 26 of the Universal Declaration and Article 13 of the ICESCR in important respects, however. In addition to providing in subparagraph (b) that education shall be directed to the development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, subparagraph (d) stipulates that education should be directed to the development of respect for the child's parents, *his or her own cultural identity, language and values*, as well as for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own. Furthermore, Article 30 makes specific reference to minority and indigenous children; drawing considerably on Article 27 of the 1966 United Nations' **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights** (the "ICCPR")—the famous "minorities" provision of that fundamentally important treaty—Article 30 provides as follows:

In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities or persons of indigenous origin exist, a child belonging to such a minority or who is indigenous shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of his or her own group, to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practice his or her own religion, *or to use his or her own language*.² (emphasis added)

It is important to note that the right to education is also recognized in a number of important regional human rights treaties. For example in Article 2 of the First Optional Protocol of 1952 to the Council of Europe's **Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms** of 1950 (the **European Convention on Human Rights**, or the "ECHR") (<http://conventions.coe.int/treaty/en/Treaties/Html/005.htm>), in Article 17 of the **African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights** of 1981 (the "African Charter") (<http://www.hrcr.org/docs/Banjul/afchr.html>), in Article 11 of the **African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child** of 1990 (available at: <http://www.africa-union.org/child/home.htm>), and in Article 13 of the **Additional Protocol to the American Convention on Human Rights** (<http://www.oas.org/juridico/English/treaties/a-52.html>) (see TSK & RP 2010 for details).

What is noticeable from the foregoing is that no direct reference is made in any of these provisions to a right to education in or through the medium of any particular language or,

²Although not specifically directed to education, Article 17 of the CRC is also worth noting. Under it, States party to the treaty recognise the important function performed by the mass media, and requires States to ensure that the child has access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources, especially those aimed at the promotion of his or her social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health. To this end, States are required to do a number of things, including, under paragraph (d), to encourage the mass media to have particular regard to the *linguistic needs of the child who belongs to a minority group or who is indigenous*. This has obvious implications for broadcasting policy, but also emphasises the sympathy which the CRC has to the linguistic identity and needs of minority and indigenous children, a point of relevance to the interpretation of the scope of the provisions of Articles 28 to 30 relating to education.

specifically, to education in or through the medium of the mother tongue of the child. But this issue has been considered in several important court cases (see TSK & RP 2010 for examples).

There are other aspects of the right to education, as set out in the various UN instruments (and in many of the regional ones) referred to above which are relevant to this discussion. As we have seen, a common feature of the UN instruments which create a right to education is the requirement that such education be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity (see Art. 13, para. 1, of the ICESCR), or, in the terms of the relevant CRC provision, to the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential (Art. 29, subpara. 1(a)). Based on the evidence set out in Skutnabb-Kangas & Dunbar 2010 with regard to the wide range of seriously harmful consequences of various forms of submersion education³ for such development, with resulting impact on employment prospects, mental and physical health, and life chances generally, TSK & RD submit that such forms of submersion education are completely inconsistent with this aspect of the right to education. Further, given the significant evidence presented in TSK & RD 2010 about the very important contribution that mother-tongue-based multilingual education for ITM children (ITM = Indigenous, Tribal, Minority and Minoritized children) makes to their cognitive, emotional (including identity-related), academic and social development, TSK & RD 2010 are of the view that this MTM education, and particularly in the early years of education, is absolutely essential to the *full* development of ITM children. Therefore, TSK & D submit that not only is it implicitly required by the basic right to education, but that *only* MTM education, at least in primary school, is consistent with the relevant treaty provisions. This is because any other form of education tends not to guarantee the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity, nor does it enable children who are subject to non-MTM education to participate as effectively in society.

There are certain provisions of the CRC that are of particular importance: once again, TSK & RD would emphasise the wide scope of these binding obligations, as virtually every State in the international community have ratified this treaty. As already noted, Article 28, subparagraph 1(e) requires States parties to take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates. We know, as is discussed elsewhere in TSK & RD 2010, that the effects of enforced dominant language medium educational policies, and particularly submersion education, tend to result not only in considerably poorer performance results but also higher levels of non-completion, and so forth. Thus, the pursuit of such policies would clearly frustrate and arguably violate Article 28, subparagraph 1(e). As also noted above, Article 29, subparagraph 1(c) of the CRC provides that education of the child shall be directed "to the development of respect for the child's parents, *his or her own cultural identity, language and values*", among other things. It seems obvious that an education in a language other than the child's mother tongue (or, if absolutely necessary, another extremely well known language) which contains no recognition of that mother tongue is highly unlikely to contribute to respect for the child's own cultural identity, language and values. Given that such forms of education are clearly premised upon the superiority of the dominant language and culture and are intended or

³ In **submersion/"sink-or-swim" programs**, linguistic minority children with a low-status mother tongue are forced to accept instruction through a foreign majority/official/dominant language, in classes in which the teacher does not understand the minoritised mother tongue, and in which the dominant language constitutes a threat to that language, which runs the risk of being replaced; a *subtractive* language learning situation (Skutnabb-Kangas & McCarty 2008; see it also for other definitions relevant for this article).

have the effect of convincing ITM children of this, we would argue that such education violates the provisions of Article 29, subparagraph 1(c). Indeed, we would suggest that only MTM education can adequately ensure the development of the respect that is required by those provisions.

Finally, with regard to the language of instruction, the extremely important recent General Comment of the treaty body established under the CRC, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, with regard to Indigenous children and their rights under the CRC is vital.⁴ The **Committee** could hardly have been more clear and categorical:

Article 30 of the [CRC] establishes the right of the indigenous child to use his or her own language. *In order to implement this right, education in the child's own language is essential.* Article 28 of the ILO Convention No. 169 (discussed further in TSK & RD 2010) affirms that indigenous children shall be taught to read and write in their own language besides being accorded the opportunity to attain fluency in the official languages of the country. *Bilingual and inter-cultural curricula are important criteria for the education of indigenous children.* Teachers of indigenous children should to the extent possible be recruited from within indigenous communities and given adequate support and training. (para. 62)

It is therefore clear that MTM education is viewed by the Committee on the Rights of the Child as being essential and required under the CRC; as noted, given that the CRC is the single most widely-ratified treaty, and therefore arguably the single most important source of binding legal obligations in respect of education, General Comment No. 11 represents a huge step forward.

To summarise, reference can be made to the work of Katarina Tomaševski (the former United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, e.g. 2004). Under the subtitle “Schooling can be deadly”, she claims that translating what rights-based education means from vision to reality “requires the identification and abolition of contrary practices” (2004, para. 50). This is rendered difficult by two assumptions: “One important reason is the assumption that getting children into schools is the end rather than a means of education, and an even more dangerous assumption that any schooling is good for children”. TSK & RD 2010 have outlined in Section 4.1 of their book how the present practices of educating ITM children through the medium of dominant national/state languages are completely contrary to solid theories and research results about how best to achieving the four goals for good education outlined in the first part of TSK & RD 2010. In addition, they also violate the parents’ right to intergenerational transmission of their values, including their languages. In Tomaševski’s views (2004, para. 5), the impact of a rights-based education should be “assessed by the contribution it makes to the enjoyment of all human rights”. “International human rights law demands substitution of the previous requirement upon children to adapt themselves to whatever education was available by adapting education to the best interests of each child” (2004, para. 54). The right to use one’s own language is made impossible if the children lose it during the educational process.

⁴ General Comment No. 11 (2009), “Indigenous children and their rights under the Convention”, Committee on the Rights of the Child, Fiftieth session, 12-30 January, 2009: Document CRC/C/GC/11 (http://www.crin.org/docs/GC.11_indigenous_New.pdf).

Robert Dunbar and I wrote (with some support from Board members) two Expert papers for the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (see references to Magga, Nicolaisen, Trask, Dunbar & Skutnabb-Kangas 2005, and Dunbar & Skutnabb-Kangas 2008). In the second Expert paper, we were particularly concerned with the human cost of the subtractive educational policies⁵. There is a wealth of evidence of the suffering and intense mental and, often, physical harm that has resulted to ITM children from such policies. It is clear that governments are often aware of these and other adverse effects of forcing ITM children to be educated through the medium of the dominant language. That States persist in such policies, given such knowledge, has been described as a form of linguistic and/or cultural genocide, and, in the words of Rodolfo Stavenhagen 1990, 1995), “ethnocide”.⁶

The structural constraints limiting minority parents’ agency⁷, also in Iran, may include education that promotes linguistic genocide. The United Nations *International Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide* (E793, 1948) has five definitions of genocide. At least two of them, possibly three, are relevant for ITM education:

Article II(e): 'forcibly transferring children of the group to another group'; and
Article II(b): 'causing serious bodily *or mental* harm to members of the group'; (emphasis added).

Can most Indigenous and minority education in the world be claimed to participate in committing linguistic and cultural genocide, according to the genocide definitions in the UN Genocide Convention? Can it be seen as a crime against humanity? Robert Dunbar’s (human rights lawyer) and my first Expert paper for the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (Magga et al., see above) contains sociological and legal argumentation which shows that to educate Indigenous/tribal and minority (ITM) children through a dominant language in a submersion or even early-exit transitional programme violates the human right to education (see above about this right in international law). In addition, subtractive dominant-language medium education for ITM children

- prevents access to education, because of the linguistic, pedagogical and psychological barriers it creates. Thus it violates the right to education;
- often curtails the development of the children’s capabilities, and perpetuates thus poverty (see economics Nobel laureate Amartya Sen);
- is organized *against solid research evidence* about how best to reach high levels of bilingualism or multilingualism and how to enable these children to achieve academically in school.

In our second Expert paper (Dunbar & Skutnabb-Kangas 2008) we went into more detail in considering to what extent such subtractive educational policies, implemented in the full knowledge of their devastating effects on those who suffer them, may constitute international crimes, including genocide, within the meaning of the United Nations’ 1948 *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide* (the ‘Genocide Convention’) and other

⁵ SUBTRACTIVE teaching, using the dominant language as the teaching language **replaces minority children’s mother tongue**. It **subtracts** from the children’s linguistic repertoire

⁶ "Linguistic Genocide" is also, in addition to ethnocide, an independent entry in Macmillan's recent *Encyclopedia of Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity* (see Skutnabb-Kangas 2005).

⁷ See Ahearn 2010: 28-33 for a reflective discussion on agency and structural constraints.

international documents. That States persist in such subtractive policies, given such knowledge, can, it is concluded, *from an educational and sociological point of view* be described as a form of linguistic and cultural genocide.

Dominant-language medium education for ITM children can cause serious physical and mental harm. Subtractive dominant-language medium education for ITM children can have harmful consequences socially, psychologically, economically, and politically (see Article 2b in the Genocide Convention above). It can cause

- very serious mental harm: social dislocation, psychological, cognitive, linguistic and educational harm, and, partially through this, also economic, social and political marginalization;
- often also serious physical harm, e.g. in residential schools, and as a long-term result of marginalisation - e.g. alcoholism, suicides, incest, violence, illnesses, short life-span.

The Expert paper contains legal argumentation which shows that forcibly (i.e. when alternatives do not exist) educating ITM children in a dominant language in submersion and even early-exit transitional programmes is *at least sociologically and educationally genocide*. We need some more court cases to ascertain the precise interpretations of some concepts in the Genocide Convention's definitions.

In any case this education might be legally labeled a crime against humanity. The concept of "crimes against humanity" provides a good basis for an evolution that will ultimately lead to the stigmatisation through law of subtractive educational practices and policies. In TSK & RD 2010 we look further into the extent to which the various forms of submersion education practiced both earlier and today by States could be considered to give rise to *international criminal responsibility*. The term 'crime against humanity', first used in the modern context in respect of the massacres of Ottoman Turkey's Armenians of 1915, was translated into an international legal principle in 1945, Although long associated with armed conflict, it is now accepted that crimes against humanity can also be perpetrated in times of peace, and can now be seen as part of customary international law. Although the concept "crimes against humanity" is 'sweeping', it has a number of common features. First, these crimes are "particularly odious offences in that they constitute a serious attack on human dignity or a grave humiliation or degradation of one or more persons". Second, they are not isolated or sporadic events, but "are part of a widespread or systematic practice of atrocities that either form part of government policy or are tolerated, condoned, or acquiesced in by a government". Third, such crimes can be perpetrated in time of war or in peace. Fourth, they are committed against civilians or, under customary international law, enemy combatants in armed conflicts (Cassese, 2008: 98-101). The most complete description of what constitute "crimes against humanity" is now set out in the *Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court* of 17 July, 1998 (the 'ICC Statute') (<http://untreaty.un.org/cod/icc/statute/romefra.htm>). In the Skutnabb-Kangas and Dunbar (2010) book (which the very short description above is based on), we note the existence of a range of barriers to the application of either concept (genocide, and crime against hmanity) to forms of submersion education, in the absence of concrete court cases that could clarify some of the concepts. But we also note, particularly in relation to the concept of crimes against humanity, that the law is not particularly clear and is constantly evolving. This may make the application of at least some concepts of international *criminal* law to submersion education possible as the law develops.

AK: The governments which have imposed official language policies in Iran—also the writers, the educators, the linguists, and the citizens who have supported these policies—have traditionally put forth a number of different arguments to oppose the desires of the speakers of minority languages to receive education in their mother tongues as the medium of the instruction. In what follows, I will share these arguments with you in order to record your thoughts about the reasoning of the supporters of the status of Farsi as the only official language and the linguistic medium of instruction. The questions that follow are the main areas of debate in the mother tongue conversation in Iran today. To start with, Reza Shah, the founder of the Pahlavi dynasty (1925-1979), and the intellectuals of his age deemed a serious and rapid attempt to build the spirit of a centralized and unified nation as an inevitable step in the wake of the creation of European nation states, which, over a short period of time, had gained military, political, and economic supremacy in the world. As one measure among many, they tried to give dominance to Persian to guarantee the unity of the nation and facilitate centralized administration of the land, broken by political and economic uncertainties. Accordingly, the Persian language, with the largest number of speakers in the country, became the language of civil service and the only language of instruction in the modern Iranian public educational system, which was created by Reza Shah in the same period. The “unity argument” is still commonly used both against giving equal official status to other languages and against instruction in students’ mother tongues in schools.

2. **How valid do you think the argument of unification through one common language is? Have you, in your academic and activist work, encountered examples of how linguists, educators, and mother tongue activists dealt with similar arguments in their own countries and communities?**
3. **Considering the historical circumstances of the time, how would you judge the decision of Reza Shah’s officials to reinforce the status of an official language in a so called “third world” country? Was what they did not an inevitable measure at the time, following the political trends set by “advanced” European countries and the examples of the same policy in neighbouring countries such as Turkey?**

TSK: Britain and the USA have been said to be divided by a common language, English. The language most commonly spoken in Northern Ireland is English. –Has that united the Catholics and the Protestant in Northern Ireland? NO. State reluctance to grant educational linguistic human rights to minorities is based on misplaced and outdated ideologies. These reflect old-fashioned nation-state ideology (one state – one language), and thus a belief that the existence of minorities and their reproduction of themselves as minorities, partly through mother-tongue medium education, necessarily lead to the disintegration of nation states.

In fact, it is lack of basic linguistic human rights that contributes to conflict and tension in situations where linguistic hierarchies coincide with political & economic power hierarchies, as lawyers, e.g. Asbjörn Eide, peace researchers, e.g. Björn Hettne and Johan Galtung, and sociologists of cultural human rights, e.g. Rodolfo Stavenhagen have shown. The Sri Lankan situation (with a serious long-lasting civil war, with many human rights violations, between the minority Tamils who wanted more LHRs and cultural autonomy, and the Singalese-speaking majority) might have been solved by granting linguistic and cultural rights to the Tamils. Granting educational linguistic human rights might be part of a solution to many conflicts that

are often, falsely, attributed to linguistic diversity and ITMs' demand for linguistic and cultural human rights. One example follows. The international Mother Tongue (Mother Language) Day, 21 February, in fact originated on the basis of a massacre of language activists in Dacca, East Pakistan in 1952. As you know, Pakistan was created as a result of political intrigues when the British left India in 1947, and agreed to 'partition' the country along very dubious religious lines. This meant that areas of the country with strong Muslim representation, but 1000 miles apart, were separated as forming a single state consisting of West and East Pakistan (which is, since 1971, Bangladesh) (India by contrast has aimed at creating a diverse secular state, and often the borders have reflected linguistic lines). Bangladesh was then over 90% Bengali-speaking, but this did not prevent the Punjabis in the West from determining that Urdu should be the "unifying" language of Pakistan. The East Pakistanis won a free election in 1971 that the West Pakistanis, then run as a military dictatorship (with US support, see Bass 2013), refused to recognize. The (West) Pakistan army, its military dictator Yahya Khan and opposition leader, Bhutto, all opted for East Pakistan to be crushed militarily rather than negotiating a settlement that would meet the wishes of the population of East Bengal and its charismatic leader. Nixon and Kissinger were unwilling to lean on the Pakistan government or condemn the use of military hardware supplied by the USA to inflict a genocide on the Bengalis, because the East Pakistani leader was then deeply involved in facilitating negotiations between the US and Maoist China. Well over 200,000 were slaughtered, including many professors and students at the university. Nine million Bengalis escaped to India as refugees, mainly Hindus, who were singled out for extermination. The triggering factor was that Bengalis wanted their language to be respected, and greater autonomy. There was then a two-week war between Pakistan and India, which India won decisively, after which Bangladesh, which had been wrecked by the Pakistani army, became independent. But this genocide has been 'forgotten' because West Pakistan and the USA, and especially Nixon and Kissinger, did everything possible to conceal what happened, as described in Bass 2013⁸.

Turkey did, through laws and massacres, the same as West Pakistan, in law in 1923-24 when the new constitution of Atatürk (Mustafa Kemal) was written and came into force: strongly enforcing "unity" through official monolingualism. Several countries with a monolingual orientation have phrases about the integrity and indivisible unity of the nation in their constitutions, and they claim that this can be reached through official monolingualism that does not respect linguistic, cultural and educational rights of Indigenous peoples or minorities. Wrong!

The completely false argument about linguistic rights leading to the disintegration of a state has, unfortunately, been and is being used by politicians and even some researchers in many states, including Canada, France, Turkey, and the USA. The Turkish ideologies of genocide vis-à-vis Kurds and Armenians (see Fernandes 2008 and 2010) are more or less identical to old USA physically genocidal (indigenous peoples) and the continuing culturally and linguistically genocidal assimilationist (immigrant) policies.

⁸ The Bengali case is based on Robert Phillipson's 21 February 2014 email to Stefano Keller in preparation for Keller's speech at the *Seventh session of the Forum on Minority Issues on "Preventing and addressing violence and atrocity crimes targeted against minorities"*
<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Minority/Pages/Session7.aspx>

In Turkey, Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) COULD have said exactly what the USA president Theodore Roosevelt wrote in 1917, around the time of resigning. In the original Roosevelt quote, I have changed “immigrant” to “Kurdish”, “American” to Turkish/a Turk”, and “English” to “Turkish”. With these changes, you have the present-day Turkish ideology (which has, despite some lip-service, not changed much since 1923:

In the first place, we should insist that if a Kurd in good faith becomes a Turk and assimilates himself to us, he shall be treated on an exact equality with everyone else, for it is an outrage to discriminate against any such man because of creed, or birthplace, or origin. But this is predicated upon the person's becoming in every facet a Turk, and nothing but a Turk ... There can be no divided allegiance here. Any man who says he is a Turk, but something else also, isn't a Turk at all. We have room for but one flag, the Turkish flag ... We have room for but one language here, and that is the Turkish language ... and we have room for but one sole loyalty and that is a loyalty to the Turkish people.

One can ask to what extent this applies to Iran.

When we analyse the reasons why these false arguments have been and are being used, it is clear that they have very little to do with ignorance of the power-holders, or human rights or social justice. Donald Macedo suggests, when writing about resistance to bilingual education as colonialism, “... Whereas one can argue that they are ignorant, one has to realize that ignorance is never innocent and is always shaped by a particular ideological predisposition” (2014: 253). And those ideologies are about maintaining power. A few examples from the USA. The USA’s main negotiator at the Bretton Woods conference (where the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, IMF, were shaped), George Kennan, was open about the USA foreign policy guidelines:

We have 50% of the world’s wealth, but only 6,3% of its population. In this situation, **our real job** in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships **which** permit us to **maintain this position of disparity**. To do so, we have to dispense with all sentimentality ... we should **cease thinking about human rights, the raising of living standards, and democratisation** (quoted in Pilger 1998: 59, emphases added)

The U.S. Council for Foreign Relations, 1944, put the USA aim as follows: ‘a global economy, dominated by U.S. corporate interests’. The reason formulated was that the USA ‘would need to dominate economically and militarily’ because ‘the U.S. national interest required free access to the markets and raw materials of this area’ (Korten 1996: 21). Condoleezza Rice, President G.W. Bush’s foreign affairs advisor, in Campaign 2000. Promoting the national interest, continued on the same line: “The rest of the world is best served by the USA pursuing its own interests because American values are universal.”

But we could still ask if ignorance is not involved – after all, the second US president Bush showed often appalling lack of basic knowledge. Henry Kissinger is reported as having ‘a brilliant mind, a profound knowledge of world history, and a firm, principled commitment to realpolitik. From his early writings, he had argued that foreign policy ought not to be driven by the demands of justice’ but rather by ‘the task of building a Cold War balance of power’ (Bass 2013, 8, 9).

Critical scholar Mark Curtis (1995, all emphases added) analyses the role of Britain and other powerful states in relation to eradicating or promoting poverty, as follows:

The history of British foreign policy is partly one of complicity in some of the world's worst horrors. If we were honest, we would see **Britain's role in the world to a large extent as a story of crimes against humanity. Currently**, contrary to the extraordinary rhetoric of New Labour leaders and other elites, **policies are continuing** on this traditional course, **systematically making the world more abusive of human rights as well as more unequal and less secure** (p. 432). One basic fact [is] that the mass poverty and destitution that exist in much of the Third World are direct products of the structure of the international system. Moreover, an elementary truth is that **the world's powerful states have pursued policies** with regard to the Third World which **knowingly promote poverty**. It is clear that the **policies** they have encouraged or imposed on the Third World - in the earlier postwar period following military intervention and in the later period through the international financial institutions – **have betrayed no institutional interest in eradicating poverty or in promoting a form of economic development meaningful to the poor**. Rather, policies have been imposed with the understanding that they will not contribute to these ends” (p. 236).

With this analysis in mind, we can ask what Britain's role was in deleting Kurdistan and minority protection in Turkey from the Lausanne Peace Treaty in 1923?⁹ In economic terms, the war against linguistic and other human rights, based on false ideologies, is expensive, both in terms of revenue lost, and in terms of completely failing in the creation of a state where minorities might feel solidarity and identify with the state if they had some autonomy and self-determination. The highly respected *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute*, SIPRI (2011 www.sipri.org) writes that without Turkey's war on Kurds, over 10 billion \$ could have been used 2000-2007 for education, health and economic development in Kurdish areas in Turkey.

It is fair to claim that the countries that were responsible for removing Kurdistan and linguistic minority protection from the 1924 Treaty of Lausanne have been and are still contributing to the oppression of Kurds, based on false and back-firing argumentation. USA has added itself to the list, e.g. through politics of arms sales (and NATO arms & training gifts), and their other Middle East considerations. It is the econo-military systems of UK, USA (a great “friend” of Turkey; NATO ally, etc), and (some) Turkish elites that benefit when contributing to conditions which reproduce the continuation of the economic, educational and human rights underdevelopment in “Turkish” Kurdistan. It is up to the readers to examine to what extent similar issues can be used to explain Iranian minorities policy in education.

On the other hand, a good example of respect for linguistic human rights is an early Constitutional Law of 1867 from Austria. It states in its Article 19:

'All the ethnic minorities of the State shall enjoy the same rights and, in particular, have an absolute right to maintain and develop their nationality and their language. All the languages used in the provinces are recognized by the State as having equal rights with regard to education, administration and public life. In provinces inhabited by several ethnic groups,

⁹ See [MacMillan 2003](#) for an excellent analysis of this.

the public educational institutions shall be organized in such a way as to enable all the ethnic groups to acquire the education they need in their own language, without being obliged to learn another language of the province' (quoted in Capotorti 1979: 3).

Many countries granted minorities linguistic and education rights after World War 1, either separately, or by inscribing official bilingualism (e.g. Finland) or multilingualism (e.g. India) in their constitutions directly after independence (Finland 1917, India 1948). Francesco Capotorti, in his report commissioned by the United Nations in 1971 and published in 1979, gives a thorough summary of linguistic human rights of minorities historically and until 1979. Fernand de Varennes (1996) updates these rights; see also Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson's edited book (1994), Skutnabb-Kangas 2000 and Skutnabb-Kangas & Dunbar 2010).

Regardless of history, blaming one individual or groups of individuals for what they did to restrict language rights is outdated, even if we need to know and analyse history to understand present, and plan the future. We can possibly learn from history. Many states have during the last decades become officially multilingual, both mostly on paper (e.g. South Africa) or even in practice, through at least some implementation (e.g. India, Peru, Bolivia, and several other Latin American countries). One possibility is also to grant those minorities who live fairly concentrated in certain areas, regional language rights in those areas, such as for instance the Saami have in Finland and Norway, or the five official national minorities have in Sweden, or several Indigenous languages have in northern parts of Canada, e.g. in Nunavut. This would be perfectly possible in Iran too. It has led to more positive conditions in the countries mentioned.

AK: Variations of the argument that underlines the pivotal role of the Persian language in keeping Iran a unified political entity appears over and over again, yet in different forms, in mother tongue conversations. Here are the most frequently employed propositions:

Some Iranian academics draw upon the experiences of other nations in the world and argue that many other multilingual nations have also accepted the dominance of one official language as a pragmatic measure. They refer to ninety million Spanish speakers in the United States who have accepted English as the official language. Or they emphasize the example of immigrants in Israel, who have to use Hebrew officially and at school, in particular in order to strengthen the unity of the nation. In the United Kingdom also, they claim, there are different languages and dialects; however, the public have welcomed English as the official language.

- 4. Based on the above examples, these academics invite the speakers of minority languages in Iran to accept the status of Farsi as the official language of the country as a pragmatic move similarly experienced in other parts of the world. Are they right? Have minority language speakers comfortably accepted the official languages in the countries mentioned above? Are Iranian Kurds, Turks, Balochis, and other speakers of minority languages exceptionally uncooperative?**

TSK: Your big examples are from countries with a sizeable immigration, USA and Israel. Iran is completely different – most of the minority language speakers you mention are not immigrants of even great grandchildren of immigrants – they are autochthonous minorities, just like the

Welsh, Irish, and Scots in the UK or Swedish-speakers in Finland or French-speakers in Canada. All these minorities have substantial linguistic rights – they have NOT accepted English (or Finnish) as the ONLY official language. Look at the recent Scottish language law, for instance – the only problem with it is that it came too late. Thinking of the fact that some 51 percent of those children who started elementary school in the USA in the autumn 2014 are NOT “white” (they are racial and ethnic minorities), demands for their linguistic rights are very soon going to be more vocal than until now. Besides, there are hundreds of classrooms in the USA where other languages are the main teaching languages and their numbers are growing fast. And it is not only children whose parents or grandparents spoke other languages who attend; many “English-only-heritage” children also want to learn these other languages because it makes them smarter. They will become “blessed with bilingual brains”; they will avoid suffering from “monolingual stupidity”, to use some of the phrases that might sound a bit provocative but which are essentially based on hard-core research. Their parents also see a better economic future for multilingual children. Farsi-speakers could be equally foresighted...

AK: In the above conversation and at many other points in the mother tongue debate in Iran, the sides involved seem to ignore the line between mother tongue as the official language and mother tongue as the medium of instruction. Typically, minority language activists start with the right to receive education in students’ mother tongues but their opponents end up arguing for Farsi as the official language.

5. How important is it to clearly distinguish between mother tongue as the medium of instruction and mother tongue as the official language?

TSK: Extremely important. Many African countries have in their constitutions one or several African languages as co-official with English, French or Portuguese, and still children do not have their mother tongues as teaching languages, especially after grade 3, often not at all. What is important is the implementation. Legal rights are often a necessary but never a sufficient precondition for mother-tongue-based multilingual (MTM) education. On the other hand, in many countries children have teaching through the medium of their or their parents mother tongues in countries where these languages are not official languages. And the other mixing of concepts happens, for instance, when one does not differentiate between teaching a minority mother tongue as a subject only (good, but nowhere near enough for learning the more formal aspects of the language), and using the mother tongue as the teaching language, the medium of instruction. The latter is what linguistic human rights are about – the former is only a type of psychological therapy that has very little to do with becoming high-level bi- or multilingual.

AK: Still in the family of arguments claiming that the dominant status of Farsi will guarantee the unity of the nation, the advocates of Farsi as the official language sometimes adopt a very political perspective. They state that most requests for instruction in students’ mother tongues are practically separatist attempts rather than serious linguistic or pedagogical suggestions. This view has frequently left mother tongue activists in a vulnerable position when they try to negotiate their demands.

6. Are there any international experiences that can clarify the relationship between a mother tongue movement and a separatist movement?

TSK: Many of the claims about separatist movements hiding behind requests of MTM come from researchers and politicians who believe in forced assimilation. In most cases they do not respect minority languages, cultures or identities. The intriguing issue is that people with these claims can be conservative nationalists who believe in the old false “one nation – one language” ideology. Or they can be neoliberalists who believe that the efficiency of a “free” market “demands” conformity, also linguistically. But they can also be otherwise progressive people, for instance old-school Marxists, who think that class solidarity will in time overrule all ethnic considerations and thus ethnic minorities, with their languages and cultures, are bound to find “new” economically more profitable **class-based** identities, and will leave their “old-fashioned” ethnic solidarities behind. For all these groups, demanding mother-tongue-based multilingual education thus seems to be something that they do not understand, and therefore they, mostly falsely, suspect other motives behind the requests.

AK: The supporters of the idea of the Persian language as a unifying cultural factor claim that even if we undermined the position of Farsi as the official language, Iranian minority languages would not be empowered. Instead, they stress, Western languages would dominate the cultural scene in regions with non-Persian populations. Historically, they exemplify, countries like India and Nigeria have had to undergo linguistic colonialism due to failing to choose a local linguistic medium in their own cultures and have had to use, English, the language of their colonizers. In the case of India, even before English, Persian (another non-native language) was used as the official language of most of the land. In the same manner, they say, although in northern Azerbaijan, the government tried to purge the Azerbaijani language from any Persian influence, they failed to create a reliable body of Azerbaijani language that could be effectively used in cultural, intellectual, and scientific exchanges. Ironically, instead of Persian, which through centuries had organically interacted with their language, they had to start using Russian and English vocabulary and thus subjected themselves to a much more harmful form of linguistic colonialism.

7. What do you think of this argument? Do you know of any similar international experiences?

TSK: In India, the issue was more about two competing big Indian languages, Hindi and Tamil, both with a longer history of being used as written languages than most Western languages. Iran does not have TWO big competing languages where a compromise would be needed. Take Ethiopia, one of the poorest countries in the world, as an example where Amharic is a language spoken by a very large number of the population, either as a mother tongue or as a second language

Ethiopia has since 1994 an innovative and progressive national education policy which is based on 8 years of mother-tongue medium education. Regions have the authority to make their own decentralised implementation plans. Some regions transfer to English medium already after 4 or 6 years. Amharic, used as a *lingua franca*, is learned as a first or second language by all. The Ethiopian Ministry of Education commissioned a study across all the regions (Heugh et al. 2007; see also Heugh 2009, Benson 2009, Heugh & Skutnabb-Kangas, eds, 2010). There is an efficient collection of system-wide assessment data. These show very clear patterns of learner achievement at Grade/Year 8, 10 and 12. The Grade 8 data show that those learners who have had 8 years of MTM education plus English as a

subject perform better across the curriculum, in mathematics, biology, chemistry, etc. than those who have had English-medium education from grade 5 or 7. In addition, their results in the English language are better than the results of most of the early-exit regions. The exception is “the more wealthy and urban city states of Addis Ababa and Harar where students with six years of MTM do show a consistently higher level of English language achievement. This is to be expected for socio-economic reasons and also because urban students have some access to English beyond school. In summary, the data show that the longer the students have MTM, the better their overall academic achievement” (Heugh 2009: 105). This shows very clearly that even when 4 or even 6 years of MTM education is much better than early-exit weak models (see the African results presented by Heugh in Example 22), to enable the transfer to the second/foreign language from the linguistic and cognitive competence developed in the MT, (minimally) 8 years is needed (Skutnabb-Kangas & Dunbar 2010: 98).

The example shows that it is perfectly possible for minority children to learn both a dominant official language (in this case Amharic) AND an international language (in this case English), if this is what is required. Despite this, Ethiopia has in recent years gone back to teaching more through the medium of English. Why? Ethiopia has never been colonised by Britain. But the economic, technological, linguistic and cultural neocolonisation by UK and USA is difficult to resist for poor countries where their own dominant language has not had the same economic resources to develop the language and science as the UK and the USA. Wealthier countries, regardless of whether their own dominant language has been reduced to writing thousands of years ago (Iran) or only a few centuries ago (Finland) have much better possibilities of resisting this neocolonialisation. They need their whole population, including all the minorities, behind this resistance, and minorities are more willing to feel the necessity of it if they have linguistic and cultural human rights and can thus resist an outside linguistic and cultural “enemy” rather than an internal enemy that deprives them their rights.

Having said that, there are examples where English has been preferred by minorities – we can see this to some extent in, for instance, India and Nepal. In many cases this has to do with economics and status. English-medium schools are often richer (“in our school we make books in our language from banana leaves; in the English-medium school they have two pianos”); some English-medium teachers get to courses paid for by British Council; orate parents (“illiterate”, see later) are proud when their children know some English words; the ideologies of these schools serve to “overcelebrate the [English] language to a level of mystification, i.e. viewing English as education itself” (Macedo 2014; 253), meaning most content knowledge is sacrificed if the child learns some English. In properly conducted mother-tongue-based multilingual education children can learn both their mother tongue, AND a dominant national language, AND an international language, e.g. English, really well. Most parents are fooled into believing that they have to choose, and that becoming fully bilingual or even more, multilingual, even in formal aspects of languages, is impossible. They are made to believe in the either/or (choose the mother tongue medium, and the child will not learn the official language, or an international language, or if you want the child to learn the last two, you have to sacrifice the mother tongue). Instead, parents need to know that both/and/and (meaning three or more languages) is perfectly possible, and that this is done in thousands of schools over the world.

AK: Some say that the recent Western discourses that celebrate the mother tongue have been constructed as a reaction to the brutal elimination of native European languages by centralized nation states created over the few past centuries in Europe. They particularly talk about what happened in France after the French revolution. They assert that such a brutal treatment of minority languages in Iran has actually never happened. Segregation of schools as we have seen in the United States has never happened in the long history of Iran. Or any institution similar to Canadian Residential Schools has never been established in Iran. They say most of the discourses through which mother tongue activists are speaking are too aggressive because of their original context, which is practically the brutality of white European colonial linguistic policies. They believe that Iranian civilization, Greater Iran, or “cultural Iran” has always been a multilingual and multicultural society. This argument is also indicative of the fear that importing these discourses from the West might indeed be the sign of a new colonial cultural invasion, another practical mistreatment of a good idea like planting democracy in Iraq by President Bush.

8. Is, in your opinion, this concern about hidden colonial agendas in discourses surrounding linguistic human rights justified?

TSK: There are no “one-size-fits-all” solutions, and Iran has to find its own solutions. On the other hand, one has to look at the mother-tongue discourses in the West to see who claim what. ITMs themselves mostly use educational, sociolinguistic and identity arguments based on research. These are equally valid around the world. The neo-colonial agendas which lead to dispossession of cultural capital (Harvey 2005) are very clear in relation to the promotion of English. It is, of course, also possible that in some instances misuse of the concept of linguistic human rights can be made to serve neoliberal agendas (e.g. USA’s acting in relation to various groupings in Syria), but I cannot see any trace of this in Iran.

AK: Some defenders of the official state of Farsi say it is true that the Iranian governments have been particularly oversensitive to the status of the Persian language over the past century; this protectionism, however, should not be interpreted as antagonism towards other Iranian ethnicities and their mother tongues. They, instead, believe the anxiety surrounding the status of Persian is a reaction to Western colonialism, mainly the impact of French in the past and English in the present. They strongly believe that Farsi itself is an endangered language that requires immediate attention and revival. They say, for example, although Farsi is the mother tongue of the people of Tajikistan, for decades—particularly before the collapse of the Soviet Union—these people were not able to write and publish in their language or receive educational instruction in their mother tongue. Similarly, in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and India, Persian speakers have experienced a lot of discrimination. Portraying Farsi as a colonial language, thus, they believe, is a mistake. Bashing Farsi, they claim, is a technique employed by the separatists, who are used by the West as puppets for political purposes. These separatists, they tell the public, are not really concerned about the status of native cultures or better education for the children of the speakers of minority languages.

9. How valid do you think this argument is? Have you encountered similar sentiments in other parts of the world?

TSK: Many neocolonial strategies are extremely sophisticated. But again, people and groups who objectively lack at least some linguistic human rights, may develop negative feelings against the languages that they see as oppressive, even “killer languages”. Of course

it is not *languages* that kill each other, but unequal power relations between speakers and users of the languages that are the case in point. Secondly, can we describe Farsi in any way an endangered language? In terms of number of mother tongue speakers, Persian is, according to the the latest Ethnologue data number 23 out of the 7,106 languages listed (see <http://www.ethnologue.com/statistics/by-language-size>, and other Ethnologue tables for the complicated details). Farsi cannot be seen as an endangered language. UNESCO's Atlas of World Languages (<http://www.unesco.org/culture/languages-atlas/>) gives in a search for endangered languages in iran the following numbers: there are 4 vulnerable languages, 14 definitely endangered languages, and 2 in each of the three categories severe or critically endangered or extinct). Farsi is not among these. UNESCO has also developed 9 criteria for language vitality and for what are seen as endangered languages (see <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/endangered-languages/language-vitality/>). According to all the criteria Farsi is a language with very high vitality. Thus, even if emotions may run high – languages ARE in most cases connected to identities and may often arouse strong emotions – it is important to look at objective criteria for endangerment.

AK: One particular phenomenon that strengthens the position of the critics who fear the possibility of the disintegration of Iran as a result of more substantial recognition of minority languages is the fact that Iran has been surrounded by countries which are already using Iranian minority languages as their official languages. Turkish in Azerbaijan, Kurdish in Iraqi Kurdistan, and Arabic among the Arab nations of the Gulf might be the best examples. Policy makers fear that elevating the status of non-Persian languages in Iran will automatically draw Iranian minorities closer to their cousins beyond the borders, which will in time bring about their separation from Iran.

10. How would you reply to this concern as an Iranian mother tongue activist or an educator? Are there any similar international situations? How have the speakers of minority languages found their way out of this maze?

TSK: Again, if one uses Kurds in northern Iraq as an example, most of the demands from the Kurds during Saddam Hussain included the demand for Kurdish-medium education. When I and my husband (professor Robert Phillipson) spent some time in Kurdistan in 2006, we interviewed the then Minister of Education, Abdul-Aziz Taib, on 15. March 2006. Among other wise things, he said these memorable words: “Every child in the world has the right to education through the medium of their mother tongue”. We visited Minority Departments at the Ministry of Education, and spoke to their staff, including their directors, about minority education. They said that Kurds, having suffered so much earlier because their language was forbidden, understood its importance, and did not want to make the same mistake as Saddam had made. Therefore, minority children had the right to education through their own languages. Peshmerga soldiers we met emphasised this also. On the other hand, even if Iraqi Kurdistan shows solidarity towards Kurds from other countries, their vulnerable situation and the strengthening of neoliberal economic and other ideologies is worrying, also from a language policy point of view (see Skutnabb-Kangas & Fernandes 2008).

In Finland there is an old Swedish-speaking autochthonous minority (under 6 percent of the population). Swedish and Finnish are both official languages. In the Indigenous Saami areas in the north of Finland, all three Saami languages, North Saami, Skolt Saami and Aanaar Saami, are

co-official. Skolt and Aanaar Saami have both fewer than 400 speakers. In a study about the Finland Swedes, i.e. Swedish mother tongue speakers from the national minority in Finland, almost 100 percent of them said that they identified much more with Finnish-speakers in Finland than with Swedish-speakers in Sweden, i.e. they had a politonymic identity, not a linguonymic identity. The political entity, the state they lived in, Finland, was much more important than the linguistic affinity with Swedish-speakers in Sweden, the neighbouring country (e.g. Allardt 1978, Allardt & Starck 1981). This would also apply about both border minorities, German speakers in Denmark and Danish speakers in Germany. But then, in this kind of cases, the minorities in question have very strong minority protection, and the right to mother tongue medium education, meaning linguistic human rights also seems to lead to solidarity with the state that grants these rights.

AK: The supporters of the status of Farsi as the official language argue that minority language rights activists do not desire to create a multilingual society; they practically plan to force minority students to study in their own languages only. This, they claim, will prevent those students from learning Farsi that can in practice make their children succeed in life. This argument is sometimes even made by minority language speakers of great cultural stature in Iran. They say that the discourses used by mother tongue activists are so aggressive that if they obtain ground in this battle, there will be no room for cultural and linguistic interaction. These activists, for example, call the Persians imperialists and colonialists, they desire complete separation, and they distort history to appropriate great Iranian figures. The Turks say that Avicenna was a Turk and the Kurds say he was a Kurd. This approach to this issue is an indication that they might indeed sacrifice the future of their children for the sake of a political agenda.

11. How would you reply to this argument if you were an Iranian mother tongue activist or a teacher with a special interest in making room for your students' mother tongues?

TSK: We call the programmes that we know would lead to good results mother-tongue-based **multilingual** education. What this means is that the mother tongues should be the MAIN medium for several years (up to 8 if possible), and an official language should be studied as a subject, either from the beginning, or at least from the 3rd, 4th, or 5th grade. Likewise, the first foreign language should be studied as a subject from fairly early on. I do not know of programmes for the minorities anywhere in the world where the official language would NOT be studied as a subject, and in many if not most of them an official language becomes a partial teaching language at the latest after grade 6, first in easy not intellectually or linguistically demanding subjects, later also in these. Good minority programmes never aim at monolingualism in the minority language – that would be both educationally and economically unwise and would really harm the children. I will quote a bit from an old article of mine – I still agree fully with these principles. In it, I have first presented non-models, weak models and strong models of bi/multilingual education, with their results. The three strong models here are mother-tongue based multilingual maintenance programmes for minorities, dual-language bilingual programmes (e.g. in the USA, with 50% English-speaking and 50% Spanish-speaking children), and the special European (Union) schools. For more, of the programmes, read my edited book *Multilingualism for all* (1985). There are dozens of books discussing various models and the benefits and drawbacks of them.

Although the strong forms of multilingual education outlined above have different sociolinguistic realities with regard to the linguistic background of the students and the language(s) of the classroom, and different sociopolitical realities with regard to the power relations between the groups attending and the rest of society, they all share an aim of cultural and linguistic pluralism, with the bi/multilingualism and bi/multiliteracy of students as an avowed minimum aim.

Assessing the leading principles for strong models

The experiments described above have reached good results in terms of the goals we mentioned initially: high levels of bi- or multilingualism, a fair chance of success in school achievement, and positive multilingual/multicultural identities and attitudes. The principles which have to a large extent been followed in them can be formulated as 8 recommendations. They form one possible baseline which the reader can relate to, agree or disagree with. Here are the principles.

1. Support (= use as the main medium of education, at least during the first 8 years) that language (of the two that the child is supposed to become bilingual in initially) which is least likely to develop up to a high formal level. This is for all minority children their own mother tongue. For majority children, it should be a minority language. (The European Schools do not follow this principle completely, because they teach also majority children initially through the medium of their mother tongues, e.g. the the Italian-speaking children in the European School in Italy are initially taught through the medium of Italian, instead of a minority language).

2. In most experiments, the children are initially grouped together according to their L1. Mixed groups are not positive initially, and certainly not in cognitively demanding decontextualised subjects. (Spanish-English Two-way programmes in the U.S.A. are an exception: they have mixed in the same class 50% minority, 50% majority children. All are initially taught through the medium of the minority language, later through both. This may be a relevant factor in accounting for the Spanish-speaking children's sometimes relatively less impressive gains in both languages, compared to English-speaking children in the same programmes. The mere presence of majority language children in the same classroom may be too overwhelming for minority children, despite the minority language being the medium of education).

3. All children are to become high level bilinguals, not only minority children. This seems to be especially important in contexts where majority and minority children are in the same classes.

4. All children have to be equalized vis-a-vis the status of their mother tongues and their knowledge of the language of instruction. Nice phrases about the worth of everybody's mother tongue, the value of interculturalism, etc, serve little purpose, unless they are followed up in how the schools are organised.

There has to be equality in the demands made on the children's and the teachers' competencies in the different languages involved, so that the same demands are made on everybody. Both minority and majority children and teachers must be or become bi- or multilingual.

There has to be equality in the role that 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 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 a late phase; alternate-days programmes (50% minority and 50% majority children, the medium of education alternates daily).

5. All teachers have to be bi- or multilingual. Thus they can be good models for the children, and support them in language learning, through comparing and contrasting, and being metalinguistically aware. 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 anyway, whereas many of them do NOT have the same opportunities to hear/read native minority language models. A high level of competence in a minority language is thus more important for a teacher than a high level 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 via Turkish).

7. All children must study both L1 and L2 as compulsory subjects through grades 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 in how and how much each is used seems to vary 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.

But 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. 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 the choice of subjects may vary. It seems that the following development functions well:

- transfer from the known to the unknown;
- transfer from teaching of a language (as a subject) 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 used for all children in the European Union Schools seems close to ideal for minority children. The progression in relation to the (minority) MOTHER TONGUE is as follows:

1. All subjects are taught through the medium of the mother tongue during the first 2 years.
2. All cognitively demanding decontextualized core 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, can express and critically evaluate them thoroughly.
4. The mother tongue is taught as a subject throughout 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 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. Teaching can take place 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 together with children for whom the language of instruction is their L1, before grade 8. In European Union Schools this is mostly not done even in grades 9-12 in compulsory subjects, only in elective courses.

When applying the principles to the strong models discussed above it appears that the European Union Schools model -- which factually achieves the best results -- gets more plus-ratings than any of the other models. Even if many of these schools are elite schools, they seem to succeed because the model is scientifically sound, not because of their elitism.

AK: The arguments we discussed above had a sociopolitical edge. The following are questions with a more legal, linguistic and cultural bent.

The Iranian constitution states that ethnic minorities in Iran can study their languages as core subjects, but the law does not confirm the right of speakers of minority languages to use their mother tongues as the medium of instruction. Some in Iran argue that as long as the speakers of minority languages are free to study their own languages and literatures, an emphasis on instructing students in their mother tongues is irrelevant.

12. Could you shed some light on the legal complexities that might arise because of the lack of emphasis on mother tongues as medium of instruction in the constitution?

TSK: In the discussion above I have already shown that subtractive programmes where ITM mother tongues are not used as the main teaching languages at least for the first many years violate the right to education; they may also lead to linguistic genocide in education, and they can be said to represent crimes against humanity. For more details of these claims, with many examples, see TSK & RD 2010.

AK: Some Iranian linguists argue that the Persian language does not linguistically belong to any particular Iranian ethnicity. They argue that Persian has always been (as Farsi is today) an educational, literary, and bureaucratic *lingua franca* contributed to and shared by all Iranian ethnicities equally. As a result, they argue, Persian should remain the most important language in our educational systems. They, for instance, say that before the recent status of Farsi as the official language of Iran as a modern nation, for nine centuries the mother tongue of the rulers of Iran was Turkish, yet the language of politics and literature in Iran remained Persian. Persian, thus, they conclude, has a transnational nature. They particularly underline the fact that most of families living in Tehran, the economic and political heart of today's Iran, are multilingual because of the unprecedented flow of immigration to the capital over the past century. The Farsi spoken today in Tehran, they claim, is practically an amalgam of all of these linguistic traditions, so the idea of replacing Farsi with any other language is unrealistic simply because no other Iranian language is as linguistically connected to other languages in Iran as today's Farsi.

13. Can this linguistic argument justify the status of Farsi as an official language or the only medium of instruction?

TSK: Similar arguments are being used about English today. It is said that it is today a neutral *lingua franca*, owned by nobody, or owned by all those who use it. Everybody can contribute to its development, and the fact that we can today speak of American English, Australian English, Indian English, Nigerian English, etc, proves this. This is not true (see

Phillipson 2014, in press, forthcoming; and Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas 2013, for denunciations and arguments). In most formal situations, especially in writing, only what is called “standard English” (both British and American Englishes) is still required, in terms of both grammar and, to some extent also vocabulary. Also, the term “*lingua franca*” is supposed to mean a language that is used between speakers who have other mother tongues. The claim you present in your question above, “an educational, literary, and bureaucratic lingua franca contributed to and shared by all Iranian ethnicities **equally**” (my emphasis), might apply to situations where Persian/Farsi is NOBODY’s mother tongue. But in a situation where a native Farsi-speaker interacts with other people who are NOT native speakers of Farsi, through the medium of Farsi, it is very clear that the interaction is NOT equal, almost regardless of how good the Farsi competence of the non-native speaker is. This has been shown for English in countless studies. It takes more time and energy to think of HOW to say things in a second or third languages than it takes to say a similar thing in one’s first languages, and this means that somewhat less time and energy can be used for content. People who speak a non-native language are evaluated more negatively than native speakers, even if the content they express is equally competent. When students or professionals (e.g. medical doctors) who are not native speakers of English but know it extremely well, hear a lecture or read an article in English, they do not get as much out of it as when they listen to the same lecture or read the same article in their L1, first language. And so on. There is no reason to believe that this would not be same in Farsi, even if many Farsi-speakers may be more tolerant of non-native speech or text, partially because of their multilingual tradition, than native (or even non-native) English speakers.

AK: The supporters of the exclusive right of Farsi as the official language of Iran usually argue that other Iranian languages do not have a considerable body of written language and a long history of documenting thoughts and ideas in written language. They claim that “local languages” are not culturally significant. These languages, they say, have limited linguistic potentials and cannot be used as a foundation for cultural growth. Presupposing that written language is superior to oral communication, the advocates of the official status of Farsi hold that the only language in the Iranian plateau that is sophisticated enough to help a civilization function is Persian. There are similarities between this mentality in Iran and European colonizers who labelled peoples from more oral cultures as savage, primitive, and illiterate.

TSK: Firstly, written language is NOT superior to spoken (or signed) language. All languages have a lot of potential to function as cultural and scientific languages, provided that enough resources are devoted to their further development. Secondly, the cultural riches of every language in the world, the diversity of ideas encoded in them, are desperately needed if human life on the planet is to be saved from the catastrophies of our own making. This includes not only the numerically very small Indigenous/tribal spoken languages but also Sign languages (see, e.g. articles in the fantastic new book (2014), edited by H-Dirksen Bauman and Joseph J. Murray, *Deaf Gain. Raising the Stakes for Human Diversity*).

14. What social, cultural, and political discourses create this manner of thinking? What have been the unpleasant consequences of this mentality in the West? How can the speakers of minority languages resist this view and build confidence in cultural potentials of their languages?

TSK: Here I again want to borrow an argument from an article where the authors describe a project in Nepal where Indigenous/tribal (ITM) Nepalese children were taught through the medium of their own languages, in addition to learning Nepali as a second language. One of the authors, dr. Lava Deo Awasthi, is now the Director General of the Department of Education in Nepal, and is trying to organise mother tongue medium education for at least the first years for all children in Nepal. Nepal has minimally 123 languages, according to the latest Census (see Yadava 2013). ¹⁰This is what I wrote about some of the ideological background and connotations or literacy and oracy:

6.3. Oracy and literacy

Textbooks for mother tongues as subjects have been written for some of the ITM languages. Most of the ITM languages in Nepal are oral in their traditions. However, there is no regard for the oral traditions of ITMs in Nepal today. We need to see how orate and literate people are defined and what the implications of these definitions are for orate ITMs in Nepal and elsewhere. We have looked at the definitions in the online Thesaurus of Word (see Skutnabb-Kangas 2009b):

LITERATE, adjective

1. many of the workers were not literate ABLE TO READ/WRITE, educated, schooled. ANTONYM illiterate.
2. her literate friends EDUCATED, well-educated, well-read, widely read, scholarly, learned, knowledgeable, lettered, cultured, cultivated, sophisticated, well-informed. ANTONYM ignorant.
3. he was computer literate KNOWLEDGEABLE, well-versed, savvy, smart, conversant, competent; ANTONYM ignorant. (Thesaurus, Word, online)

These definitions give the impression that a literate person is in many ways positive. If you are orate ('not literate'; ORATE as an adjective does not exist in the Thesaurus), you are NOT educated or knowledgeable or cultured or sophisticated or well-informed or smart or competent. You are the opposite of all these positive characteristics. 'Illiterates' are IGNORANT. We can ask, where fairness is. Everybody should be defined either positively, in terms of what they are and know: 'literate' versus 'orate', or BOTH should be defined negatively, in terms of what they are NOT and do NOT know: 'inorate' versus 'illiterate'. It is unfair to define one group positively in terms of what they are/know

¹⁰ For more general presentations of Nepali language policy, see Awasthi 2004, Yadava & Bajracharya (eds) (2006), and Yadava & Turin. Lava Deo Awasthi is the Director General of the Nepali Department of Education; Yogendra Yadava is Professor Emeritus, Tribhuvan University; among other things, he directed the recent survey of languages in Nepal.

(‘literate’) but define the other group negatively, in terms of what they are NOT/do NOT know (‘illiterate’). This hierarchises people. More accurate definitions might be:

ORACY: High levels of spoken language proficiency; to be a competent speaker or storyteller. An *orate* is an individual who communicates through listening and speaking but not reading and writing; orates often have superb memory strategies in comparison with persons considered literate because orates carry their entire “library” in their heads. *Orature* is oral literature (Skutnabb-Kangas and McCarty 2008: 11).

One might ask why we need to define these concepts

The concepts we use are almost never neutral. In contested arenas such as bilingual education, words and concepts frame and construct the phenomena under discussion, making some persons and groups visible, others invisible; some the unmarked norm, others marked and negative. Choice of language can minoritise or distort some individuals, groups, phenomena, and relations while majoritising and glorifying others. Concepts also can be defined in ways that either hide or expose, and rationalize or question power relations (Skutnabb-Kangas and McCarty 2008: 3).

It is clear that the concept ‘literate’ participates in making ITMs and their cultures ‘invisible’, ‘marked’ and ‘negative’; it ‘minoritises’ them, and hides and rationalizes power relations instead of exposing and questioning them. The existence of paradigms in literacy research also makes this clear:

Literacy can be defined as the ability to read and write. Yet this definition masks two different paradigms informing literacy research and practice. *Autonomous* views characterise literacy as abstract, neutral, and independent from the social context and language users (Ong, 1982). *Ideological* views characterize literacy as socially and historically situated, fluid, multiple, and power-linked. Educationally, an *autonomous* view emphasizes discrete language skills, often taught through direct instruction and scripted phonics programs. An *ideological* view binds reading and writing to **oracy**, emphasizing the development of different literacies (and multiliteracies) for different purposes through meaningful social interaction and critical examination of authentic texts (Skutnabb-Kangas and McCarty 2008: 3-4).

As stated above, most of the ITM languages in Nepal are oral in their traditions and these may include ‘praise-songs, word games, proverbs, riddles, tongue twisters...arithmetic puzzles, dilemma tales, fables, myths and legends’ (Reagan 1996: 26, 21) which are also

common in African languages. They all have an educational side; for example dilemma tales aim to stimulate discussion on a specific problem, and proverbs develop the child's reasoning power and skill required for decision-making and settling disputes. Similarly, a tale is

...not just history but an educational story. The stories are manifestations of the memory, the origin and history of the group, the deeds of their great men and women, their victories and defeats in war, their experiences which led to individual and group successes and those which led to individual and group failure (N. Uka quoted in Reagan 1996: 27).

For example, the Rai have a fascinating tradition of composing songs on the spot; they have even sung songs about MLE during seminars. These all should be a part of the mother tongue curriculum; they should come first before the introduction of written language and literature. The introduction of written language and a literary tradition will change the culture (e.g. Reagan 1996, Mühlhäusler 2003).

All this is something the ITM people/s should be aware of and discuss when they start developing scripts and building a literary repertoire. There is so far very little discussion about the values and benefits of oral cultures and traditions in Nepal. It seems in Nepal too that it is assumed that a written language is more developed and therefore all ITM groups will want to move away from oral traditions. Today literacy is glorified and made into a norm that cannot be questioned, while oracy in adults is stigmatised and made into something to be ashamed of. Everybody HAS to be literate. People who are orate are made to feel that it is their own fault; they "ARE" stupid and ignorant, and their oral culture is not worth maintaining. Perhaps it is inevitable (and beneficial?) in the long run that *some* oral traditions disappear, or at least change as all cultures do, but children who currently grow up in oral environments should not be subjected to education that is comprised mostly of reading and writing. As a way of learning, this is culturally irrelevant. In fact, both oracy and literacy have drawbacks and benefits, and these have to be clarified. It may be possible to combine the benefits of both in well-conducted MLE so that those who want it, can maintain the benefits of oral traditions at the same time as they become literate at a high level in both or all languages.

AK: The next argument represents an extremely elitist view of cultural and educational policy making. Some supporters of Farsi as the official language, even among the speakers of minority languages, say that people might want to educate their children in their own language; however, language policies are not made by "the masses." Great men of letters have already decided about it. They, then, give examples of, for instance, great Turkish speaking writers (such as Khaqani, Nezami, and Shahriar) who wrote in Persian. They assert the best educational model,

accordingly, is what these old masters did: Speak your own languages but use Farsi (especially written Farsi) as your main medium of communication with Iranian civilization.

15. How would you reply to this argument?

TSK: This argument represents again the devastating either/or thinking. You can choose to speak both (or all) languages, and use both (or all) for writing. I am, for instance, now, when writing in English, using my fifth language in terms of order of learning (first: Finnish AND Swedish, third Latin, fourth: German, fifth: English). What the people you refer to describe (speak your own language, write Farsi) is called functional differentiation, diglossia (a concept originally developed by Charles Ferguson). The Grand Old Man of sociolinguistics, Joshua Fishman, claimed in his book Sociolinguistics (1971) that diglossia is the only way to save and maintain all the languages involved, especially small languages, because nobody needs two different languages for the same purposes. After some time, one of them will disappear, and this will inevitably be the minority language. Therefore it is good to use one's languages for different, specialised purposes, he claimed. Indian researchers (e.g. Lachman Khubchandani) showed that this is not true in multilingual countries. For instance, the two languages, Marathi and Kannada, are extremely similar, but both have been used, side by side, for ALL purposes, by the same people, for centuries – and none of them has disappeared. India's great linguist, the founder of the Central Institute of Indian Languages, Debi Prasanna Pattanayak, shows the same thing extremely convincingly in many of his publications. These have just (2014) been published in two massive volumes, 914 and 562 pages, respectively, and they contain answers to most questions that Iranians might ask about language policies in multilingual countries.

AK: Another argument against mother tongue instruction is that the speakers of minority languages have always learned their mother tongues from their mothers and can continue to do so. At school, however, children should learn the official national language, Farsi. The supporters of this argument hold that non-Persian languages, as have always been, can be taught and learned, at home. Public schooling funded by the government, they state, has its own agenda, namely unifying the nation through a common language and alphabet.

The following questions include arguments that mainly state that the idea of elevating the status of minority languages in Iran is neither feasible nor practical.

AK: The believers in the superior status of Farsi say that even if mother tongue schools opened in Iran or schools had the freedom to choose their medium of instruction, the parents would not take their kids to those schools. Pilot projects and private initiatives with this mentality, they argue, show that the parents of the students are not simply interested in, for instance, Turkish only or Kurdish only schools. Accordingly, they believe, an emphasis on the mother tongue in education, although an appealing idea, is not actually practical.

16. What do you think of this argument?

Some argue that the concern about the status of minority languages in Iranian educational systems is indeed an ethical stance that might eventually empower the students and create a sense of achievement in society. However, in the context of today's Iran, the consequences of a sudden shift to students' mother tongues would be more harmful than beneficial for the students and their communities. In the present economic and political circumstances in Iran, they say, the

elevation of the status of any minority language would only open a can of worms. Who, they ask, is going to pay for the bureaucracy involved in such a move. The logistics needed for such a huge change will impoverish the regions and drain the little money they have. As a result, they conclude, although instruction through the medium of mother tongues might appear to be a valuable educational step, it might easily prove to be a Pyrrhic victory.. The current situation is a win-win equation for everyone, they declare.

17. What do you think of this argument? How have other countries dealt with the costs of reforming their educational systems to accommodate students' mother tongues?

TSK: The first claim, that children learn their mother tongues at home from their mothers, and school should teach them the official language, is often heard from parents. School authorities then legitimate the lack of mother tongue medium with the argument that parents have *chosen* to have the official language as the teaching language. But we can only speak of a real choice, if parents have had enough solid research-based knowledge about the long-term consequences of their choices. In Nepal, Indigenous organisations asked me in 2009 to write a very short reply to some of the claims and questions that Indigenous/tribal parents in Nepal often have. This was then translated into several Indigenous languages. Here it is, in English (also published in Issue 1 of the *MLE Newsletter of Multilingual Education Resource Centre*, in Nepal.

WHY MOTHER-TONGUE-BASED MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION (MLE)?

Tove Skutnabb-Kangas

Why should children be taught mainly through the medium of their mother tongue (MT) in school for the first 6-8 years? They know their MT already?

When children come to school, they can talk in their MT about concrete everyday things in a face-to-face situation in their own environment where the context is clear: they can see and touch the things they are talking about and they get immediate feedback if they do not understand (“I didn’t mean the apples, I asked you to bring bananas”). They speak fluently, with a native accent, and they know the basic grammar and many concrete words. They can explain all the basic needs in the MT: they have basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS). This may be enough for the first grades in school where teachers are still talking about things that the child knows. But later in school children need abstract intellectually and linguistically much more demanding concepts; they need to be able to understand and talk about things far away (e.g. in geography, history) or things that cannot be seen (e.g. mathematical and scientific concepts, honesty, constitution, fairness, democracy). They need to be able to solve problems using just language and abstract reasoning, without being able to do concrete things (“if I first do A, then either D or E happens; if I then choose K, X may happen but Y may also happen; therefore it is best to do B or C first”). The cognitive-academic language proficiency (CALP) that is needed to manage from grade 3 on in school, in higher grades, upper secondary school and later in life, develops slowly. Children need to develop these abstract concepts on the basis of what they already know in their mother tongue. If the development of the mother tongue CALP (which mainly happens through formal education) is cut off when the child starts school, s/he may never have an opportunity to develop higher abstract thinking in any language.

If teaching is in a language that the Indigenous/Tribal/Minority (ITM) child does not know (e.g. Nepali), the child sits in the classroom the first 2-3 years without understanding much of the teaching. S/he may repeat mechanically what the teacher says, without understanding, without developing her capacity to think with the help of language, and without learning almost anything of the subjects that she is taught. This is why many ITM children leave school early, not having learned much Nepali, not having learned properly how to read and write, not having developed their mother tongue, and almost without any school knowledge.

If the child has the MT as the teaching language, s/he understands the teaching, learns the subjects, develops the CALP in the MT, and has very good chances of becoming a thinking, knowledgeable person who can continue the education.

Parents want children to learn Nepali and English. If children are taught mainly through their MT the first many years, how do they learn Nepali and English?

All MLE programmes teach Nepali as a SECOND language subject from grade 1 or 2. The teachers know both the children's MT and Nepali. In the CALP part of language, much is shared in the MT and Nepali (and other additional languages such as English). The child needs to learn reading and writing only once in life, and it is easiest to learn it in a language that one knows well. When the child has understood the relationship between what one hears and speaks, and the reading/writing system, in the MT, this can easily be transferred to other languages (even if the script may be different). When the child has learned many abstract concepts in the MT, s/he just needs to learn new "labels", new words for them in Nepali; s/he already knows the concepts. In this way, only parts of the language (Nepali) is new; the child already knows the content in various subjects (e.g. in mathematics). All languages share a common underlying proficiency. When the child develops this proficiency in the language she knows best, the MT, it is easily transferred to other languages. And when the child is already high-level bilingual in the MT and Nepali, she learns English and other languages faster and better than if she starts English learning as monolingual in the MT. She needs fewer years of and less exposure to English, to learn it well. All research studies in the world show that the longer the child has the MT as the main medium of education, the better the child learns the subjects and the better s/he also becomes in the dominant language of the country and in additional languages. The number of years in MT-medium education is also more important for the results than the parents' socio-economic status. This means that MLE also supports economically poor children's school achievement.

Isn't it enough if children have the first 3 years in the MT and then the teaching can be in Nepali?

3 years of MT-medium teaching is much better than having all the teaching in Nepali (or in English which is even worse), but 3 years is NOT enough. The CALP development is nowhere near a high enough level in the MT after 3 years. 6 years in the MT is an

absolute minimum, but 8 years is better. Ethiopia, one of the poorest countries in Africa, has a decentralised education system where 8 years of mother-tongue-based MLE is recommended. Some districts have chosen to have only 4 or 6 years of MT-medium. Comparing results from the whole country, a large study shows that those who have had 8 years of mainly MT-medium and who have studied Amharic (the dominant Ethiopian language) and English as subjects, have the best results in science, mathematics, etc, and also in English. Those with 6 years are not as good, and those who have switched to English-medium already after grade 4, have the worst results, also in English.

Parents want English-medium schools. What are the likely results?

Many studies in India show that children in English-medium private schools initially know English better than children in MT or regional language medium government schools. But at the end of grade 8, the knowledge in the various subjects of the students in English-medium schools is lower than in government schools, and their English is no better. In addition, they do not know how to read or write their MTs and do not have the vocabulary to discuss what they have learned in any Indian languages. They have sacrificed knowledge of Indian languages and much of the knowledge of school subjects but they only get a proficiency in the English language, that is not high-level. This is partly because the English language competence of teachers is generally not very high, but also because the children have not been able to develop a high-level CALP, neither in the MTs nor in English.

Mother-tongue based MLE for the first 6-8 years, with good teaching of Nepali as a second language and English as a foreign language, and possibly other languages too, with locally based materials which respect local Indigenous knowledge, seems to be a good research-based recommendation for Nepal.

It was later also published in the first *Newsletter*, Volume 1, Issue 1, 2009 (*SWARA. A Symphony of Liberating Voices*) of the National Multilingual Education Resource Consortium at Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi, India (<http://www.nmrc-jnu.org/>, directed by Professors Ajit Mohanty and Minati Panda). They revised it for India together with me, and it was published in Hindi, Oriya and Telugu (see http://www.nmrc-jnu.org/nmrc_publications.html).

When discussing costs in ITM education, a starting point could be economics Nobel Prize laureate Amartya Sen's conceptualisation of poverty as 'capability deprivation': "Even the relevance of low incomes, meagre possessions, and other aspects of what are standardly seen as economic poverty relates ultimately to their role in curtailing capabilities (that is, their role in severely restricting the choices people have) ... Poverty is, thus, ultimately a matter of 'capability deprivation'" (Dreze & Sen 1996: 10-11). Thus, "poverty is no longer to be viewed simply in terms of generating economic growth; expansion of human capabilities can be viewed as a more basic objective of development" (Misra & Mohanty 2000a: 263). Since the loci of poverty, and of intervention, are in Sen's view, economic, social and psychological, and

measures have to be taken in each of these areas, the central question in reducing poverty is: “What is the most critical (and cost effective) input to change the conditions of poverty, or rather, to expand human capabilities?” (Misra & Mohanty 2000a: 265). There is “a general consensus among the economists, psychologists and other social scientists that education is perhaps the most crucial input” (ibid.).

Thus *if* poverty is understood as “both a set of contextual conditions as well as certain processes which together give rise to typical performance of the poor and the disadvantaged” in school, and *if* of “all different aspects of such performance, cognitive and intellectual functions have been held in high priority as these happen to be closely associated with upward socio-economic mobility of the poor” (Misra & Mohanty 2000b: 135-136), *then* we have to look for the type of division of labour between both/all languages in education that guarantees the best possible development of these “cognitive and intellectual functions” which enhance children’s “human capabilities” (Skutnabb-Kangas & Dunbar 2010). And here it is very clear that submersion education through the medium of a dominant language for ITM children enhances poverty. It leads to extremely high push-out rates (these are called “drop-out” rates, as if children dropped out of education voluntarily; instead they are pushed out by the way their submersion education is organised). It is an enormous economic (and human) wastage. Stephen Walter (in Walter & Benson 2012; see also e.g. 2008, 2010) shows clearly in a very big study from Guatemala, with almost 400,000 children, that Mayan mother tongue medium education is cheaper than Spanish-medium education in getting children up to graduation at grade 6 (fewer children are pushed out (“drop out”) in lower grades, meaning the cost per pupil who reaches grade 6 is lower in Mayan-medium schools. Francois Grin¹¹, the Swiss economist of language, has shown in many of his articles and books that the cost of granting minorities language rights, also in education, are amazingly minor even initially, and both states and corporations get long-term profits. This is also because ITM children stay in school and become more productive citizens, also economically. Multilingualism, importantly including high-level multiliteracy, is the future. It enhances creativity, divergent thinking, cognitive flexibility, ability to focus, and many other aspects of human functioning that are not only economically beneficial but enhance human development. Also here, the literature is massive.

AK: Some supporters of Farsi as the official language argue that there are many Iranian languages and dialects (some have suggested up to 700). Elevating the status of only a few languages among so many will open the Pandora’s Box. Which language are you going to start with? As soon as the first regional language is official, the speakers of hundreds of other languages will be up in arms. There is this illusion, they add, that apart from Tehran, which is more visibly a multilingual city, other areas are linguistically homogeneous. They believe this is not true. What is going to happen, they ask, to the speakers of Farsi, Kurdish, or Balochi who live in Azerbaijan (in Iran) if Turkish becomes the official language in that region, particularly considering the fact that all these non-Turks will need Farsi to survive economically and socially anywhere in Iran beyond the borders of Turkish speaking provinces? If languages such as Turkish and Kurdish gain any form of officiality, the speakers of other languages, although spoken by smaller populations, might have demands that the central government would not be able to meet. This process only would lead to chaos.

18. Do you think they are right? How have other countries dealt with this problem?

¹¹ Look up his home page on Google, or find references to many of his articles in my Big Bibliography on my home page,

TSK: Replying to this question would mean writing a whole book. In general, I do not think they are right. There are many challenges and difficulties, and in some countries and situations things have certainly gone wrong. But I would like to remind readers that it in most cases is NOT language that causes the problems. It is the economic, social and political divisions, the unequal power relations, that are the main causal factors. And when divisions along these lines coincide with language differences, we have dangerous situations. Granting linguistic human rights, also in education, is ONE – and only one – of the necessary prerequisites for social justice and more peaceful conditions, but it is really important to emphasize that language rights are NOT sufficient for harmony. They do work towards harmony, but economic, social and political changes are absolutely necessary for social justice. In addition, I see in many of the questions, a mixing up with on the one hand, organising mother-tongue based multilingual education, MLE, for minority groups, and making minority languages co-official. It is perfectly possible to organise MLE for many groups, without making their languages co-official, and even without many groups demanding this co-officiality.

AK: Some of the critics of mother tongue instruction argue that it is an illusion to imagine that there is one standard Kurdish, for example, in Iran that could be used by all Iranian Kurds. They say there are tens of different Kurdish dialects in Iran's Kurdistan. In a few cases these dialects are so different that the speakers of these Kurdish dialects need to speak in Farsi in order to understand each other.

19. Doesn't this situation make policy making for teaching a standard Kurdish in schools an extremely difficult enterprise? Do you recall any international examples in this regard?

TSK: This issue has been discussed really extensively in all countries where Kurds live. I recommend especially books and articles by Kurdish scholars themselves (e.g. Amir Hassanpour, Jaffer Sheyholislami). Both Kurdish and other scholars (e.g. Martin van Bruinessen) have recently started publishing much more than earlier, in many languages, including Farsi and English and, of course, several Kurdish languages/dialects/varieties. There are at least two high-level international Kurdish journals (*Kurdish Studies Journal*, and since **Kovara Akademîk a Xebatên Kurdî / Academic Journal of Kurdish Studies**), and the literature is already large.

One situation that is in some ways similar to the Kurdish one, even if the numbers are very small, is the Saami. There are probably maximally around 120,000 Saami, divided between four countries (Finland, Norway, Russia, Sweden), with 10 different Saami languages, most with their own dialects. Some groups are very small, e.g. the Aanaar Saami¹² and the Skolt Saami in Finland, both under 400, and Saami groups in Russia are even smaller. Some of the Saami languages are spoken in one country only, many in two or more. But, again, the situation of the Saami is in most respects incredibly much better than that of the Kurds. In the three Nordic countries, they have (as Indigenous peoples) many linguistic human rights, especially in their own administrative areas where their languages are co-official; they have their own Parliaments, with their own budgets, which can make many decisions within Saami culture and many other issues (whereas they have only an advisory function in relation to the governments in the respective countries in larger economic and political issues, including many land right issues).

¹² See Olthuis, Kivelä & Skutnabb-Kangas (2013) for a description of a spectacular revitalisation of the Aanaar Saami language in Finland.

Even if the Saami in the four countries say that they are one people, with several languages and cultures, there are next to no voices (and none serious) demanding independence; autonomy in certain issues, together with human rights, especially linguistic and cultural human rights, seems to be enough. The Saami University College in Guovdageaidnu/Kautokeino, Norway, with a Russian Saami president, teaches in several Saami languages, depending on the competencies of the teachers; many speakers of smaller Saami languages have learned the largest one, North Saami. There is simultaneous interpretations in some more formal contexts. For instance, in the Finnish Saami Parliament, the recently (2015) elected President, Tiina Sanila-Aikio, speaks her mother tongue Skolt Saami at the meetings, and there is simultaneous interpretation from and into the other Saami languages. Often at Saami conferences there is also interpretation into Finnish, Swedish, or Norwegian, and sometimes also English. In the daily Nordic Saami news programme on television, all Saami speak their own Saami languages and dialects, and for instance on Swedish TV where I watch these news, everything said in Saami is translated into Swedish or Norwegian, and everything said in other languages is interpreted into one of the Saami languages. If the Indigenous speaker interviewed on the news is, for instance, from Japan or Guatemala, her speech is interpreted (e.g. via English or Spanish) into spoken Saami, and translated into Swedish in the subtitle. It sounds complicated, but for us multilinguals it is natural, and works fairly well.

AK: In mother tongue conversations in Iran, regularly references are made to the research in the US shows that Hispanic students who received bilingual education did not succeed in their future lives as much as the Spanish speaking kids who went to English only schools. In the same fashion, some Iranian intellectuals assert that this would be a disfavour to the children of speakers of minority languages if we did not emphasize the importance of Farsi in schools simply because Farsi is language of social, educational, and academic success.

20. Have you ever encountered this research? How popular are the findings of research of this kind internationally?

TSK: I think I know the North American research on bilingual education fairly well, and I cannot recognise studies of this kind. Partly, I know of NO research where Spanish-speaking children who have been in English-only schools would have been systematically compared with Spanish-speaking children in bilingual education, in terms of their future lives. This should have been a longitudinal study, following both groups of children at least until their thirties, and trying to keep other factors that influence educational success constant. I have not seen any such studies. On the other hand, the largest ever study in the USA, comparing Spanish-speaking children in various educational models, with over 200,000 children (Wayne Thomas & Virginia Collier – look up all their studies, including the 2014 book, under both names, on Google), show very clearly that the longer the children had Spanish-medium education, the better their school achievement, including their competence in English. And the length of mother tongue medium education is more important than socioeconomic status, a factor that in many studies explains why poor children (who often also happen to be minorities) do worse in academic achievement than middle class children. Most other comparative studies show the same, all over the world. The few which do not, often have methodological shortcomings, where, just to take one example, what has been called “bilingual education” in some studies has only had an element of teaching the mother tongue as a subject, or where most of the teaching has been in the dominant language,

already from the beginning or after a couple of years. All serious and solid research shows that properly conducted bilingual education works well and produces better results than dominant-language-medium education. TSK & RD 2010 presents dozens of examples, and the literature on the benefits of bilingual and mother-tongue-based multilingual education is enormous, hundreds of books and tens of thousands of reports, articles and book chapter.

AK: Some of the critics of launching educational programs in students' mother tongues in Iran argue that any practical measure to change language policies needs a strong theoretical foundation. They believe, considering the political, social, cultural, and economic consequences of such a decision, we need to conduct detailed and in-depth research from a variety of perspectives before changing the educational system. They state that taking any practical step towards instruction in mother tongue without enough pedagogical, ethnographical, and historical research would be a grave mistake. As a matter of fact, these critics might be right about the amount of empirical research on this issue in Iran. When I was reviewing literature for this interview, I realized that most of the discussion on educational instruction in mother tongue in Iran was reflected in newspaper interviews with people of influence rather than empirical research published in scientific and academic journals.

21. What do you think about this concern?

TSK: The concern is real in terms of preparation of teachers, materials, etc – the change has to be extremely well prepared. Regardless of which language is the medium of education, there are many other factors that influence the outcome (see, for instance, the characteristics listed in Skutnabb-Kangas & García 1995). There are also hundreds of examples from most non-Western countries where the political and even educational decision-makers have, for instance, decided that English (or, in some cases, French) will be the teaching language in the whole educational system, but where there are extremely few competent teachers, no or completely inadequate pedagogical training of teachers, etc. This has been one of the main catastrophes in many African countries' disastrously poor educational achievement. But when it comes to the theoretical foundations, they are extremely strong already. Even if all education has to be contextualised, and even if one cannot ever take over models from other contexts and expect them to work without any changes and adjustments, we know more than enough about the basic theoretical foundation for why certain types of models work and others don't. There are many big international comparisons from many different types of countries showing this. In a large comparative study, done for the New Zealand (Aotearoa) Ministry of Education. Stephen May and Richard Hill conclude that dominant-language-only education is "widely attested as the least effective educationally for minority language students" (May & Hill, 2003: 14). It is organized against solid research evidence about how best to reach high levels of bilingualism or multilingualism and how to enable the ITM children to achieve academically in school. The fact that a proper education and human rights make demands both on the groups themselves and the state, in no way legitimates the present situation in many countries, including Iran, with human rights violations.

AK: And finally, the last question. The mother tongue activists in Iran complain that a major obstacle in the way any change of language policies in Iran is the views of the Iranian elite and intellectuals, who are mostly supporters of a Farsi-only educational system. These activists think

if the Persian intellectuals joined them in this cause, convincing the government and the public would become a considerably less energy consuming business?

22. What is the role the elite and the intellectuals in this debate? Are there any international experiences concerning the role of intellectuals that Iranian mother tongue activists can learn from?

TSK: I would like to quote Edward Said on the role of intellectuals:

The intellectual is ... someone whose place it is publicly to raise embarrassing questions ... to be someone who cannot be easily co-opted by governments or corporations ... Least of all should an intellectual be there to make his/her audience feel good: the whole point is to be embarrassing, contrary, even unpleasant' (Said 1994: 9-10).

It seems to me that some Iranian intellectuals may follow (and/or even lead) those Iranian elites who harm rather than support the positive educational efforts. Those who might make society more socially, economically and politically just, among other things through mother-tongue-based multilingual education, may be counteracted by these Iranian intellectuals. It is indeed easy to be “co-opted by governments or corporations”, and be or become voluntarily ignorant about what solid research says about the issues at hand.

I am sometimes accused, often by those who do not want to analyse their own place on the diversity continuum (from preventing the maintenance and development of minority mother tongues, via toleration of them, to promoting them), of politicizing educational language issues. Otto Rene Castillo, the Guatemalan poet and revolutionary, gives an answer that resonates with me – I have quoted the first sentence of it for several decades. Here you get the whole poem. The world needs more “political intellectuals” in Castillo’s sense in every country, including Iran.

Apolitical intellectuals

One day
the apolitical
intellectuals
of my country
will be
interrogated
by the simplest
of our people.
They will be asked
what they did
when their nation
died out
slowly,
like a sweet fire
small and alone.

No one will ask them
about their dress
their long siestas
after lunch,
no one will want to know
about their sterile combats
with the idea
of the nothing
no one will care about
their higher financial learning.
They won't be questioned
on Greek mythology,
or regarding their self-disgust
when someone within them
begins to die
the coward's death.

about their absurd
justifications,
born in the shadow
of the total life.
On that day
the simple men will come.
Those who had no place
in the books and poems
of the apolitical intellectuals,
but daily delivered
their bread and milk,
their tortillas and eggs,
those who drove their cars,
who cared for their dogs and gardens
and worked for them.

And they'll ask
"What did you do when the poor
suffered, when tenderness
and life
burned out of them?"
Apolitical intellectuals
of my sweet country,
you will not be able to answer.
A vulture of silence
will eat your gut.
Your own misery
will pick at your soul.
And you will be mute in your shame.

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Multilingual Education: Pedagogy, Power, and Identity

A Conversation with Jim Cummins

Amir Kalan: In the early years of the Pahlavi reign in Iran (1925-1979), policy makers deemed a serious and rapid attempt to build the spirit of a centralized and unified nation as an inevitable step reaction to the creation of European nation states, which, over a short period of time, had gained military, political, and economic supremacy in the world. Among numerous actions that they took to unify the nation, they urged that a single dominant language in the state would guarantee the unity of the nation. Fluency in Persian was required for governmental positions and Persian became the only language of instruction in the modern Iranian public educational system, which was created by Reza Shah in the same period. The “unity” argument is still commonly used both against giving equal official status to other languages and against instruction in students’ mother tongues in schools. **How valid do you think the argument of unification through one common language is? What are the consequences of such a political approach to making language policies for educational systems and pedagogical practices? Have you, in your academic work, encountered examples of how linguists, educators, and mother tongue activists dealt with similar arguments in their own countries and communities?**

Jim Cummins: As you have pointed out, the notion that unity of language is essential for the unity of the nation is still a dominant sentiment in many countries such as the United States. And again, as you’ve pointed out, after the revolution in France, they just tried to wipe out all the varied languages that were part of the French reality. And I think it’s not hard to refute that notion in general. The obvious example is a country like Switzerland, which has three or four

official languages, and is not in any danger of breaking up. And the argument that one needs to marginalize or get rid of minority languages in order to maintain cohesion of the country just has no validity whatsoever because of many counter examples to that. And it clearly has been used historically as a way of imposing the dominance of one group over others and getting rid of what are perceived as potential threats to that dominance. But the rhetoric is very much alive and well. Probably the most prominent, recent example that I'm familiar with is in the United States. The United States does not have an official language but English is obviously the de facto official language, and there have been strong movements over the last forty years to make English the official language. And it's because Spanish is perceived as being a threat and Spanish speakers as possibly copying Quebec and trying to develop some kind of independence. Even though there's never been any actual movement. But when this rhetoric starts, you generally get a paranoia that's directed at the minority group that's perceived as being a threat. Typically the minority group that's perceived as being a threat has been discriminated against over generations, as in the United States. Part of the rhetoric is also that the dominant language is threatened and that the country is going to break up unless we squash other languages. And it has absolutely no validity whatsoever. To claim in the United States context that English is a threatened language, which people have done, is just so absurd that it defies belief. And yet, it's part of that paranoia that we have to do this in order to maintain our way of life. And our way of life is being the dominant group and not acknowledging that there may be some advantages to other groups that speak other languages. And the ironic thing is that in the United States, the empirical data are very much against the argument that other languages represent a disadvantage; for example, if you compare people who are fluent and literate in Spanish and English with those who are fluent and literate in just English, or fluent and literate in just Spanish, in terms of

income, there's about an eight thousand dollar difference in favour of those who have knowledge of both languages. And so, it's not hard to see how people who are monolingual in English in the United States context would want to squash that potential advantage that the minority group has.

AK: And what are the consequences of such a political approach to making language policies for education and pedagogical practices in particular? What will happen in the classroom if policy makers look at language as merely a political battleground?

JC: Well, again, historically in many countries and currently in many parts of Europe and to a lesser extent in North America these days, the pattern has been one of punishing children for speaking their own language, certainly reprimanding them. For example, in the Canadian context historically with First Nations students, students' mouths were washed out with soap and many of them were brutally beaten if they spoke any of their languages. And obviously that was rationalized in pedagogical terms. You're never going to learn English unless you give up this other language, and again it's nonsense in terms of any empirical data. And it was just an educational expression of racism that has characterized many societies. But those attitudes become institutionalized very quickly. For example, it was very common for psychologists and teachers in Canada in the seventies and eighties to advise parents that if they wanted their child to succeed in school they needed to switch to English in the home. This advice was given even when the parents didn't speak any English. Those kinds of practices are the educational expression of broader patterns of racism in the society. Empirical evidence typically has minimal impact on these ideological discourses and so they just get ignored until the empirical evidence becomes impossible to ignore, which at this point is the case. But if you look at some of the data

from the European context in Germany and many other countries, it's still the rule that immigrant background children are not permitted to use any language other than the school language in the school or in the playground. They can be punished for doing it. I recently read an article about Turkish children in a Belgian school where students were prohibited from speaking Turkish in the playground but they would sometimes get together in the schoolyard and speak Turkish knowing that if the teachers can't hear them then they can't do anything about it. And so, it becomes an opportunity for resistance on the part of the students.

AK: In your experience, how have educators and academics who believe in mother tongue-based instruction reacted to such discourses and ideologies? How have they internationally dealt with stances such as the one taken in the “unity argument”?

JC: What they have done is (a) point to the research evidence that is contrary to the ideological assumptions and (b) point to the inconsistencies in the logic, because certain kinds of bilingualism and multilingualism are accepted and acceptable. And it just happens to be the languages of oppressed minority groups that are not acceptable. So for example, in the European context, it's totally acceptable within the European Union and strongly supported to have bilingualism in French and English and German and other languages, and schools spend a lot of time trying to do that. So when multilingualism is serving the interests of dominant groups, it's fine. It's when multilingualism is potentially preserving languages of discriminated minorities that it becomes a problem. Many researchers such as Tove Skutnabb-Kangas and, in fact, all researchers who have looked at this issue, have pointed to the inconsistency in viewing elite bilingualism as fine, but bilingualism that might advantage minority groups is not fine. And it's

not valued. So basically the response of researchers has been to (a) point to the empirical evidence and (b) point to the logical inconsistencies.

AK: Some Iranian academics draw upon the experiences of other nations in the world and argue that many other multilingual nations have also accepted the dominance of one official language as a pragmatic measure. They refer to ninety million Spanish speakers in the United States who have accepted English as the official language. They underline the example of immigrants in Israel, who have to use Hebrew officially and at school, particularly in order to strengthen the unity of the nation. In the United Kingdom also, they claim, there are different languages and dialects; however, the public have welcomed English as the official language. Based on these examples, these academics invite the speakers of minority languages in Iran to accept the status of Farsi as the official language of the country as a pragmatic move similarly experienced in other parts of the world. **Are they right? Have speakers of minority languages comfortably accepted the official languages in the countries listed above? How did these language policies impact the education of minority students? Is there any research that can show how these policies affected students' identities and, as a result, their education?**

JC: You've got a situation in most countries where there is one or more dominant languages. Obviously in the United States it's English, in Canada it's English and French and they're official languages. And there's no question that the minority groups recognize the rules of the game, recognize that there is a dominant language that they need to acquire for success for advancement in the society. And for example, no Spanish speaker in United States has ever argued against acquiring strong English skills because they know that that's necessary for going

to university and advancement socially and economically. And so there's no dispute about that. The problem with the attitudes that are behind the questions you've asked is that they imply an 'either-or' logic. Either minority group members accept the dominance of the dominant language and as a result give up their own language or they stick with their own language and then they won't learn the dominant language. And again, the empirical data are totally at variance with that logic. It's not a case of 'either-or', it's a case of 'both-and'. And so the dominant groups that have argued, for example, to make English the dominant or official language thereby marginalizing other languages, have always used the argument that this is necessary if you want to be an American. If you want to be part of the society, you've got to give up the culture and language of your country of origin. And there's obviously no logic to that, or empirical support for that at all. As I said in United States context, there are obviously economic advantages to knowing Spanish or other languages. Spanish is the fourth or fifth largest language in the world in terms of number of native speakers. There are huge economic opportunities for people who speak that language. If you look at Chinese or Mandarin Chinese, you've got even more economic advantages that are possible. So the argument that minority groups should get rid of those languages and schools should discourage children from maintaining those languages has almost come to the point that the dominant group is saying to minority groups that we don't want you to have an advantage over us. We're monolingual, we don't know those languages. We know that if you are fluent and literate in Chinese, companies like Apple or Google are going to hire you before they're going to hire me. And so, it's a case of just continuing a discriminatory attitude by denying children access to a language that's going to advantage them both socially and economically. But what the orientation does pedagogically is encourage students to reject their home languages. And so, you've got a situation in this city [Toronto] where you've got

more than half the students in the school system who come from non-English speaking backgrounds, and yet only a relatively small proportion will go through elementary school maintaining real fluency in their home language and developing literacy in that language. Because English is very much the dominant language, the home language is likely to stop developing unless the school is proactive in communicating to children that their home languages represent an intellectual accomplishment and unless they provide support for parents in communicating accurate information about the value of bilingualism and biliteracy for their children. If the school is not proactive in communicating this information, both to parents and to children, then the 'normal process' of language loss and language attrition will continue. There are so many kids in this city who by the time they're age ten have lost most of their productive capacity in their home language, although they may still have some receptive knowledge. These children were probably largely monolingual in that language up to the age of four. But they have lost the ability to speak it. They cannot speak with their grandparents; if they go back to the home country they can't interact with relatives or other children. The school system has contributed to children being less than they were when they first entered school. And it's a huge loss. It's a loss for them as individuals. It's a loss for the families. Because family communication is often less than it might be if the children spoke both languages. And it's obviously a loss for the society. Despite our knowledge of these realities, we have not taken any concrete steps to address the issue on a large scale. Obviously some individual teachers have strongly supported students in developing their home language skills and attitudes have changed at Ministries of Education in several provinces. However, the idea that children's home languages are an intellectual and cultural resource is still not a mainstream orientation. Most schools do not have an operational language policy that says we're going to give students every

encouragement to maintain their home languages. We need to communicate effective and empirically supported messages to students about the value of their languages and encourage all students to develop an awareness of the languages of the classroom. We're still a long way from that despite the fact that there has been an uptick in terms of the number of teachers who are aware of the value of students' languages and a number of wonderful projects have been implemented across the country. We haven't developed language policies that would enable all teachers to adopt an orientation of what I've called a 'teaching through a multilingual lens'. This orientation would position students not just as 'ESL' or 'ELL' students where they are being defined by their current deficiency in English, but would view them as emergent bilingual or multilingual kids, and communicate the advantages of knowing multiple languages to students. So pedagogically, these attitudes have destructive effects on children, on families, and on the country. And yet, because still too many policy-makers and educators have these ideological blinders on implicit policies that are harmful to students and education generally remain in place.

AK: In conversations about language as a unifying factor and at many other points in the mother tongue debate in Iran, the sides involved seem to ignore the line between mother tongue as the official language and mother tongue as the medium of instruction. Typically, minority language activists start with the right to receive education in students' mother tongues but their opponents end up arguing for Farsi as the official language. **How important is it to clearly distinguish between mother tongue as the medium of instruction and mother tongue as the official language?**

JC: The normal use of the term mother tongue, certainly in the international research community, is to refer to the first language of the student—the language that is spoken in the home. And to talk about mother tongue as the official language of the country is something that is certainly not common within the research or educational communities. But I can see how people would do that, because mother tongue has good connotations that it's the language you embrace and the argument is that Farsi should be the language that is the language of identity of children and the new generation. I suspect it's the same in Iran as it is elsewhere: the vast majority of minority groups want to be part of the midstream society. They know that acquiring Farsi or English, or whatever the dominant language is, is prerequisite for advancement within society. But they're clear, as is the research community, that that doesn't need to happen at the expense of one's home language and that bilingualism and multilingualism represent the dominant mode of existence of people worldwide. Multilingualism is more common than monolingualism. Monolingualism is the exception rather than the rule. And so there's no empirical basis to arguments that if you maintain your first language, you're going to do less well academically. There's no empirical basis to the notion that maintaining the first language will reduce one's affiliation to the broader societal as a whole. Often the arguments that people make when they try to impose a dominant language on minority groups are counterproductive. By oppressing other languages, you marginalize the groups that speak these languages. And you can foster separatist movements, and separatist tendencies because of this kind of discrimination. For example, the separatist movement in Quebec, which has ebbed and flowed over the years, was initially promoted or fostered by the fact that a small dominant group of English speaking people in the society dominated the economic life of the province. And so even though Quebec was a language spoken by the vast majority of people, over eighty percent of the province, they

didn't have control of the economy. That was controlled by an Anglophone elite. And so basically the separatist movement was built on resentment of that. The rallying call of resistance was that we want to be *maîtres chez nous*, we want to be masters in our own house, and so the danger of oppressing other languages is that you develop a consciousness of the threat to their languages on the part of the minority group that's being oppressed. They believe accurately that if we want to maintain our language and maintain our identity we have to fight for it. And so it sets up an 'us versus them' reality that can in fact foster separatist movements.

AK: I think the distinction between “mother tongue as the medium of instruction” and “mother tongue as the official language” is very important because it might reduce political intensities in the conversation. Blurring the borders between the two will distort the reality of the educational demands of the speakers of minority languages. For example, teachers in a small village in Kurdistan might argue that their students need to speak their home language at school. This request should not be interpreted as a political attack for elevating the Kurdish language to an official language. They are two entirely different demands.

JC: There may be situations such as you describe for Kurdish communities in Iran. I obviously don't know the specifics, but Kurds are people without a nation and are split over four or five different countries. And so that kind of oppression and marginalization that they have experienced from multiple countries can certainly lead to a yearning to have some control over one's own destiny and to have a place that one can call home, which may be happening right now in Iraq. But in general, minority groups in a society want to be part of the mainstream, they want access to the benefits that belong to a society. And if the dominant group within the society

takes a kind of *laissez-faire* attitude and says, “hey just no problem, speak your language” but if you only speak Kurdish you’re not going to get a job in the civil service, or you’re not going to be able to go to university or advance economically. So, ironically, in contexts where there isn't oppression of other languages, language assimilation will tend to happen more smoothly. That’s been the case in the United States with Spanish. As people become middle class, they will tend to switch to English as their normal language of interaction. If you maintain class divisions and if students are dropping out of school early without means to really develop strong English skills, then they’ll continue to maintain their language. So oppression and racism create the phenomenon that they’re trying to counteract.

AK: Some Iranian scholars say that the recent Western discourses that celebrate the mother tongue have been constructed as a reaction to the brutal elimination of native European languages by centralized nation states created over the few past centuries in Europe. They particularly talk about what happened in France after the French revolution. They assert that such a brutal treatment of minority languages in Iran has actually never happened. Segregation of schools as we have seen in the United States has never happened in the long history of Iran. Or any institution similar to Canadian Residential Schools has never been established in Iran. They say most of the discourses through which Iranian mother tongue activists are speaking are too aggressive because of their original context, which is practically the brutality of white European colonial linguistic policies. They believe that Iranian civilization, Greater Iran, or “cultural Iran” has always been a multilingual and multicultural society. This argument is also indicative of the fear that importing these discourses from the West might indeed be the sign of a new colonial cultural invasion, another practical mistreatment of a good idea like planting democracy in Iraq

by President Bush. **How do you think Iranian policy makers and educators can both deal with the mother tongue problem in Iran and at the same time localize international experiences in a way that bitter historical memories such as Western interventions would not overshadow their attempts? Do you recall any other examples of the same challenge anywhere else in the world?**

JK: It's a really interesting idea and one that hadn't occurred to me until I read the question. When you talk about the mother tongue problem, it's only a problem if one makes it a problem. It's not a problem, if you've got a situation where the goal of schooling for Turkish or Kurdish or other minority groups would be to have students do as well as any other students in terms of Persian but also develop literacy and languages that are functional within their community in the broader territories around. And different schools can certainly do that if the law were to permit them to do it. We have the technology if you like, for implementing bilingual programs of various kinds or even teaching the language as a subject in contexts where it's strong outside can be effective in many cases. We also know that if children do develop literacy in their home language, that will certainly not have any negative impact on their knowledge of the dominant language and may in fact have a positive impact on it, because there's a lot of data suggesting that bilingualism is a positive force in children's intellectual development. So it only becomes a problem when you try to suppress mother tongues. This process is frequently rationalized on the grounds that if communities and individual children hold on to their mother tongues that's going to (a) lessen their affiliation to the mainstream culture and (b) result in less accomplished academic learning. Neither of those have any basis whatsoever. And as I said before, when you start with those assumptions and implement repressive language policies in terms of general

society and in terms of the school, you create the problem that you're ostensibly trying to solve. Take the example of places like the United States or Canada, where the school doesn't encourage children to lose their mother tongue - basically here, it's *laissez-faire*, we don't typically punish kids for speaking their language anymore. But English is just so strong in the wider society that it zaps the other languages. And so children tend not to develop a really strong literacy in those languages. And so in the Iranian context, my sense is that if the government were serious about trying to ensure that Farsi becomes the dominant language and that everybody develops it and gradually becomes the language of transmission from one generation to the next, the best thing to do would be to just forget about it. Let people learn the mother tongue, let them teach it, but if all of the rewards in society come from knowing the dominant language, then people gradually switch to that over several generations. What the government is doing in terms of instituting repressive policies in relation to minority languages is generating a sense of resentment, generating an activist movement that is trying to defend languages and the identities they represent. And so it's generating a linguistic nationalism that doesn't need to be there. Look at the Chinese context. You've got some bilingual programs for minority languages, typically very much transitional in nature, but most parents are not that interested in them. Because they know that Mandarin is the language that they need for academic advancement. But the government is not going out and repressing these languages, it's just sort of ignoring them. And so from the point of view of linguistic assimilation, it's probably much more productive than actually trying to implement laws that would prohibit people from using the languages, or prohibit people from teaching the languages.

AK: This is really interesting because some critics of multilingual education in Iran have also said that even if you opened only-Kurdish schools or only-Turkish schools, the parents wouldn't take their children to those schools. **But about the Chinese government's *laissez-faire* approach, are you critical of this *laissez-faire* approach or do you regard it as a reasonable solution?**

JC: I am absolutely critical of it from the perspective of social justice and what's in the best interest of the society. However, from a cynical perspective, dominant groups who want to encourage other languages to 'fade away' and die a 'natural' death, while minimizing any kind of social dissent, can achieve this most productively by ensuring that the minority groups do not perceive their languages as being repressed. The dominant group might provide some token support for teaching those languages, knowing that just this token support would probably not be effective. And so it's like putting a frog in cold water. If you put it in hot water, immediately it'll jump out. But if the linguistic assimilation is slow then people will not realize that it's happening. And so at a cynical level, an 'invisible' approach to language planning is likely to be much more effective in reducing the prevalence of minority languages and gradually increasing the number of dominant language speakers and the functions that are carried out in the dominant language. Repression is going to generate language activism. Now from the point of view of what's in the best interest of the society, obviously a linguistically competent society is going to be far more effective in many respects. There's no evidence that helping students develop literacy in their first language is going to in any way lessen the strength of the dominant language. It's not an either-or situation. So from the point of view of social justice, from the point of view of maximizing the intellectual and linguistic resources of a society, a much more

proactive approach to encourage multilingualism and multiliteracy as explicit goals of schooling would be advocated by virtually every researcher who has examined the academic and social effective of bilingualism and bilingual education.

AK: Some defenders of the official state of Farsi say it is true that the Iranian governments have been particularly oversensitive to the status of the Persian language over the past century; this protectionism, however, should not be interpreted as antagonism towards other Iranian ethnicities and their mother tongues. They, instead, believe the anxiety surrounding the status of Persian is a reaction to Western colonialism, mainly the impact of French in the past and English at present. They strongly believe that Farsi itself is an endangered language that requires immediate attention and revival. They say, for example, although Farsi is the mother tongue of the people of Tajikistan, for decades—particularly before the collapse of the Soviet Union—the Tajiks were not able to write and publish in their language or receive educational instruction in their mother tongue. Similarly, in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and India, Persian speakers have experienced a lot of discrimination. Portraying Farsi as a colonial language, thus, they believe, is a mistake. Bashing Farsi, they claim, is a technique employed by separatists, who are used by the West as puppets for political purposes. These separatists, they tell the public, are not really concerned about the status of native cultures or better education for the children of the speakers of minority languages. **How valid do you think this argument is? What would be an example of wise policy making that could guide the Iranian intellectuals, school administrators, and teachers who are particularly concerned about the declining status of the Persian language?**

JC: It seems very problematic to me. It seems almost absurd to argue that Farsi is an endangered language in a country of about eighty million speakers of that language. It's almost as silly as people in the United States claiming that English is an endangered language. Again you can see how that argument fits into a particular ideology of fear of minority groups. And so the argument that these groups have been manipulated by the West as a plot to undermine the status and legitimacy of Farsi fits a paranoid mindset and acts to justify what are essentially repressive language policies. As we've discussed, this paranoia just feeds on itself. It's counterproductive insofar as it will generate language activism. Because the more a language is actually being repressed, the more legitimate are the minority group's feeling that their identity and language are under threat. So that generates resentment. And resentment generates separatist tendencies—the minority group argues that they'd be better off out of here. And so, arguing that minority languages need to be squeezed out of the public sphere seems not very persuasive. But it's really easy to see how dominant groups can argue in this way. Because you get a lot of ridiculous attitudes being expressed when people become paranoid. And so if somebody in the United States hears people speaking Spanish on the street, it generates paranoia. This paranoia can also help explain why in many parts of Europe it's still very common for educators and policy-makers to attribute the difficulties of Turkish children in school to the fact that they speak Turkish at home. And this is a way of blaming the victim, it's blaming the parents. The reason these kids are not doing well in school, the argument goes, has nothing to do with educators who are providing free and open education. It's because their parents refuse to learn German. And even if they do know German they refuse to speak it to the children, so they're disadvantaging their children. And so, it's not our fault, it's their fault. This is the classical blaming the victim mindset. But it's very persuasive to members of the dominant group, and the more it gets

repeated, the more it becomes convincing because you've got a discourse community that's all in the same mindset, and they reinforce each other.

AK: As you were speaking, I was wondering if the people who support these ideas – particularly the influential intellectuals who spread these ideas – have the paranoia, or if they exploit the public's paranoia. Sometimes it seems as if they just want to stir up nationalist sentiments in society and ride on this paranoia.

JC: Well, on the one hand they're promoting an Iranian nationalism linked to the notion that because Farsi is supposedly under threat, we've got to wipe out the other languages. But as I've said, it's a very counterproductive policy because it generates the nationalism that it is trying to get rid of.

AK: The supporters of the status of Farsi as the official language argue that minority language rights activists do not desire to create a multilingual society; they practically plan to force minority students to study in their own languages only. This tendency, they claim, will prevent those students from learning Farsi, which, in practice, can make their children succeed in life. This argument is sometimes even made by minority language speakers of great cultural stature in Iran. They say that the discourses used by mother tongue activists are so aggressive that if they obtain ground in this battle, there will be no room for cultural and linguistic interaction. These activists, they exemplify, call the Persians imperialists and colonialists, they desire complete separation, and they distort history to appropriate great Iranian figures. The Turks say that Avicenna was a Turk and the Kurds say he was a Kurd. This approach to this issue is an

indication that they might indeed sacrifice the future of their children for the sake of a political agenda. **How would you reply to this argument if you were an Iranian mother tongue activist or a teacher trying to make room for your students' mother tongues?**

JC: Again, it's easy to see how that argument can be made. And it may be that there are some people within some of the linguistic communities who are separatist, who want a separate state, and who would try to prevent or hinder children from acquiring real strong Farsi skills, because they're also operating on an 'either-or' type of orientation. But you've only got to look at any number of examples around the world to see the fallacies in the argument. If you look at the Basque country in Spain, which is probably the best example of effective language planning that I know of anywhere. The dictator Franco repressed Basque for forty years after the Spanish civil war. If you were caught speaking Basque in the street you'd be thrown in jail, you couldn't write Basque on gravestones, and the language declined dramatically under that really overt repression. When Franco died and the Basque autonomous community was established, only about twenty percent of the population were fluent speakers of Basque. The government of the Basque Autonomous Region set out to revive the Basque language. And they've been very successful in that now more than ninety percent of students go to schools that are either bilingual, fifty-fifty Basque-Spanish, or eighty percent Basque, twenty percent Spanish. It's a very successful language policy in that it has produced a new generation that's fluent in Basque. But their Spanish skills haven't declined. For a large majority, Spanish is still their stronger language even though most of the schooling has been in Basque. Spanish is the language that they know they need for access to the wider Spanish society. English is being acquired strongly, also. So the fact that they have had eighty percent of their instruction through Basque has not in

any way impeded their ability to acquire the dominant language and an international language. So one could imagine the same kind of situation among Turkish speakers in Iran. If they were in a bilingual program with Turkish being a language used for fifty percent of the instruction, their knowledge of Farsi would develop as well as in a school context where Farsi is used as the only language of instruction. This is a direct inference or generalization from the international research literature on this topic. However, if these issues get caught up with broader political conflicts, then that could impact on what's happening in the classroom. But in general what we know from the literature on bilingual education is that instruction through a minority language for a significant part of the school day does not in any way impede children's acquisition of the dominant language, assuming that there's sufficient exposure to the dominant language, and that children are motivated to learn it. So if those conditions are met, then in principle a bilingual program involving minority languages in Iran would not in any way discourage children from acquiring the dominant language. It would just lead children to have literacy in two languages.

AK: And probably the separatist movement in Basque has been much more energetic than any separatist desires in Iran.

JC: Yeah, and certainly the fact that Basque is a language that is now a viable language once again in the Basque country has probably undercut the separatist movement. Because basically what this says is we that don't need to have a separate country in order to maintain our language and culture. We are *maîtres chez nous* at least in the social and educational sphere. So again, the reality supported by the research evidence is the opposite of what the dominant ideology asserts.

AK: The Iranian Constitution states that ethnic minorities in Iran can study their languages as core subjects, but the law does not confirm the right of speakers of minority languages to use their mother tongues as the medium of instruction. Some in Iran argue that as long as the speakers of minority languages are free to study their own languages and literatures, an emphasis on instructing students in their mother tongues is irrelevant. **Could you shed some light on the practical consequences of a shift from instruction in mother tongue to learning mother tongue in a course in the classroom? How could either choice impact students' identities and the process of teaching and learning?**

JC: In general terms, teaching through a language, or teaching at least one other subject through a language, works much better than teaching language just as a core subject. So CLIL - content and language integrated learning – in which at least one other subject is taught through the language will tend to work much better than just teaching a language as a subject. And this is a broad generalization that comes from a lot of research literature. So that if the society were serious about developing literacy in children's mother tongues and having them study the languages and read the literature in that language, some kind of bilingual program would likely be much more effective than just teaching it as a subject. Now, having said that, it doesn't mean that teaching a language as a subject is not a valuable thing to do, particularly when the language is the dominant language within the community and is strongly promoted at home. So that can be valuable, particularly in developing literacy in the language. But in general, better results will be obtained from programs that actually use language to teach content. It doesn't have to be for half the day, it doesn't have to be for all the day, it can be successful when even one school subjects taught through the language.

AK: What about using the mother tongue as the medium of instruction particularly in primary school, and the identity of students? Would it not help empower students because their identities are recognized?

JC: It depends on what other messages are being communicated. So if Farsi is used as the medium of instruction, and children are being reprimanded for speaking Kurdish or Turkish amongst themselves in the classroom, that's certainly giving a negative message in relation to the children's identity. But if Farsi is the medium of instruction and it's accepted that everybody knows other languages too- especially if the teacher is from that community and speaks the language- then there's not going to be any negative effect on children's identity. They'd just grow up knowing that the language of schooling is Farsi - but the language used predominantly outside of school is Kurdish or Turkish, or whatever the language might be. And so, for people who grow up with that linguistic differentiation, there won't be any negative connotation associated with the minority language as long as the school is not actively suppressing it.

AK: In the Iranian context, this recognition might occasionally happen by local teachers who choose to ignore the rules and speak to their students in local languages. The teachers might make a decision to teach a lesson, for instance, in Turkish or Kurdish, because the teachers are also Kurds and Turks after all. When the principal is walking past a classroom, however, they might have to switch to Farsi.

JC: Again I think it's not a problem to have a strong push to develop Farsi **and** the other languages. But this is a surreptitious acceptance of the minority language, except when the voice of authority walks by, which is basically communicating two things: (a) this is an inferior language that is not accepted within the school or (b) we've got to stand up for our language against Farsi, neither of which is necessarily a positive attitude. It would make much more sense to have as a goal that we're going to develop literacy in (at least) two languages. And the research says that the two languages will help each other pedagogically and students get the message that one is not in any way inferior to the other. They have different histories, different realities – competition between the languages is not an issue. And so ideally this clarity in the school among teachers in terms of what they are doing is communicated to students in a way that's positive in relation to students' identity. That acknowledges that one can be a Kurdish speaker and a Farsi speaker at the same time. And one can be full citizen of Iran while speaking a minority language and advance within the society. That's the ideal. And it's eminently possible, but what happens in school is not insulated from the broader political battles that are going on.

AK: Some Iranian linguists argue that the Persian language does not linguistically belong to any particular Iranian ethnicity. They argue that Persian has always been (as Farsi is today) an educational, literary, and bureaucratic lingua franca contributed to and shared by all Iranian ethnicities equally. As a result, they argue, Persian should remain the most important language in our educational systems. They, for instance, say that before the recent status of Farsi as the official language of Iran as a modern nation, for nine centuries the mother tongue of the rulers of Iran was Turkish, yet the language of politics and literature in Iran remained Persian. Persian, thus, they conclude, has a transnational nature. They particularly underline the fact that most of

families living in Tehran, the economic and political heart of today's Iran, are multilingual because of the unprecedented flow of immigration to the capital over the past century. The Farsi spoken today in Tehran, they claim, is practically an amalgam of all of these linguistic traditions, so the idea of replacing Farsi with any other language is unrealistic simply because no other Iranian language is as linguistically connected to other languages in Iran as today's Farsi. **Can this linguistic argument justify the status of Farsi as an official language or the only medium of instruction? Does this view not imply that the individuals supporting this argument have a rather instrumental view of language and disregard the relationship between language and student identity?**

JC: Well again making a language the official language does not necessarily imply that one has to suppress other languages. So you can have Farsi as the official language, which seems reasonable from one point of view, while at the same time providing encouragement and rights to other groups to maintain their languages, together with Farsi. You're probably familiar with Richard Ruiz's three-part distinction that gets quoted a lot in the language planning literature, between language as problem, language as right, and language as resource. Richard, who passed away recently, worked in Arizona and has been a very prominent authority in the area of language planning. It's a very useful distinction, because it highlights essential aspect of the ways in which languages are positioned in society. For example, if you look at say the way immigrant languages have been treated here in Canada, or in the United States, the predominant orientation has been language as problem. There's a problem, because we've got to teach these kids English, and we make the assumption that that's because they're speaking another language at home. And so, the problem is how can we teach students English effectively. But language as

right is an equally prominent orientation in certain contexts. For example, in Canada French is an official language which confers all kinds of rights to the Francophone minority for services (e.g., education) in French. And in the European Union, there are language rights that particular national minorities have gained. And finally, the language as resource orientation views language as an individual or national resource (e.g., an economic resource). So if you take this framework and view the Iranian situation through this lens, you've got a situation where the multiplicity of languages are not a problem, unless we make it a problem. All the minority communities are learning Farsi. Farsi is the language of instruction. It is the official language. But that doesn't mean that we need to deny students the right to maintain their language - to develop literacy in their home and community language. If we see them as having the right to develop literacy in their home languages, maybe not a legal right but an ethical right, then we should take some steps within school to make that happen. And then we can take a broader view - a non-paranoid view - and see the languages as resources that facilitate trade with neighboring countries, that open up markets for our products etcetera. If you look at the size of Turkey for example, Turkish speakers can act as go between, between Turkey and Iran. So there are all kinds of cultural, intellectual, and economic benefits that come from knowing other languages. Therefore, deciding how one is going to position the other languages will, at a societal level, becomes a really important issue and will determine a lot of other aspects of societal policies. And it seems like a lot of the discourse within Iran has been - okay, Farsi is the official language, therefore that means we've got to discourage all the other languages. Well that's constructing other languages or the multilingualism of the country as a problem. It's an arbitrary distinction and has no empirical basis. And if one argues from the point of view of the rights of children, or languages as resources, very different kinds of policies will emerge. And neither of these two orientations

are in any way in opposition to the fact that Farsi may be the official language. You can have Farsi as the official language, but the other languages can be viewed in a positive way their role in the national society can be encouraged.

AK: The supporters of the exclusive right of Farsi as the official language of Iran usually argue that other Iranian languages do not have a considerable body of written language and a long history of documenting thoughts and ideas in written language. They claim that “local languages” are not culturally significant. These languages, they say, have limited linguistic potentials and cannot be used as a foundation for cultural growth. Presupposing that written language is superior to oral communication, the advocates of the official status of Farsi hold that the only language in the Iranian plateau that is sophisticated enough to help a civilization function is Persian. There are similarities between this mentality in Iran and European colonizers who labelled peoples from more oral cultures as savage, primitive, and illiterate. **What social, cultural, and political discourses create this manner of thinking? What have been the unpleasant consequences of this mentality in the West? How can the speakers of minority languages resist this view and build confidence in cultural potentials of their languages? How could teachers in the classroom move beyond this dominant discourse and empower the students who speak minority languages?**

JC: As you pointed out, it’s very much the same mentality as colonizers everywhere with linguistic and cultural chauvinism operating big time. And when you adopt an attitude that essentially says, “hey, I’m superior to you,” the response will generally be “I’m not going to accept that inferior status.” So again it’s the sort of attitude that generates resistance and is

counterproductive as well as not having any basis in research or historical fact. And certainly languages do vary in the extent which they have different kinds of literature associated with them, but the legitimacy of any cultural communication, whether it's oral or written, shouldn't be in doubt. I think again, the overall educational goals of society will be furthered by validating the background and identities of the children who are learning in schools rather than saying that you come from an inferior culture and race. That's a disaffirmation of people's identity. If you take that attitude, you're not going to value parental involvement, because parents are speaking this inferior language, they have no culture. This orientation replicates what discriminated, marginalized minority communities have experienced in many countries where the school reinforces that societal power structure. The resulting marginalization leads to an increase in crime and in all kinds of negative outcomes and also a squandering of the resources of the society.

AK: The next argument represents an extremely elitist view of cultural and educational policy making. Some supporters of Farsi as the official language, even among the speakers of minority languages, say that people might want to educate their children in their own language; however, language policies are not made by "the masses." Great men of letters have already decided about it. They, then, give examples of, for instance, great Turkish speaking writers (such as Khaqani, Nezami, and Shahriar) who wrote in Persian. They assert the best educational model, accordingly, is what these old masters did: Speak your own languages but use Farsi (especially written Farsi) as your main medium of communication with Iranian civilization. **How would you reply to this argument? How community-based education, informal educational structures, and critical pedagogy can offset the dominance of such a discourse?**

JC: Again, it's a very much a linguistic, chauvinistic perspective. And I think very similar attitudes would've been expressed by British colonials in India and Pakistan and elsewhere. The appropriate response to this perspective is to aim for an educational system that focusses on decolonization. And that's not easy to do. If you look at education in Africa for example, or many other parts of the world that were formally colonized, these countries have tended to internalize the values of the colonial masters long after they've gone. And so attitudes regarding the superiority of the dominant group can be internalized and last over generations. When you have an argument like that in the Iranian context, it's very similar to the previous discussion where you cannot educate students effectively when you put down their language, their culture, and their identities. And so it may be that people coming out from different minority groups in Iran who've become writers, may choose to write in Farsi. Or they may choose to write in their own language. But that's their choice. It's not something that you can prescribe from on top. You've got to let people make that choice. And you've got to give them the opportunity to develop literacy in their home languages. Obviously if you are denied the opportunity to develop literacy in that language, you're not going to necessarily be able to write in that language.

AK: Now that, through this conversation, you might have become more familiar with the nature of the problem of the mother tongue in Iran, **how do you think your research can be connected to this debate in Iran? Specifically, what do you think Iranian policy makers and educators can learn from your major contributions to multilingual education?** Let us talk about your work famously referred to as BICS and CALP: **How could Iranian policy makers reform the educational structure and the curricula if they considered the findings of your BICS and**

CALP research? Informed by your BICS and CALP theory, what should Iranian teachers consider when teaching multilingual classes?

JC: Well the distinction in BICS and CALP or conversational versus academic proficiencies is one that I think cuts across different languages. It's essentially a distinction between the language of informal interaction, face-to-face interaction, and the language of what James Gee would call secondary discourses. It's language that focuses on what's away from the here and now and generally requires a vocabulary and register that is not typical of everyday communication. So it's got to be learned. What the research suggests in terms of developing academic language, is you've got to engage with it. If you're talking about knowledge that is written, you've got to engage with literacy. And you've got to participate in the discourses that you want to become competent in. For example, one direct implication pedagogically is that you're not going to develop a strong academic language just by being taught the grammar of the language, or being taught the language only as a subject. You've got to participate in using and creating with that language. And the second aspect is that there's a lot of interdependence or overlap between literacy or cognitive academic proficiency in one language and other languages that students have access to. So that if you want students from Kurdish or Turkish backgrounds to develop strong Farsi academic language, it helps to build up their academic knowledge in their home language. Build up their conceptual knowledge in their home language and a lot of that will transfer to Farsi. So you create an academic foundation based on what they're bringing to school. And then that provides a foundation to build strong Farsi. When students don't have that foundation, and there isn't a focus on effective teaching of Farsi in the sense of getting students engaged with the language, then it's not surprising that students will drop out and not do well.

AK: So first you build the structure and the foundation in their own languages?

JC: Ideally, yes. You certainly need to build on what they're bringing to school. And there are a lot of examples of bilingual programs for minority groups around the world that suggest that's likely to have significantly better effects than just submersing kids into the dominant language.

AK: Even some of the supporters of minority languages who would like to see mother tongues used as a medium of instruction say that for example Kurdish or Turkish are not developed enough for academic subjects. For instance, they are not good enough to be used in a chemistry classroom in grade ten. **But do you believe one can create that foundation in the languages of students whatever they are?**

JC: The reason Kurdish may not have that language strongly developed is because in no country has Kurdish been permitted to be a medium of instruction; for example, it has been repressed in Turkey and other countries. So there aren't the textbooks and other resources at this point in time. Also, teachers who are speakers of Kurdish have not been educated through that language, so they haven't developed the means of communicating academically in that language. But that's the situation with many, many languages that have been repressed. Corpus development work needs to be done in those languages. And so to say that a language is inferior or can't be used for this, is absurd. It's a self-fulfilling prophecy.

AK: One might also argue that Farsi has the same problem. We are borrowing a lot of technical terms from English, so there is the same problem in Farsi as well. A lot of what we teach in a physics class is English vocabulary.

JC: Well, a lot of what's taught in physics classes or science classes generally is derived from Latin. About eighty percent of the language of science is derived from Latin or Greek. So this kind of borrowing is part of a globalization phenomenon that has been going on for some time. Languages have always borrowed from each other.

AK: What about informal channels of literacy engagement, like lullabies, songs, riddles, and so on in students' mother tongues? Would you encourage parents to expose their children to these texts at home?

JC: Literacy I think should be understood broadly, so that stories that are handed down from one generation to another are a form of literacy even though it may not be written. Like Homer's epics - they were not written. Some of the greatest literature in the world can start off as oral knowledge. The more language interaction the children experience and the more that interaction extends their vocabulary and concepts, the better they're going to do in school. It doesn't matter whether it's happening with parents, or in a school context, or in other social contexts. And if there was a less ideological approach to language planning, one that focused on how we can use these languages as resources, how can we encourage students to develop a pride in their languages, it would obviously have to start by consultation with communities. Communities probably would not be, for the most part, anxious to have their languages used right through

schooling as a medium of instruction, because they would also acknowledge that the curriculum is a national curriculum and we want our students to be able to go to the University of Tehran, and to compete there. So you know, in a context where the languages and the communities are not being repressed, there will be a recognition that Farsi is the language of advancement. But communities also want their languages to be respected. The research suggests that if we build upon that foundation, then they'll do better in Farsi. So I suspect that most communities would probably not be demanding a model of bilingual education similar to the Basque model. They would probably go for some kind of transitional model, where you might have fifty percent home language instruction during the first few grades, and then a reduction to a smaller percentage but still maintaining a focus on teaching the home language and culture but with Farsi as the dominant language. And so, there's no contradiction between having a model that recognizes the dominance within the society of Farsi at this point in time. It's only when you say that the dominance of Farsi requires that other languages be repressed that you create problems. China represents an interesting example, in this regard. I think they've managed minority languages in a skillful way from the point of view of the dominant group. Their orientation is not to directly repress minority languages; if communities want to teach for some of the instructional time through the first language, that's fine. But communities know that their children will be judged by how well they do in Mandarin, and it's a very exam oriented society, so the communities have, for the most part, have no problems with Mandarin being the dominant or only language of instruction. But if Beijing were to say, "Hey, you cannot use those languages, well then, communities would respond, "Why not?" So you generate resistance when you prohibit.

AK: Let's talk about what you have called "identity texts". **What are identity texts and how can they open spaces for students to express their linguistic and cultural identities? Can you give some practical examples of how teachers can invite students to create identity texts?**

JC: Well, you know it would be a case of acknowledging the fact that students are bilingual or multilingual and are capable of various forms of cultural production in their home languages. For example, as you've pointed out, Kurdish communities have a strong tradition of music, and much of that tradition is being passed on in the home and in community settings. You could have students bring and perform their music in the classroom, write songs, take videos of their performances, maybe translate songs from Kurdish into Farsi, and create a bilingual songbook. You could also set up a sister class connection with Kurdish students in some other region or country. The basic idea behind the identity text concept is that identity is important in terms of school achievement. When students are coming from minority language backgrounds, particularly marginalized backgrounds, where their communities have been on the wrong end of a power structure over generations, if we want to break the pattern of students dropping out and performing poorly in school, we've got to create pedagogical interactions in the school that allow students to affirm their identities. And so recognizing the strengths of students' cultures, recognizing the fact that students can be knowledge creators as well as knowledge receivers, and allowing that to happen in two languages or more is simply good pedagogy. It's not a very complex or sophisticated concept but its' relevance has not been recognized in a lot of contexts. The central point is that negotiation of identity in the school context is critical to whether students are going to engage or not engage academically. And if the message that students are

getting is that their culture and language and identities are worthless, their reaction is likely to be: “OK, I’m out of here.” This is exactly what’s happened with African American students and Spanish speaking students in the United States, and with First Nations here in Canada. The consequences of devaluation of identity in school and the wider society are very evident.

AK: Can you give an example of the success of identity text pedagogy in Canada or any of your projects?

JC: There’s one project that I was involved in with a professor in Wilfred Laurier University, Dr. Kristiina Montero, that involved with First Nations high school students. Kristiina had worked with a First Nations elder, who is an artist, and with high school students and their teachers in a First Nations ‘mini-school’ in the Hamilton area to have the elder work with students in creating visual art. The students got very much into it and they created some amazing artwork. They responded to each others’ work, wrote poetry inspired by the art and commented on the feelings and thoughts the art evoked in them. I first encountered this project when Kristiina had arranged for students’ work to be displayed in the art gallery at Wilfred Laurier University. And it just blew me away how incredibly expressive and strong this work was. And so I suggested to Kristiina that it would be really good to interview the kids, get their impressions of what it was like for them to do this. And that’s what we did. And I there’s one paper that we published with two of the students. It was very clear from the students’ observations that they had undergone a total recalibration of how they viewed themselves. The fact that their work has been displayed in three art galleries in the form of fully curated exhibits transformed their identities and their sense of what they are capable of. They just couldn’t believe that ‘the outside

world' would appreciate their ideas and what they could express through their art. And so, when you look at the causes of underachievement among certain marginalized groups - devaluation of identity has been a major factor, because the power structure in the wider society got translated into the school in terms of repressive policies and identity devaluation. And, so if you want to reverse that you need to create pedagogies that validate students' identities. In the Iranian context a problem has been identified in terms of lower achievement of minority groups and high dropout rates. Rationally, policy-makers have got to ask, "Why is this the case?" And I suspect that if we were to have an evidence-based discussion of it, one of the reasons that might emerge would be that messages are communicated to students that their language and culture are not valued in the wider society. And so if you want to reverse that, create a context where their language and culture are valued. This involves students creating something that showcases their identities in a positive light and demonstrates what students are capable of intellectually.

AK: Finally, your research on "challenging coercive relations of power in classrooms and communities": **What could be the significance of this theory for the teachers who are willing to accommodate students' mother tongues and native cultures but are not supported by the educational structure?**

JC: Again it goes back to what I was saying in terms of understanding the sources of underachievement. If you look at potential sources of disadvantage or risk factors among minority or immigrant background students, there are essentially three major ones that emerge from the research. One is, students experiencing a home-school language switch. Students are coming to school without speaking the dominant language. If the school does nothing to help

them to learn the dominant language, they're likely to sink rather than swim. Secondly, socio-economic factors play a major role in underachievement. Low socio-economic status (i.e., poverty) results in fewer resources in the home and stressed-out parents, perhaps working long hours in low-paid jobs. In the United States context for example, the lack of affordable healthcare has led to all kinds of risks for children. Add to this low levels of nutrition, lack of books in the home, maybe less linguistic interaction in some cases. And then thirdly, students from groups that have been marginalized as a result of historical patterns of discrimination and coercive relations of power. Historically, schools have reinforced the effects of this devaluation of identity. How these potential disadvantages become real disadvantages in the school? These sources of potential disadvantage become realized as actual disadvantage when the school doesn't address the causes. And so if the school is going to be serious about reversing the impact of those factors, it has to implement instruction that directly addresses them. For example, when we look at a home-school language switch, the school has to provide help for students to learn the language of instruction. Bilingual programs might be one option in terms of providing an academic and conceptual foundation in the home language so that the students don't fall behind. And it's extremely important for schools to strongly emphasize teaching academic language across the curriculum. In terms of socio-economic status, schools can't do much to reverse some of the components associated with poverty (e.g., housing segregation, lack of healthcare, etc.) but two things schools can do is promote literacy engagement, because there's a lot of data suggesting that there is much less access to print in homes of low socio-economic status students and there are frequently no public libraries in their communities, etcetera. And so, schools can immerse students in a rich literacy environment, ideally, involving both their first language and the dominant language. And secondly, we reinforce language across the curriculum. Then when

we look at issues related to power relations, identity affirmation has got to be part of the solution, because if identity devaluation is the cause, then you've got to reverse that. And so identity text type work is part of it. So when you look at the Iranian context, in an ideal situation where evidence was being discussed, policy makers might sit down with members of the community to talk about what we know about why students are underachieving. Why are they dropping out? Some students are coming to school not knowing any Farsi, what are we doing to help them learn Farsi? And do our teachers know how to teach students Farsi as a second language? And if not, what kind of training do they need to do that? We know from the research how important literacy engagement is. All the research shows this very clearly. So what are we doing to make sure the kids have ample access to books in their school and get engaged with literacy? And then in terms of identity power relations issues, how can the school challenge the messages that these communities have been getting from the broader society over a considerable period of time? This is a challenging issue because schools are set up to serve the societies that fund them. And so, if the society is saying these groups are inferior, but the school is saying that this is not the case, then schools are challenging aspects of the power structure in the broader society. So in terms of looking at responses to the problem of low achievement among minority groups, you've got to look at what causal factors are operating in this situation? Get whatever research might be available, get expert opinion from people who've observed what's going on. And then address the problem in a rational way. The entire society benefits when all children succeed in school.

Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education: An Indian Perspective

A Conversation with Ajit Mohanty

Amir Kalan: The politicians and the intellectuals of the early Pahlavi period (1925-1979) deemed a serious and rapid attempt to build the spirit of a centralized and unified nation as an inevitable step in the wake of the creation of European nation states, which had gained military, political, and economic supremacy in the world. Among measures they took to unify the nation, they urged that a single dominant language in the state would guarantee the unity of the nation. Accordingly, the Persian language, with the largest number of speakers in the country, became the language of public service and the only language of instruction in the modern Iranian public educational system, which was created by Reza Shah Pahlavi in the same period. Since early 20th century up to the present, the “unity” argument has been frequently used both against giving equal official status to other languages and against instruction in students’ mother tongues in schools. **How valid do you think the argument of unification through one common language is? Have similar conversations in India—at any point in its modern history—advocated strengthening the unity of the nation by means of one common language?**

Ajit Mohanty: Well, I think this whole idea that there has to be one nation, one language and that every nation needs one language is a political concept which grew out of how the modern political nation states were conceptualized. I think this is unfortunate because of its fallouts, the kind of situation in Iran. The policy of “one nation, one language” results in homogenization of diversities into one language and, in most cases, one culture. I think if you look at how language issues have evolved around the world, it is not true to say that just having one language is unifying. What it involves is a lot of forced assimilation of the minority language communities in the name of homogenization and in the name of unity.

We also need to realize that natural diversity cannot just be wilfully suppressed. For any society functioning coherently with just one language is a misnomer. For argument’s sake, let us say we have one language in a nation. Hundred years after, this languages will diversify because languages grow within an eco-cultural context. So with cultural and environmental differences within a country, one language will ultimately evolve into different languages. English as a language, for example, has evolved to be many Englishes. English has diversified. And, further

on, it is going to diversify even more. Therefore the whole idea that there has to be one language and one language will continue forever is not true. Even if you had one language, it would gradually evolve into many languages because diversity is an inevitable aspect of how languages evolve along with cultures and contexts.

Attempts to unify a nation or a geographical area on the basis of a dominant language, I do not think has ever succeeded. Now, if you look at India, a parallel situation is that after independence there was a reorganization of states or provinces. And that was primarily a linguistic reorganization in which identification and demarcation of states were based on the majority or dominant language in a given area. The linguistic reorganization of the states suddenly created a situation in which large number of languages became minorities in their own areas where they coexisted for centuries in a mutually complementing role along with many other languages. Creation of geo-political entities identified on the basis of a dominant or majority language leads to an unfortunate hierarchy in which one languages becomes more powerful than the others. In a naturally multilingual world, any undue dominance of one or few languages does NOT unify; it is divisive.

AK: So the status of “regional dominant languages” even within the states created a lot of “minority” languages?

AM: Yes, within those states. Once you create a province with a particular dominant language, all of the languages in that area become minorities. Children play a common puzzle in which they ask you to make a straight line shorter without touching that line; the trick is to draw another longer line to make the existing line shorter. What happened in Indian states is something quite similar; many languages were minoritised just by identification one language as the language of the state. So linguistic reorganization of states in India in the fifties, led to creation of the so-called minority languages within the provinces. That led to debates about the place of languages in the provinces because now each province has become sort of identified with a dominant language. Did that lead to unity or disunity? Languages themselves are never divisive; people naturally take to communication links using multiple languages to enhance their own communicative effectiveness. Languages appear to divide when they are used politically to trigger different conflicting identities. Languages become instruments of division when used for

political manoeuvring of identities by some vested interest groups who are described in some psychological theory of social identity as *entrepreneurs of identity*. In India the imposed hierarchies of dominant, major and minor languages along with the politics of languages created grounds for tension among the Indigenous Tribal minority (ITM) language communities. It led to debates about languages in education or for teaching, languages for law and governance and for a host of other social activities. And it resulted in a lot of other problems. That is something one has to consider. In a nutshell, therefore, the political notion of “one language, one nation” has not resulted in true integration of the society. Evidences to the contrary are plenty.

AK: It is really interesting that after the independence in India, Indian politicians agreed that India could have different linguistic regions and did not ignore India’s multilingual nature. **What process led to the decision that India should become an officially multilingual nation? Were there any camps who believed in the necessity of one dominant language like Hindi, for example?**

AM: Yes, on the positive side, post-independence, there was a recognition of diversity in India. India was always a multilingual multicultural society and, therefore, this reality could not have been ignored. The makers Indian Constitution did recognise the presence of many languages and mother tongues. At the same time, there were demands for a national languages for the whole country and there were multiple claimants for such a status. Hindi, Hindustani, Sanskrit, Bengali, Tamil and many other languages were variously mentioned in the debates on the question of a national language in the Constituent Assembly which gave the final shape to the Constitution of India. But the practical sense prevailed and it was implicitly accepted that any special recognition of one out of many languages is potentially controversial and divisive. Therefore, Indian constitution does not have a National Language, although there prevails a mistaken view among many that Hindi is India's national language. At the same time the specification of official languages for the union of India and also for the provincial level governance in the Constitution of India also imposed a hierarchy making some languages more powerful than the others. Hindi, written in Devanagari script was recognised as the official language of the Union of India. Strangely, despite the rejection of the British empire, English language could not be left out; Macaulay seems to have succeeded in his design creating an influential group of pro-English

thinkers who saw to it that English had a role. It was initially thought of as an interim arrangement that English will continue to be used for official purposes of the Union for a period of 15 years during which, it was envisaged, Hindi would be sufficiently developed to be used as the sole official language. English was thus given an associate official language status from 26 January 1950, (when the Constitution of India was promulgated) till 1965. This, however, was not to be. The roots of English as a language of power became much deeper during the period and the conflict between Hindi and other languages, particularly the South Indian languages including Tamil, necessitated a constitutional amendment which extended the status of English for an indefinite period. Now, it seems, English is firmly rooted in India despite the wishes of Gandhi and many others who sought to give primacy to the mother tongues and to the indigenous linguistic diversity.

Along with recognition of Hindi and English as official language of the Union of India, the Constitution also listed 14 major regional languages of India, including Hindi, as official languages for all communications between the states and the Union of India. These languages were listed in the VIIIth Schedule of the Constitution. With subsequent amendments to the constitution other languages were gradually added to the VIIIth Schedule increasing the number of official languages in the Schedule to 22 at present. This happened because when some languages are recognised as official languages, others are considered left out. Many major linguistic communities lobbied for a status and got their respective languages into the Schedule. It should be pointed out that the ITM languages did not have the power to vie successfully for a place; it took 53 years for two tribal languages - Bodo and Santali - to be recognised as official languages.

AK: How did diversity become a priority in the Independence Movement? What were the political roots of this attention to diversity? Was it inspired by Gandhi's ideas?

AM: Gandhi always pleaded for promoting mother tongues and believed that promotion of English was a form of enslavement. He was very much in favour of promoting regional mother tongues and, in many of his writing, Gandhi kept on saying that English is not the language for India. He had a very compassionate view of the British people but not the British language. Nehru, in his writings, also emphasised mother tongues and not English as the language for

Indian unity. Most other prominent leaders of the freedom movement in India were strongly in support of the regional mother tongues and maintenance of linguistic diversity of the country. One has to ask, then, why has the colonial language become so dominant, even after the colonisers are gone and despite the pro-Indian languages views of the prominent leaders? And it is not just in India, but all the decolonized countries in the world have accepted dominance of the language of the colonizers – English, French, Spanish and other languages. That is because all these colonised countries were multilingual and there were multiple linguistic identities. The language of the colonizers gained prominence primarily because of the conflicting identities in the post-colonial world — the African states, the Asian countries and in other continents as well. In India too there were alternate claims to primacy. It is a similar pattern all over the post-colonial world. The colonisers had done enough to have their language rooted in the colonies and they had an advantage being perceived as international languages.

AK: Some Iranian academics draw upon the experiences of other nations in the world and argue that many other multilingual nations have also accepted the dominance of one official language as a pragmatic measure. They refer to ninety million Spanish speakers in the United States who have accepted English as the official language. Or they emphasize the example of immigrants in Israel, who have to use Hebrew officially and at school, in particular in order to strengthen the unity of the nation. They also talk about India as a country where people have accepted to use the language of their colonizers as a practical measure to run their country efficiently. Based on these examples, these academics invite the speakers of minority languages in Iran to accept the status of Farsi as the official language of the country as a pragmatic move similarly experienced in other parts of the world. **Are they right about India? Have minority language speakers comfortably accepted English (or Hindi) as the main language of India? Are Iranian Kurds, Turks, Balochis, and other speakers of minority languages exceptionally uncooperative?**

AM: This whole question of having one official language or one dominant language of the country as a pragmatic strategy has not worked, in my opinion, whether it is Farsi in Iran or English in India. This strategy of identifying a dominant language has indirectly led to some discrimination of the minority languages and therefore even if some people may have thought of

Farsi in Iran or English in India as the unifying language and as a pragmatic strategy, it has resulted in a new kind of caste system. I have characterised the imposition of English in India as creating a new caste system because you have people and communities who have varying levels of competence in the dominant language. It has resulted in a new kind of hierarchy in the society, also leading to different economic implications of language. You know, people who have an advantage with the Farsi - with Farsi or with English or the dominant language, obviously have privileged access to resources just because these languages are placed in positions of power. I have written about a double divide in most of the multilingual societies. You have one language at the apex and you have a divide between that language and the major regional languages. And, then, there are ITM languages at the bottom of the hierarchy with a second divide between the major regional languages and the ITM languages. So you have a kind of double divide situation. Conceptualising dominance of one language and failure to put all the languages of a nation in an egalitarian framework has probably done more damage to the societies in India and, I believe, in other parts of the world.

AK: Still in the family of arguments claiming that the dominant status of Farsi will guarantee the unity of the nation, the advocates of Farsi as the official language sometimes adopt a very political perspective. They state that most requests for instruction in students' mother tongues are practically separatist attempts rather than serious linguistic or pedagogical suggestions. **This view has frequently left mother tongue activists in a vulnerable position when they try to negotiate their demands. Have you had similar experiences in India?**

AM: Well, actually what is separatist is any discrimination based on language. So if the minority language communities failing to accept Farsi is, to some extent separatist, by the same line of the argument, Farsi not accepting the minority languages or not yielding a rightful place to them is also separatist. So when the minority language communities demand some kind of privileges for their own languages and communities, yes initially it runs the risk of being conceptualized as a separatist kind of movement or tendency. But ultimately, wherever all the languages are given some autonomy with some just place created for them in the society, it has led to greater integration. In India, if you look at the history of some language movements in recent years, you realise that there is tension not in the aspirations of ITM communities for a place for their

language in the society but in denial of basic linguistic rights to the language communities. In Assam, one of the north-east provinces in India, a large Bodo tribal language community initially just wanted some education for their children in Bodo language because they sought preservation and development of the language and the culture. Initially in the late sixties and early seventies it was a simple and non-controversial demand. But Assamese was the dominant official language of the state and the government of Assam rejected the simple benign demand for education in Bodo language. So the Bodo demand snowballed into a major movement. And there came a point in the seventies when the Bodo movement became actually a terrorist movement and a movement which demanded a separate Bodo Land. In the early eighties, there was a tripartite accord signed between the Government of India, the state Government of Assam and the Bodo Liberation Tigers representing Bodo people. The accord guaranteed some autonomy to the Bodo people leading to establishment of a Bodo Territorial Council and later, in the year 2003, to a constitutional amendment recognising Bodo as an official language in the VIIIth Schedule of the Constitution of India. With some autonomy, the Bodos were able to plan development of their language and education in their own area. And now there is integration; the separation question has been set aside. Bodo language has been recognized as an official language of the union of India. Bodo children now can have education in their mother tongue, in Bodo language, all the way up to the university level. In fact, one can now write a doctoral dissertation in Bodo language. Therefore, yes, for some time at the initial phase the claim of any minority language community for education of children in that language or some place for the language for official purposes may appear to be separatist, but ultimately if the languages are accepted and they are given a place beside the dominant language like Farsi and other languages, I think, it leads to more integrated society. There are a lot of evidences particularly in Indian context to show that when languages and linguistic communities coexist with relatively equal status, there is unity and greater harmony among the communities. So disharmony or separatism actually is more a product of language dominance and hierarchy.

AK: The supporters of the idea of the Persian language as a unifying cultural factor claim that even if we undermined the position of Farsi as the official language, Iranian minority languages would not be empowered. Instead, they stress, Western languages would dominate the cultural scene in regions with non-Persian populations. Historically, they exemplify, countries like India

and Nigeria have had to undergo linguistic colonialism due to failing to choose a local linguistic medium in their own cultures and have had to use, English, the language of their colonizers. In the case of India, even before English, Persian (another non-native language) was used as the official language of most of the land. In the same manner, they say, although in northern Azerbaijan, the government tried to purge the Azerbaijani language from any Persian influence, they failed to create a reliable body of Azerbaijani language that could be effectively used in cultural, intellectual, and scientific exchanges. Ironically, instead of Persian, which through centuries had organically interacted with their language, they had to start using Russian and English vocabulary and thus subjected themselves to a much more harmful form of linguistic colonialism. **What do you think of this argument?**

AM: I think promoting minority languages does not necessarily mean undermining the dominant languages. In fact, dominant languages growing side by side with the non-dominant or minority languages means mutual strengthening up of both. Obviously minority language contact would lead to changes in all the contact languages including the majority or the dominant languages and that in itself is not bad; it is a process of development and enrichment of all languages. I do not think that promotion of diversity, linguistic diversity, in a country undermines any language. It is only the promotion of supremacy of one language rather than the others that undermines the other languages. And, therefore, imposition of any dominate language creates division rather than unity. In India, English came primarily because of conflicting identities. As I said, this is the common pattern in all post-colonial societies. But what happened in the process of the initial experimenting with English and conflicting identities of Hindi and the non-Hindi languages, resulted in yielding greater place to English in Indian education. Our Constitution has never conceded a prominence to English or, for that matter, to any language. Constitution actually talks about the necessity of guaranteeing mother tongue education for the linguistic minorities. But what happened as a by-product of this initial space that was created for the English is that the Indian economy got influenced by English as a language and English in education, because it resulted in some kind of economic advantages given to a segment of the population of India getting technical education and mostly serving the corporate world abroad. English has given us some economic advantages and, therefore, English has to stay. Not many are now talking about rejection of English. But now the Indian policy makers, the Indian politicians, and also the Indian

public in general think that English can continue as a language along with other languages. I do not think that there was ever any attempt by anybody in India to establish an English-only India or complete supremacy of English in India. English did come in because of certain conditions in the post-independence context. But I think conceptually and politically, English has never been thought of as the only dominant language in India, and it has never been accepted as the language which has the potentials of displacing all of the languages and linguistic diversity of India.

Space for the minority languages does not mean limited space for Farsi. That is my position. Linguistic diversity is a fact of life and it needs to be protected. And I am quite positive that promoting minority languages would never act against the interest of Farsi. To the contrary, I think, Farsi as a language would be strengthened by strengthening all the languages in the country.

AK: Some say that the recent Western discourses that celebrate the mother tongue have been constructed as a reaction to the brutal elimination of native European languages by centralized nation states created over the few past centuries in Europe. They particularly talk about what happened in France after the French revolution. They assert that such a brutal treatment of minority languages in Iran has actually never happened. Segregation of schools as we have seen in the United States has never happened in the long history of Iran. Or any institution similar to Canadian Residential Schools has never been established in Iran. They say most of the discourses through which mother tongue activists are speaking are too aggressive because of their original context, which is practically the brutality of white European colonial linguistic policies. They believe that Iranian civilization, Greater Iran, or “cultural Iran” has always been a multilingual and multicultural society. This argument is also indicative of the fear that importing these discourses from the West might indeed be the sign of a new colonial cultural invasion, another practical mistreatment of a good idea like planting democracy in Iraq by President Bush. **Is, in your opinion, this concern about hidden colonial agendas in discourses surrounding linguistic human rights justified? Have there been similar conversations in India?**

AM: This imagined threat from the Western languages or Western ideas is projected to sort of keep the minority languages and cultures in a non-dominant status. But, I think, one can talk of the same kind of threat from Farsi as a language. Therefore, imposition of any dominance, including western dominance, is to be shunned. It is the same underlying principle. To reject Western imposition or Western dominance, one also has to reject imposition of any language. And, therefore, in fact, one can argue that forcing the minority language communities to use Farsi only, is some kind of a discriminative treatment. In fact, scholars like Tove Skutnabb-Kangas and some experts of international language and law like Dunbar argue that any imposition of dominant languages on the minority language speakers, which ultimately leads to the non-dominant speakers' loss of linguistic identity, can be seen as a linguistic genocide. Skutnabb-Kangas and Dunbar have many publications where they look into the United Nations definition of linguistic genocide. They argue that any attempt to forcibly change the minority speakers into the dominant language speakers itself is a form of linguistic genocide. And, therefore, I think one has also to consider that kind of negative fallouts of any imposition of dominant languages or dominant ideologies. One can argue for keeping the Western dominance out, but in order to do so, if you impose dominance of one language over others you are also committing the same kind of fallacy that you purport to dismiss.

AK: Some defenders of the official state of Farsi say it is true that the Iranian governments have been particularly oversensitive to the status of the Persian language over the past century; this protectionism, however, should not be interpreted as antagonism towards other Iranian ethnicities and their mother tongues. They, instead, believe the anxiety surrounding the status of Persian is a reaction to Western colonialism, mainly the impact of French in the past and English in the present. They strongly believe that Farsi itself is an endangered language that requires immediate attention and revival. They say, for example, although Persian is the mother tongue of the people of Tajikistan, for decades—particularly before the collapse of the Soviet Union—these people were not able to write and publish in their language or receive educational instruction in their mother tongue. Similarly, in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and India, Persian speakers have experienced a lot of discrimination. Portraying Farsi as a colonial language, thus, they believe, is a mistake. Bashing Farsi, they claim, is a technique employed by the separatists, who are used by the West as puppets for political purposes. These separatists, they tell the

public, are not really concerned about the status of native cultures or better education for the children of the speakers of minority languages. **How valid do you think this argument is? Have you encountered similar sentiments in India?**

AM: Well that is true. That is indeed true that status of Persian is under threat from other dominant languages. And if the pro-Persian people feel threatened by more dominant languages and cultures, the minority language speakers also have right to feel the same way that they are under threat. So the kind of threat from the more dominant to the less dominant language continues for the Persian and other languages. Therefore, one cannot talk about a threat from Western languages to Farsi and, then, deny the threat to the minority languages from Persian. In any multilingual situation, pro-mother tongue, pro-minority language position does not necessarily mean anti-dominant language. I think in India, this position has been taken by the various constitutional provisions, the position that mother tongues can co-exist and develop along with other dominant languages both at the national and the regional levels. So if Hindi is threatened by English, it should also be recognised that other languages are also threatened by Hindi.

AK: Was this constitutional sensitivity to multilingualism a reflection of Ghandi and Nehru's ideas?

AM: Yes and also because of many other factors mother tongues have a rightful place.

AK: What other factors were involved? Historical or Cultural factors?

AM: I think a large section of the people, who cooperated with Ghandi or who were the leaders along with Ghandi in the Freedom Movement, emphasised the regional identities and regional languages. Ghandi was successful in bringing the movement together because he had with him a many other leaders who represented the regional and cultural identities. Ghandi, in fact, did not want Hindi to be the dominant language. He believed in creating what he called Hindustani, which is a kind of incorporation of Hindi in all its regional varieties, Urdu, and other variations into a broader system. So he in fact pleaded for a more grassroots level language variety called

Hindustani as the official language which would have meant conceptually not just Hindi as a standard language but the variations across the country. The representation from the regional levels in our Constitution making process ensured that all the language diversities are accepted. And, therefore, Indian Constitution never had anything called ‘national language’. As I have said earlier, we have now a Schedule of twenty-two official languages in which English does not have a place. English is only an associate official language. Indian Constitution in its spirit, actually, accepted the diversity of languages. What happened in reality was that English, because it became internationally more important and because it became economically significant particularly with globalisation, established itself in India.

AK: Your response reminds me of your point that the conflict between those languages might even give power to the coloniser’s language. **So if there had not been a conflict between Hindi and non-Hindi languages, probably English might have disappeared even earlier?**

AM: Probably. Then, let us also not forget that within the Indian languages there were and there are differences in the level of vitality of languages and some languages are more powerful than others. So, English as such is not the problem; the real problem is non-egalitarian positioning of languages and their speakers.

AK: One particular phenomenon that strengthens the position of the critics who fear the possibility of the disintegration of Iran as a result of more substantial recognition of minority languages is the fact that Iran has been surrounded by countries which are already using Iranian minority languages as their official languages. Turkish in Azerbaijan, Kurdish in Iraqi Kurdistan, and Arabic among the Arab nations of the Gulf might be the best examples. Policy makers fear that elevating the status of non-Persian languages in Iran will automatically draw Iranian minorities closer to their cousins beyond the borders, which will in time bring about their separation from Iran. **How would you reply to this concern as an Iranian mother tongue activist or an educator? Is there a similar situation or debate in India?**

AM: You know many languages in India including Hindi are spoken in different countries in the world. For example Bengali is spoken in Bangladesh; so at one level there is an identity of

Bengali as a language across nations. Hindi, Maithili and Bhojpuri in different variations are spoken in Nepal, Mauritius and other countries. But such cross-national use of languages does not necessarily lead to a separatist demands. If you look at the post-independent Pakistan, including the East and the West Pakistan, imposition of Urdu on Bengali majority East Pakistan led to pro-Bengali language movement and rejection of Urdu and Pakistani dominance resulting in a separatist movement and creation of Bangladesh as a separate nation. But, then, that Bengali is also spoken in parts of India has not resulted in any claim for having one Bengali nation across the two countries. Kurdish people are there in Iran; they are also there elsewhere. But if Kurdish people in Iran are made to feel proud of their own language and if they are allowed to maintain their language along with Farsi, I do not think it will ever result in anybody demanding separation. Separation will be demanded only when you feel subjugated in your own country, you feel dominated and discriminated against. But as long as languages coexist and as long as there is a mutual respect and acceptability, there is no danger of disintegration and separation. One has to also accept that there are many other political processes including manipulation of identities by some people with vested interests, people whom some psychologists call entrepreneurs of identity. People sort of manipulate identity, in order to have their own advantages and gains, political gains. So sometimes for political purposes, language identities do get manipulated and this can happen; I am not saying that, if languages are placed in equal status, it will never happen, but, the chances are less. If a language group feels respected in its own country, I do not think that the people would demand separation. The more you try to sort of assimilate diversity, the more likely is the demand for separation.

AK: Some argue that the concern about the status of minority languages in Iranian educational systems is indeed an ethical stance that might eventually empower the students and create a sense of achievement in minority communities. However, in the context of today's Iran, the consequences of a sudden shift to students' mother tongues would be more harmful than beneficial for the students and their communities. In the present economic and political circumstances in Iran, they say, the elevation of the status of any minority language would only open a can of worms. Who, they ask, is going to pay for the bureaucracy involved in such a move. The logistics needed for such a huge change will impoverish the regions and drain the little money they have. As a result, they conclude, although instruction in mother tongue might

appear to be a valuable educational step, it might easily prove to be a Pyrrhic victory. They believe the speakers of minority languages are so sentimental about mother tongue discourses that they cannot see what will happen to them if their languages become official. The current situation is a win-win equation for everyone, they declare. **What do you think of this argument? Have you, in any of your projects, had to deal with the practicalities of supporting multilingual education? How did you deal with costs imposed by logistics and bureaucracy? How did you fund your projects and pooled resources? How did the communities you worked with react to such measures considering the practical challenges involved?**

AM: Initially, when you decide to provide education in a different languages it involves some cost for development of teaching-learning materials, textbooks, teacher training and different classrooms. Initially it might appear to be a costly exercise. But then, one has to also consider the cost against the benefits. What was happening in India? Many of the indigenous minority children were pushed out of the educational system because they had their own home language, their own community language which had no place in education; many of the children did not even understand what was going on in the classroom. The dominant language was forced on them. And, therefore, it is not surprising that over fifty percent of our indigenous children were out of school by Grade five. In ten years of school education, eighty percent were out. Therefore, for every hundred children who entered Grade I, only twenty remained to appear to the high school examination at the end of ten years. And out of that, only eight passed. This means that there was a wastage of ninety-two percent in education by imposing a dominant language instruction. There were huge problems of non-comprehension and problems of coping with a language which children that do not understand. Therefore, in talking about the cost of mother tongue based education, one has to take that wastage into consideration. The wastage would be much less if you provide education in children's language and then use the developed skills in the mother tongue as a foundation for development of competence in dominant languages like Hindi, or English in Indian context or Farsi in Iran. Economists of language like Grin claim that education in mother tongues does not really lead to higher cost. In fact, it leads to lower cost, lowering the cost in the long run. In a broader context also heritage economists point out that maintenance of heritage and languages is ultimately more beneficial. For a country to maintain

its diversity of heritages — linguistic, cultural and otherwise — is much more economically beneficial than not maintaining those heritages. So there is a lot of arguments to support education in the mother tongues. It may appear to be initially costly. But in the long run, there are economic benefits associated with such education.

AK: Some supporters of Farsi as the official language argue that there are many Iranian languages and dialects (up to 700). Elevating the status of only a few languages among so many will open the Pandora's Box. Which language are you going to start with? As soon as the first regional language is official, the speakers of hundreds of other languages will be up in arms. There is this illusion, they add, that apart from Tehran, which is more visibly a multilingual city, other areas are linguistically homogeneous. They believe this is not true. What is going to happen, they ask, to the speakers of Farsi, Kurdish, or Balochi who live in Azerbaijan (in Iran) if Turkish becomes the official language in that region, particularly considering the fact that all these non-Turks will need Farsi to survive economically and socially anywhere in Iran beyond the borders of Turkish speaking provinces? If languages such as Turkish and Kurdish gain any form of officiality, the speakers of other languages, although spoken by smaller populations, might have demands that the central government would not be able to meet. This process only would lead to chaos. **Do you think they are right? The number of languages spoken in India is significantly larger than the number of minority languages in Iran. How have the Indians dealt with this problem?**

AM: Living with many languages, I do not think, has been ever thought of as a chaos in India. In fact, it keeps the nation going. You go to the rural areas and the rural people to appreciate this fact of multilingual Indian life. When these people go to the marketplace, when they interact with the communities around them, they do use different languages. It may not be with full competence in a language, but they are able to sort of communicate across different domains of the language use. So Indian society actually thrives with multilingual modes of communication at the regional levels. People live with many languages in India. And these languages occupy different domains of their life's activities. You use certain languages for religious purposes; you use certain languages for entertainment and other purposes; one language for the marketplace and so on. So multiplicity of languages has actually not created a chaos in the country. It

probably has held the country together. Yes, when you look at it from a political perspective, people think that too many languages are somehow chaotic; but the chaos argument sort of goes back to the perception that one nation must have one language. We know that such a view of languages is not true because diversity of language is a fact of life. It is a natural process. We cannot prevent languages from becoming diverse. Diversity is not chaos.

AK: In recent debates in Iran, a narrative against the use of students' mother tongues as medium of instruction is gaining popularity that particularly focuses on multilingual education in India and Indian attempts to revive minority languages. The supporters of this narrative illustrate the attempts of mother tongue activists in India as failed strategies encouraged by the West at the service of colonial agendas. They claim that during the Indian Independence Movement, and immediately after its success, the British, for their own colonial purposes, initiated a conversation in India about elevating the status of regional languages. Fanning the flames of the mother tongue debate, the narrative goes, the British used mother tongue activists as their own agents in order to undermine the Movement and to disintegrate India. One of their goals, they emphasize, was strengthening the discourse of using students' mother tongues as the medium of instruction, which would prevent the speakers of minority languages from entering the circles of power (where English was spoken). Through this technique, the British both made the stage ready for the disintegration of the country and tore the country apart into two separate spheres of the rich and the poor. They add that resourceful figures such as Gandhi, Nehru, and Zakir Hussain managed to control this wave of linguistic colonialism. As a result of their attempts, they say, the official language in India is Hindi and English is the language of education. Thus, they conclude, although regional languages are used in the local media and folk literature and arts, English and Hindi have helped India function as a centralized country. **What do you think about this narrative? Is it an accurate account of what happened in India?**

AM: Well that paradigm of English and Hindi and the supremacy of these languages in India and in its education is not a result of any British design. These people were not plotting to create that kind of situation by promoting mother tongues. In fact, during the British rule, English was imposed. Imposition of English education was designed by the British administrators, including Macaulay who wanted to create a group of English educated people in India, who will be Indian,

but at the same time think British. Therefore, there were deliberate attempts by the British administrators to bring in supremacy of English.

AK: But this was before the movement, wasn't it?

AM: Before the movement. And at no point in the pre-independence history did the British support the cause of mother tongue. Mother tongue was an issue only in post-independence period when the linguistic identities came into sort of mutual debate as to what could be the future of languages in this country. Then, mother tongue came to the forefront. The Indian Constitution actually emphasised mother tongue education for the minority language communities right from the beginning. That was not a British plan. The way mother tongue education has evolved in India, particularly in the multilingual education paradigm, does not envisage mother tongue as moving away from English or the dominant languages. It is, in fact, putting the two together, developing competence of children in their mother tongue so that their academic achievement and their competence in the other dominant languages would be equally good. Therefore, the recent movement in India for mother tongue based multilingual education has been a movement which seeks both development of mother tongue competence and competence in other languages. Mother tongue based multilingual education is not seen as taking children away from the dominant language.

AK: As you explained before, Ghandi and the people around him didn't really want to have a central language? This narrative, however, suggests that Ghandi saved the nation by giving prominence to Hindi and English a unifying factor.

AM: No, English came in only as a compromise and, I think, this is not just in India but in all the former British colonies. Why is it that the coloniser's language survived in the post-colonial world? It is because of the existing conflicts of identities. These countries were multilingual and, soon after independence, all the languages tried to have supremacy and, in the process, the colonizers' languages came in as a compromise. And that is generally true. I do not think India is an exception to that.

AK: This narrative specifically claims that the official language in India is Hindi and English is the main medium of instruction in India. Are these claims true? Is Hindi used in every governmental office in India? Is English used in every classroom?

AM: No, that's not true. Although English education is quite dominant in India and English has been very dominant in higher education, that dominance is not by the design of the British rule nor by the design of the makers of our Constitution. The dominance has grown because of the international scenario, because of the international significance of English as a language, and its economic advantages. The Indian society saw the economic advantages of English as the medium of higher education and that is how they have continued with that. But it is never seen as detracting the Indian society from the significance of the other languages.

AK: Are there K-12 classes in India where English is not the main medium of instruction?

AM: I was educated in my mother tongue. I did not receive instruction in English in primary school. A large number of people in my generation were educated in their mother tongue. English as a language came in as one language subject after four to six years of our education in our mother tongue only. Mother tongue education continued all through the high school. It is only when we entered the university level education that the medium of instruction became English, but mother tongues continued as a subject. Therefore, competence in English and competence in one's mother tongue did not come as a cost to one or the other. My competence in my mother tongue did not cost me in terms of lowering my competence in English or having had a competence in English did not come at a cost to losing my competence in my mother tongue. The idea here is that mother tongue and other language competences can grow together additively so that one can choose the language of instruction in the higher levels. If you promote high levels of multilingual competence by the time students are out of high school, it should be possible for the students to choose a language of higher education. Because English has been very dominant in higher and technical education, English can be a language of choice at that level or at that point in time. Now, unfortunately what is happening in India is the imposition of English in the earlier grades and earlier levels of education. It is not necessary. It is always good for Indian nation to have people who are competent multilinguals. Therefore, competence in

mother tongue should not be seen as detracting from competence in English in the modern world. So the people who are trying to argue in favour of mother tongue education are not against English or not against the dominant languages. It is something that needs to be understood. Multilingual education framework necessarily means equal place for all languages and the ability of the educated person to choose among different languages rather than having one language enforced on them. I do not think any minority language community will want their children to be completely isolated to their mother tongues. They would really want the horizon to grow across languages. The scope for education has to be to sort of widening the horizon of any educated person across languages, across national borders and so on. One has to look at the place of languages from that kind of egalitarian possibility.

AK: Now that this conversation might have given you a better understanding of language policies in Iran and the concerns of Iranian policy makers, linguists, mother tongue activists, and educators, **what do think your achievements in multilingual education in India are that the Iranians can learn from?**

AM: I think generally the Indian scenario would send two messages. One, all languages need to survive in a multilingual framework in the country. The next lesson is that if you yield primacy to one language like English over the others as has happened in India, it leads to some threat to other languages including Hindi. Therefore, promotion of dominance of any language at the cost of the diversity is perhaps not going to yield positive dividends for the society and its communities. Education has to remain within a multilingual framework, within the framework of the context where minority language groups would be able to maintain their language. All the children should be able to develop their own languages to a point where they feel proud of their language while they also learn other languages to a certain degree of competence. The message is that multilingualism is a fact of life, something that needs to be promoted and preserved. But, at the same time, any dominance, undue dominance of one or some language or languages over others which threatens other languages is perhaps a major danger to the world's linguistic and cultural diversity and, hence, to biodiversity and survival.

AK: If the Iranians started multilingual education in different regions of Iran today, what would be the immediate benefits for the country?

AM: Immediately, it would be better performance of children in their schools and the school and the community coming together and promoting literacies and ultimately promoting better competence in Farsi. Farsi has to thrive as a language along with the mother tongues. You promote children's competence in Farsi not by rejecting mother tongues and minority languages but by bringing them into the system so that they feel more competent, confident and they participate in the classroom processes and learn much better. That should be a pragmatic strategy. If you want Farsi to be strengthened, it can come not at the cost of the minority languages. Minority languages, if strengthened, will strengthen Farsi. All over the world, education in mother tongue should be seen as a step towards multilingual competence and hence towards a better world.

Multilingual Education in China and Central Asia

A Conversation with Stephen Bahry

Amir Kalan: You have extensively studied and written about multilingual education in China and Central Asia. Despite strong historical and cultural bonds between Iran and the nations in those areas, there is very little reference to multilingual education in China, Tajikistan, and Afghanistan in the mother tongue debate in Iran. Similarly, research on multilingualism in Central Asia has received little attention in Anglo-American Academia. **Could you briefly sketch the situation of minority languages and historical developments of multilingual education in China and Central Asia including the models used today?**

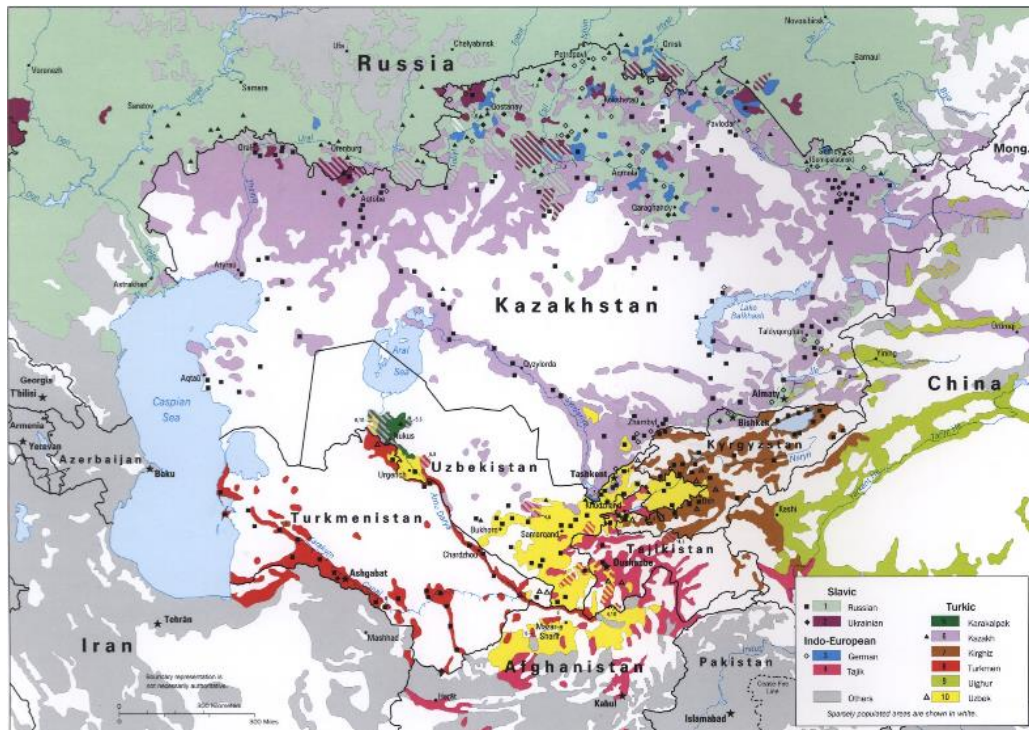


Figure 1. Central Asia and its major ethnolinguistic groups.

(Source: University of Texas Austin, Perry-Castañeda Map Collection)

Stephen Bahry: Before Central Asia was under Russian or Soviet rule, education was quite similar to traditional Iranian education. Primary school or *Maktab* was concerned with basic literacy—teaching the Arabic alphabet and its adaptations for writing Persian and Turkic¹³ languages, and starting with essential religious texts and prayers (see Figure 1 above for approximate distribution of nationalities (and usually languages) of Central Asia). Prayers and quotations from the Quran were in Arabic, but the curriculum also included important texts in classical Persian and, in Turkic speaking areas, in Central Asian classical literary Turkic, Chaghatai. However, these texts were quite heavily Arabized¹⁴ and, as a result, speakers of vernacular Persian (Tajik) would have been confronted at school with multiple languages and language forms. Classical Persian used in high status (H) domains and vernacular Tajik in low status (L) domains were arguably sufficiently distinct varieties of the same language that speakers of vernacular Tajik could not easily understand classical Persian without considerable instruction. This may have been then a case of what Ferguson (1959) calls diglossia, where the H & L varieties of the same language are almost as great as those between distinct languages. For speakers of Turkic vernaculars, the combination of

¹³ Uzbekistan and Tajikistan's sedentary population traditionally were agriculturalists in the Ferghana Valley and along the Syr Darya River (Jaxartes), Zeravshan River, and Amu Darya River (Panj or Oxus) from the Tian Shan and Pamir Mountains to the Aral Sea. West Iranian Tajik/Persian are spoken in lowland Tajikistan and in the urban centres of Bukhara and Samarqand on the lower Zeravshan River and surrounding rural areas in Uzbekistan, while Eastern Iranian Pamiri and Yagnobi languages: are spoken in mountainous areas of Tajikistan. Turkic-speaking sedentary agriculturalists spoke Uzbek, a southeast variety of Turkic most closely related to today's Uyghur language, in the Ferghana valley, along the Syr Darya and Amu Darya Rivers, in lowland areas of Tajikistan, and in bordering areas of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. Traditionally nomadic Turkic populations spoke northwest varieties of Turkic, including Kazakh, Karakalpak, Kyrgyz, and Tatar. These Turkic varieties are found farther north in grassland / steppe / mountain zones suitable for pasturage. Turkmen, a southwest variety of Turkic, similar to Azerbaijani and Turkish, is spoken in Turkmenistan, west of Uzbekistan and south of Kazakhstan. See Windfuhr (2009) and Johanson and Csató (1998) for more on Iranian and Turkic languages.

¹⁴ See Bahry 2015a, 18 for more on languages in early Islamic Central Asia. Initially, Arabic alone was used as High language for scholarship and government, while local vernaculars were East Iranian languages such as Soghdian and Khwarezmian. Over several hundred years these languages were replaced by New Persian which some scholars speculate developed through language contact phenomena between Middle Persian brought into the region with Arab armies, and other Iranian languages spoken in Central Asia. Scholars such as Biruni mocked pretensions to use Persian for H purposes, saying "If one looks at a scientific book which has been translated into Persian, its beauty has gone, its importance is eclipsed, its face blackened, and it loses all usefulness, because this language is no use except for tales of kings and night-time story-telling" (Biruni 1973: 12, in Tetley 2008: 27, cited in Bahry 2015a, 18). Nevertheless, New Persian eventually replaced Arabic as dominant H language. Some such as Ibn Sina (Avicenna) tried to develop Persian as H language innovating technical terms from Persian lexical resources (Afnan 1958, in Bahry, 2015a, 18), while the predominant approach to developed literary Persian though much borrowing from Arabic (Richter-Bernburg 1974, in Bahry, 2015a, 18).

their own vernacular language with classical Turkic and Persian would seem to have been more a case of what Fishman (1967) calls bilingualism with diglossia. In areas such as Bukhara, this would have involved knowledge of two vernaculars, Tajik and Uzbek, and three classical languages, Arabic, and Persian as well as Chaghatay, Classical Central Asian Turkic. Chaghatay, not only was heavily Arabized, but its lexicon also included a considerable amount of Persian vocabulary.

AK: Can we call what you have been describing the traditional model of multilingual education in Central Asia? A simple multilingual model but organically developed according to sociocultural needs and expectations?

SB: Yes, the traditional curriculum had classical Arabic, Persian, and/or Turkic plus the local vernaculars of students and teachers. If we treat vernacular Persian or Turkic as distinct from their classical varieties, this model of education involves from three to five languages, clearly a form of multilingual education¹⁵.

AK: Multilingual education is usually the result of certain sociocultural and sociopolitical circumstances? What gave dominance to this approach in these regions? What educational paradigms informed it? How consciously did the educators practice this form of multicultural education?

SB: The origins of the model lie in early periods of Islamic education when philosophers, who reconciled religious texts with Arabic translations of Greek philosophy, may have been sensitive to questions of language and interpretation, which perhaps may have also influenced their approach to education. Al-Jahir (817-870 CE) exhorted teachers to take into account students'

¹⁵ The education model derives partly from the need to inculcate religious knowledge and the necessary language ability to understand the texts of the curriculum, and partly from philosophical traditions of knowledge, hence of teaching and learning.

readiness to learn and to teach in language they could understand, which in Arabic-speaking areas likely meant to avoid unnecessarily complex expression, but if in non-Arabic speaking areas could suggest use of mother tongue alongside Arabic. Al-Farabi (ca. 950 CE) argued that true teaching required interaction between the teacher and student, deriving some of the pedagogical justification for his thinking from Aristotle. A Turkic speaker from Central Asia, Al-Farabi said little about multiple languages, yet the principle of interaction he defends would require teachers in Central Asia to use other languages besides Arabic. Ibn Sina, or Avicenna (980-1037 CE) was a native speaker of Persian born not far from Bukhara in Central Asia, who was known mainly for his work on medicine, but took an interest in all the sciences of the day, including education. He argued that formal education required a minimum maturity and language development, which most children possessed by the age of 6, and argues that children's education should also include poetry. Clearly, then writing in a Persian-speaking environment, he was referring to Persian-language readiness and likely also Persian-language poetry.¹⁶

Despite these beginnings, observers of 19th and early 20th century Islamic education in Central Asia reported much dependence on rote learning with choral chanting without interaction, and especially with Arabic texts, with virtually no comprehension, as well as some dependence on corporal punishment, all of which seem to go against the educational principles mentioned above. However, there are reports that interaction among students and between students and teacher was part of education at the secondary level, despite the heavy criticisms of the Central Asian modernizers.¹⁷

¹⁶ This relies on Günther (2006), who remarks on the origins of the scholars discussed above, but does not note that three of the four foundational Islamic educational thinkers he discusses are from Central Asia or Iran and likely bilingual in Arabic and Persian, and in one case, trilingual, with the addition of Turkic mother tongue.

¹⁷ See Medlin et al. (1971) and Khan (2003) for a summary of accounts of pre-Soviet Central Asian education, mainly by Russian observers. Khanykov (1845) is a representative example of a contemporary external observer. Important to note is the importance of oral literacy in cultural life, with adult males gathering for "conversation" *gap*, and scholars participating in disputations conducted in

AK: Did the arrival of modernity change this multilingual, plurilingual atmosphere?

SB: Modernity came to Central Asia in several ways: partly through students who had gone abroad to study in Egypt and Turkey and returned with some new ideas, and partly in response to the Russian Empire, mediated by the Tatars. The Tatars were Muslim Turkic speakers some of whom also knew Russian. They used their bilingual ability to trade and, in this way, brought Russian and European ideas and products to Central Asia. Also, because Tatar is so close to Kazak and Kyrgyz, they were in a position to mediate between Russians and Central Asians.

AK: What happened institutionally?

SB: The Tatars not only worked as Russian government officials in Turkic-speaking areas, but they also set up printing presses in their home region on the Volga in Russia and spread printed material in Tatar to Central Asia. Along with these books, they operated schools that brought their version of Islam and the Tatar language to the Kazakh and Kyrgyz steppes. This strengthening of Islamic identity frightened the Russian government, which then set up alternative non-religious schools to create loyal subjects for the empire. However, because Russian-only education would not attract students, the government developed a bilingual approach for its Central Asian territories in the mid-to-late 19th century.¹⁸

Well the idea of bilingual education perhaps came from the Ilminsky system used in government schools with linguistic minorities in the Volga region. In this system, the first two years were

public. For more on contemporary Islamic education see Shahrani (2002) with a primary account of Maktab education in Afghanistan in the 1960s and Street (1984), which includes a discussion of literacy practices in northeast Iran in the 1970s. Street's discussion of what he calls Maktab literacy in an Iranian village suggests that traditional literacy practices are strongly connected to oral discussion of interpretation and application of texts, and argues that this practical element of Maktab literacy is one factor explaining why commercial literacy developed among villagers educated in religious schools, not state schools, where it seems practical reason is less developed.

¹⁸ For more about the Tatars role in modernizing Islamic Culture throughout Central Eurasia, see Strauss, 1993; Sultangalieva, 2012; Yemelianova, 1999; and Zenkovsky, 1953. For the Russian empire's response, see Dowler (2001).

taught in the mother tongue with Russian as a separate subject and then, in the third year, the main language of instruction was Russian. However, the schools set up in the northern part of Central Asia under Russian control differed from the Ilminsky system and were called “Russian local schools.” In the South, where several independent emirates remained, there was a different response to modernity. Some of the scholars there who had been to Cairo or Istanbul had observed how the outside world was changing, including approaches to education. As a result, they introduced “jadid” or “new method” education. Jadid education retained the traditional curriculum while adding modern subjects such as science and the Russian language. They were also influenced by the modernization initiatives of the Crimean Tatars, some of whom had studied in Egypt and Turkey as well as Russia.¹⁹

So the modernization of education came from two directions: from the north via Tatar officials and teachers and the Russian government and from the south through domestic reformers. As a result, when Soviet rule came to the entire region, an alliance was made with the jadidists to carry out the early Soviet policy of “indigenization.” Under this policy, in the first years after the Revolution, there was a strong commitment to mass basic education in the mother tongue. In this so-called national school system, Uzbeks went to Uzbek-medium schools, Kazaks attended Kazak-medium schools, and so on. But in some places one school would have two or more parallel national programs; for example, both a Tajik and a Russian language program. These were not really bilingual schools, but schools with two monolingual programs in one building.

In 1956, Khrushchev declared that parents could choose their children's school or vote to change the school's language of instruction. Consequently, many more Central Asians entered Russian-

¹⁹ Dowler, 2001; Khalid, 1998; Raffass, 2012.

medium programs, thus creating a form of Russian immersion (or submersion) education. This resulted in a remarkable increase in Russian proficiency among urban Central Asians, but also in a form of subtractive bilingualism. After several generations, many had only limited conversational skills in their heritage language. As a result, language-in-education policy fairly rapidly created a situation of asymmetrical bilingualism with diglossia, which some Central Asians feared would eventually lead to complete loss of their language and identity²⁰.

AK: What happened after the collapse of the USSR?

SB: By the last years of Perestroika, two parallel elites had formed. The technical intelligentsia—specialists in engineering, medicine, science, administration and politics—were educated at university in Russian, while the cultural elite—specialists in Central Asian history, languages, and literature—had high proficiency in the literary standards of their Central Asian language as well as a fair degree of proficiency in literary Russian. During these years, the cultural elite protested the low status of their Central Asian languages, with the result that in 1989, two years before independence, each Central Asian republic passed a new law making their republican language the state language. They were not pushing for independence; what they wanted was more autonomy and recognition for their languages and cultures.

What we have now in Central Asia is quite varied. Each country has increased formal rights for its state language. Turkmenistan has made Turkmen the major language of instruction in the country, has closed most minority language schools, and also closed all Russian-medium schools aside from one elite school in the capital. Kazakhstan has retained a mix of school types from the Soviet

²⁰ See Lewis (1972) for more on language policy in the USSR; and Shorish (1988) on a dispute on monolingual versus bilingual Russian as a Second Language teaching methodology in Central Asia between monolingual Russophone proponents of target-language-only and bilingual teachers who use students' native languages in teaching Russian. Monolingual teachers of the state language in minority language areas are often unaware of pedagogical benefits of incorporating the mother tongue. See Olimnazarova (2012) on how plurilingual teachers support English learning in Tajikistan through students' native Pamiri language.

epoch. Monolingual Kazak-medium schools predominate in rural areas while many Russian-medium schools remain in urban areas. The number of parallel Kazak-Russian-medium schools is increasing. Nevertheless, the ideology that Russian-medium education is superior persists, as does the practice of monolingual education.

This multiplicity of school types can expose students to multiple languages of instruction over their educational careers. For example, in Kazakhstan it is possible for a member of the Uygur minority to have a sort of trilingual education: Uygur-medium primary school, Kazak-medium secondary school, and Russian-medium post-secondary education. This is a multilingual education, but it is a sequence of monolingual models without bilingual curriculum or pedagogies.²¹

AK: The experiences of Central Asians and the Chinese with multilingual education seem to have been more complex than the only-Persian education system dominant over the past century in Iran. According to your description speakers of minority languages in those areas have had more freedom than ethnic minorities in Iran to use their languages and receive education in their mother tongues.

SB: Well they have formal freedom provided in the Constitution and language laws. Lenin's nationality policy sought to educate, propagandize and persuade non-Russian populations in their own languages, rather than to impose the Russian language by force. For 10 years after 1917, non-Russian languages were strongly promoted, and it was not until 1938 that the study of Russian as a school subject was made compulsory in non-Russian republics of the USSR, and only in 1956 that non-Russian language schools were permitted to convert to Russian-medium schools. Note

²¹ See Bahry et al. (2008), or Bahry et al. (2016, in press) for a review of language(s) and education in contemporary Central Asia.

however the persistent either-or thinking and heavy separation between languages, and the lack of research and innovation in this sphere. The leap to bi-/multilingual models of education was seldom made.

AK: The Russian influence seems to have had the character of a cultural invasion in comparison with the interactions (and even sometimes frictions) between different ethnicities in Iran, most importantly between the Persians and non-Persians such as the Kurds or the Turks (people of Iran's Azerbaijan). Cultural and linguistic interactions in the Iranian plateau seem to have been rather more organic most of the time if not always.

SB: This is very little studied in post-Soviet Central Asia. For example, when a monolingual Russophone interacted with a Kyrgyz speaker, the Russian language would be used by default. In this kind of zero-sum language hierarchy, a Central Asian language might not be willingly used by a higher status Russophone, and it might be avoided by language minorities after independence as well.²²

AK: What about China?

SB: China's policy is essentially Soviet policy. Remember that in imperial China there was no compulsory education. If you wanted to learn, you were given some basic characters to memorize through some simple texts. Higher levels were for Confucian education. Non-Chinese speaking minorities were allowed to attend, but they usually didn't. And what happened to minorities like Muslims and Buddhists? They were left to do what they wanted. The thinking was: as long as you

²² See Korth (2005) for in-depth discussion of language attitudes towards of dominant Russophones (Europeans and Kyrgyz) towards Kyrgyz speakers in independent Kyrgyzstan.

pay your taxes, pay your tribute, and don't revolt, what you do in your schools is your own business.

AK: So the Chinese had a *Laissez-faire* approach to mother-tongue based education. Has it continued up to now?

SB: The People's Republic of China followed the Soviet modernization model of compulsory mass primary education, and at first also followed early Soviet language policy giving every nationality the right to education in its language, and state support for the development of official scripts for those languages without writing systems. Han Chinese volunteers were also trained to speak different languages and then sent to minority villages to teach in Chinese with oral minority language explanation. So the large nationalities with a big population and an established literature and writing system would have textbooks in their language and would eventually have their own trained people to teach in their language.

However, the textbooks were the central textbooks from Beijing, approved by the government, and just translated. As a result, in rural Tibetan areas for example, it has been noted that these textbooks are not understood by the children or their teachers. The content is far from their experience and does not take local knowledge into account. Although teachers were granted the freedom to adapt the content to local circumstances, they weren't told or trained how to do this. As a result, teaching the existing curriculum and teaching only in Chinese resulted in lots of failure to learn.

In my doctoral research, for example, I focused on a semi-nomadic group in China with an unwritten language. In the 1950s and 1960s they had been taught in Chinese, but often with extra instruction in their language, which they liked. In other cases, their teacher only knew Chinese,

but permitted students to use their language in class, letting those that understood Chinese better explain to their peers, which participants also commented favourably on. However, some reported a strict Chinese-only policy, and criticism or punishment for speaking their language instead of Chinese, which they resented.

AK: So practically it depended on the teacher?

SB: Yes, there was great disruption during the Cultural Revolution of the late 1960s to 1970s during which Chinese-language promotion and even suppression of minority languages in schools increased. As a result, in a few places the previous policy continued, while in others Chinese promotion was actively pursued.

AK: What about China today?

SB: The policies are almost as good as before the Cultural Revolution²³. The constitution gives the right to use minority languages as languages of instruction in school. Legislation states that minority languages *may* be used as languages of instruction, but leaves the choice of policy up to lower levels of government, and as we have seen, to some extent up to the individual school and even teacher. Which language to use is a local political decision. Thus, while the right exists, it's not necessarily realized²⁴. Blachford's research on local implementation of language policy in schools in west China (1998) found enormous variation in the models implemented. Some places start with mother tongue and then after two or three years suddenly shift to Chinese. Some start with Chinese, and then, after two or three years, add mother tongue as a subject. Some use Chinese only. Some use minority language only and teach Chinese just as a subject. For example, most

²³ As in the early Soviet Indigenization policy, majority Han officials and teachers assigned to minority areas were required up until the Cultural Revolution to learn the languages of the population they were assigned to. During the Cultural Revolution,

²⁴ See Zhou (2003 & 2004) for more detail on changes in minority language policy in China.

Tibetan rural areas had taught in Tibetan with Chinese as a subject, and similarly, Uygur areas in rural parts of Xinjiang teach Uygur only with Chinese as a subject. Recent central policy has not said to stop this—it just says learning Chinese is very important. So with inadequate consultation and with little or no awareness of research, local officials just say: 'Chinese is most important; young kids are best at learning languages', and introduce Chinese earlier and earlier or even start with Chinese. At the same time, there is heavy pressure for children to “learn” English, and by the same reasoning it is introduced into the curriculum earlier and earlier and to make room for it in the curriculum in minority areas, mother tongue instruction is reduced or cancelled.

In Xinjiang, they're beginning to experiment with something they call 'bilingual education', but the term can be applied to any situation with two languages present in some sense, for example monolingual Chinese instruction of bilingual minority students. One report I've seen says they're taking local teachers who are bilingual—for example, in Chinese and Uygur—and training them to a higher Chinese standard as well as in bilingual methods of some sort. These teachers will teach in Chinese, but are likely to also use their mother tongue when students don't understand, in a weak form of bilingual education called 'mixed bilingual education.' Another report refers to bilingual teaching as 'teaching modern subjects in modern language'—in other words, in Chinese, and local geography and local history in a local minority language. Interestingly, this model revives the imperial Russian model of local-Russian schooling with its hierarchy of content that corresponded to a hierarchy of languages. As a result, it's clear that simply providing the right to a strong form of bilingual education is no guarantee that this is what will be implemented.²⁵

²⁵ Strawbridge (2008) and Ma (2009) for differing explanations of the implementation of bilingual education in Xinjiang

AK: Reza Shah, the founder of the Pahlavi dynasty (1925-1979), and the intellectuals who surrounded him tried to create a centralized and unified Iran following political models offered by European nation states, which, over a short period of time, had gained military, political, and economic supremacy in the world. They believed using Persian as the dominant language in governmental institutions would guarantee the unity of the nation. The Persian language, thus, became the only language of instruction in the modern Iranian public educational system, which was created by Reza Shah in the same period. The “unity” argument is still commonly used both against giving equal official status to other languages and against instruction in students’ mother tongues in schools. **How valid do you think the argument of unification through one common language is? Have similar measures been taken in China and Central Asia (at any point in modern history)? What have been the consequences of such measures? What kind of debates have they created?**

SB: The short answer is that the Persian-only arguments are the same as the English-only arguments in North-America and recent evidence suggests that actually, it’s not true.

AK: Have there been variations of the same line of thought regarding the unifying power of a single language at work in Central Asia and China?

SB: Yes, they assumed it was necessary; they assumed it would work. But look at the Soviet Union today. It’s split up on national lines. It was under Stalin that they started to emphasize the Russian language more and more. But one of the reasons they emphasized it more was because the option of teaching in Russian, the teaching of Russian as a language subject, the pedagogies, and the curriculum were not having the effect of bringing people up to actually being able to function in Russian and communicate with people transferred from other parts of the USSR.

AK: How well did this model work?

SB: The initial stage of official Russian taught as a subject didn't work. They decided to send young people to boarding schools in the cities, where students did learn to communicate in Russian, but ceased to develop their original language further. As a result many in the capital city would know Russian well, while in the provincial cities Russian wasn't used as much and, in the villages, was barely understood. This is clearly not the same as building up a population bilingual in Russian and Kazak or Russian and Kyrgyz who are equally able in both. Central Asians in Russian-dominant programs would develop conversational and academic Russian, but academic proficiency in their "native" language would be weak or non-existent.

AK: And is it why the dominance of Russian didn't unify the nation after all?

SB: Possibly. At no point in Soviet history did anyone seriously discuss bilingual education as a model where everybody would be taught real content in two languages. The best they did was side by side, parallel-medium schooling where the minority language program students were learning oral Russian through non-academic activities. So the Uzbek group would learn oral Russian. Following Cummins' idea of transfer, those who had studied, for example, Uzbek academic language, would have had many opportunities to be exposed to academic Russian too. It was everywhere—at least receptively for reading and so on. So we would predict that those who were educated all the way in the mother tongue could have become additive bilinguals. Similarly, those who were educated all the way in Russian would be subtractive bilinguals good at, you know, basic family interaction in the mother tongue, but that's all. So when you have a meeting in the capital city of Bishkek for example, you could have five Kyrgyz, but they're speaking only Russian because that's what they're comfortable with. It's a very diglossic situation.

One of the discourses we haven't touched on is the colonial superiority complex. Despite the rhetoric of providing quality modern knowledge to the masses, this knowledge was produced by Europeans and delivered to Central Asia from Moscow. The conflation of the level of sophistication of knowledge and the language it was encoded in led to covert (and some overt) assumption of essential superiority of Russian knowledge and language and a resulting stratification of knowledge, language and persons.²⁶

AK: In Iran, however, policies have been less equitable. On the other hand, the Persian language has been a crucial element in nation building and cultural unification.

SB: Yes, but Persian elements have spread throughout Central Asia even in Turkic speaking areas, where you can find names such as Gulbahar (Persian for *Spring Flower*). Persian language and culture have permeated Turkic language and culture. Was it by force, by prestige, or by cultural attractiveness? There was clearly a mixture of these. Similarly, Russia and the USSR had great prestige in terms of its language and the knowledge associated with it, but they also commanded enormous power. Many Central Asians wanted access to Russian language and knowledge as a resource: but the issue was that that access was only available through this asymmetrical subordinate relation, whereby Russians sent to Central Asia saw no reason to learn the local language.

This was in great contrast to the earliest Soviet policy of indigenization in the 1920s and early 1930s designed to build up the capacity of the local population so that officials and so on would be local people using local language. Stalin's making the study of Russian compulsory Russian,

²⁶ See Dzyuba (1974) for an insider's view of how this played out in the Ukrainian SSR in the Soviet Union and Korth (2005) on the persistence of this mentality after independence in Kyrgyzstan, while Smagulova (2014) argues describes how limited language functions filled by Kazakh among educated urban russophone Kazakhs leads to infantilization of the non-dominant language.

coincided with the end of indigenization policy where Russian could not be used as a language of administration in meetings, exactly because it smacked of colonialism or “Great Russian chauvinism”. If there had been an actual system of promoting maintenance, bilingual education, or additive bilingualism throughout the Soviet period, and treating Russian and Central Asian languages as resources, there would have been less pressure for the Soviet Union to break up.

AK: Some Iranian academics claim that minorities all over the world eventually embrace dominant languages although unhappily. They say ninety million Spanish speakers in the United States have accepted English as the official language or immigrants in Israel speak Hebrew at school particularly in order to strengthen the unity of their young nation. They also talk about India as an example of a country where people have accepted to use the language of their colonizers as a practical measure to run their country efficiently. Based on these examples, these academics invite the speakers of minority languages in Iran to accept the status of Farsi as the official language of the country as a pragmatic move similarly experienced in other parts of the world. **Have minority language speakers comfortably accepted Mandarin as the main language of China or other dominant languages in Central Asia? Are Iranian Kurds, Turks, Balochis, and other speakers of minority languages exceptionally uncooperative? Have there been any movements in China or Central Asia that have demanded the protection and recognition of minority languages? Have, for instance, Tibetans accepted Mandarin as the dominant language, or have they resisted its dominance?**

SB: Tibetans, for example, have a long and powerful literary tradition, but few resist the idea of Chinese as the dominant language in the country as a whole. But there is a range of responses to the imposition of Chinese-dominant education in Tibetan-dominant areas. For most, there is no contradiction with being Tibetan in China if Tibetan Autonomous districts can make and carry out

their own policy in spheres such as education, and decide whether to promote Tibetan language or Chinese or bilingualism. Several years ago a provincial government with a large Tibetan population shifted without warning or consultation to Chinese-dominant instruction, which caused immediate large-scale student protest. However, if models using effective bilingual pedagogies had been applied, then many of these problems would be reduced.

AK: The advocates of Farsi as the official language sometimes claim that most requests for instruction in student's mother tongues are practically separatist attempts rather than serious linguistic or pedagogical suggestions. This hostile ideological atmosphere has frequently left mother tongue activists in a vulnerable position when they try to negotiate the demands. **Have there been similar experiences in China and Central Asia?**

SB: There is no necessary connection between mother tongue instruction or bilingual instruction and that kind of nationalism. And in fact, an extreme nationalist would argue for mother tongue only, not bilingual education. In Central Asia, there is a province of Tajikistan called Badakhshan. The government is a little bit nervous about separatism there, so the people are very careful about asking for local Pamir languages in the school system. But nobody is saying they want Pamir language only. Their thousand-year tradition is to use Pamiri language for daily communication, while reserving Persian / Tajik for higher level purposes. So although we must recognize that governments have these fears, governments need education too. They make the logical error that because you *could* use this to argue for separatism, then if you ask for this, you are *therefore* separatist. And in a certain sense, these fears are not evidence based, in that neither governments nor researchers bother to conduct much high quality qualitative research among minority populations. What most minority people want is linguistic and cultural autonomy and bilingualism. One Tibetan parent married to a Yughur man was trilingual in Tibetan, West Yughur and Chinese,

and hoped that her child would be proficient in English as well as these three languages. Most minority students and parents see a need to learn Chinese. They just don't see why they should only study Chinese²⁷ So by not teaching children effectively or by creating assimilation through monolingual submersion education, governments can create tensions.

Take the example of (north) Azerbaijan. When they talk about building up their language, they're not talking about Iran's province Azerbaijan: annexing Iran's (south) Azerbaijan is just not on the radar.²⁸ Similarly, if Kurds feel there's no contradiction in being Kurdish in Iran, and learning Farsi for general country-wide purposes, this should not lead to separatism. The language of wider communication will remain Persian as it has been for a thousand years. Coercive policies are not necessary: the Persian language and culture are attractive and useful enough. Everybody likely wants to learn Persian. But the question is, should it be Persian only? Or Persian plus Kurdish, Persian plus Azeri, Persian plus some Arabic. Let's look at the history of Iran: people learned multiple languages all the time, but for the widest communication purposes, Persian was always the best language to use for wider communication purposes. It's everybody's Language of wider communication and some people's first language.

AK: The supporters of the idea of the Persian language as a unifying cultural factor claim that even if we undermined the position of Farsi as the official language, Iranian minority languages would not be empowered. Instead, they believe Western languages would dominate the cultural scene in regions with non-Persian populations. Historically, they exemplify, countries like India and Nigeria have had to undergo linguistic colonialism due to failing to choose a local linguistic

²⁷ See Bahry (2012) for analysis of perspectives of teachers, administrators, minority students and parents on minority culture and language in a minority district with Chinese only instruction where minority children are undergoing rapid language shift to Chinese.

²⁸ See Bahry, Karimova & Shamatov (2015), and Marquardt (2011) for discussion of language policy in (north) Azerbaijan.

medium in their own cultures and have had to use, English, the language of their colonizers. In the case of India, even before English, Persian (another non-native language) was used as the official language of most of the land. In the same manner, they say, although in northern Azerbaijan, the government tried to purge the Azerbaijani language from any Persian influence, they failed to create a reliable body of Azerbaijani language that could be effectively used in cultural, intellectual, and scientific exchanges. Ironically, instead of Persian, which through centuries had organically interacted with their language, they had to start using Russian and English vocabulary and thus subjected themselves to a much more extreme linguistic colonialism. **What do you think of this argument? Are there any examples of similar circumstances in China and Central Asia? How have the speakers of minority languages in China and Central Asia dealt with this challenge?**

SB: But think of the word “organically” in your question. That’s the key word there. The Russian influence was not organic. It was imposed from above. In 1927 there was a big conference in Baku, Azerbaijan about language modernization. As progressive Muslims, they wanted to modernize, and as Turkic-speaking Central Asian and Azerbaijan specialists, the participants saw the Arabic alphabet as holding this back and voted for Romanization of the writing system and modernization of lexicon. They could create new vocabulary in Azerbaijani or they could use Russian as a model and translate, or they could just borrow Russian terminology wholesale. This was to a certain extent an organic process in society or at least among intellectuals, but subsequently, central Moscow policy was to use Russian words as much as possible for scientific vocabulary and to write Azerbaijani and Central Asian languages in the Russian (Cyrillic) alphabet. What is happening in Central Asia now, for example, is again a more organic process where some Russian

vocabulary is kept, but often earlier Arabic or Persian terminology is revived and of course, there is a good deal of borrowing from English as well.

The idea of how much or whether there should be central control of language still remains. What you mentioned sounds like people in Iran are saying: 'We should have a policy that tells people what the language is. If we just say hands off, and let the intellectuals write their books and so on, maybe they will start using English words.' That's not an organic process. There will be some people who are totally opposed to Western influence and don't want these ideas. Others will say we'll take the idea, and they will either develop new terminology or translate, or translate. With the Internet, it's pretty hard to control.

AK: If you were a Kurdish mother tongue activist in Iran and a Persian policy maker told you to continue using Farsi because otherwise your culture and language would be dominated by Anglo-Saxon culture and the English language, how would you reply?

SB: But look at the massive development of Persian-English bilingualism among certain strata under the previous regime. What evidence is there of Iranians at this time undergoing language shift to English in Iran? As for lexical influence, Persian is filled with other words already—mainly Arabic, but also Turkic, and French as well as some English.

AK: Of course. Contemporary Farsi has borrowed a lot of English words particularly when it comes to science and technology.

SB: Well, I'd say the thinking is: 'If it's attractive, we will use it. The culture and science of English-speaking countries is quite productive these days and we don't have the colonial feeling that another country's word is better than ours.' But that's a question of confidence. I don't think

that confidence in Persian intellectual and cultural ability can be created purely by rule. Are the intellectuals producing a vibrant modern culture in Persian that people want to read? So that would be an example of bottom-up language planning. If Azaris in Iran create a vibrant, local Azari culture that is also bilingual in Farsi, and there's no animosity, it would be an ideal. Now maybe it's a romantic ideal, but it could perhaps happen in reality.

AK: Some say that the recent Western discourses that celebrate the mother tongue have been constructed as a reaction to the brutal elimination of native European languages by centralized nation states created over the few past centuries in Europe. They particularly talk about what happened in France after the French revolution. They believe that such a brutal treatment of minority languages in Iran has actually never happened. Segregation of schools as we have seen in the United States has never happened in the long history of Iran. Or any institution similar to Canadian Residential Schools has never been established in Iran. They say most of the discourses through which mother tongue activists are speaking are too aggressive because of their original context, which is practically the brutality of white European colonial linguistic policies. They believe that Iranian civilization, Greater Iran, or "cultural Iran" has always been a multilingual and multicultural society. This argument is also indicative of the fear that importing these discourses from the West might indeed be the sign of a new colonial cultural invasion, another practical mistreatment of a good idea like planting democracy in Iraq by President Bush. **Is, in your opinion, this concern about hidden colonial agendas in discourses surrounding linguistic human rights justified? Have there been similar conversations in China or Central Asia?**

SB: So they're saying the post-colonial discourse doesn't apply to their situation?

AK: They say it doesn't because the circumstances in the Iranian Plateau have always been less intense and aggressive. They say we have always lived together more or less peacefully, or at least more peacefully than the colonial world. They say we have never had something like Residential schools. We've never had that problem.

SB: Madrasas (secondary & tertiary school combined) were in effect residential schools, Students had to go away from their home to a new place, where, if they were not native speakers of Persian, they would get further absorbed in Persian-speaking culture. To what extent they would lose their mother tongue, wouldn't know. The key difference is that it was not compulsory to attend madrasa, whereas Native peoples in northern Canada had to go. They were taken from their families at the age of seven and sent far away, and punished by teachers for speaking their language. But note that a key element of modern education is its compulsory character, and as in Iran, its frequent monolingual character.

AK: They say that these discourses are too much for our context. Many Iranian intellectuals and policy makers believe that despite the compulsory character of modern education, the peoples of the Iranian Plateau have, broadly speaking, been more lenient in "punishment" and much more tolerant.

SB: There are many arguments for mother tongue and national language being taught bilingually. One of them is to take away coercion, repression, force, abuse. If these things did not happen, all the more reason to be flexible in approach now. At any rate, if Iran avoided these negative experiences, it doesn't cancel the other arguments. As a practitioner, the argument is that if you're in a place where the children's primary language is Kurdish and you want them to understand, you start with Kurdish, and you start with what they have and then you add to that, and you continually

build on what students know. I'm currently looking at west China and attempting to apply Dewey's notion of education as growth which requires interaction between internal and external factors. The teacher's knowledge, the textbook knowledge, and the school knowledge that the children do not have—these are the external factors. The internal factors are what students already know, what they can do already, and their experience until now. If you exclusively emphasize external factors, you're going to have problems. You're not going to support students' growth and you're repressing one part of their knowledge and their experience. You're just saying 'do what we say.' It also affects how well they can learn the external knowledge. You have to use what is known.

So by this logic, if you want to have effective mass education in an area where minority language is prevalent, you have to start from that and take it into account somehow. To ignore it is a kind of compulsion or coercion. Silence about their language is still a kind of compulsion. You're in the room, the teacher is the dominant person, but you can't speak the teacher's language. You will be silent for one or two years. How much could you have learned if you could use your own language? This is one of Jim Cummins' major arguments about curriculum and learning. Learning takes place through the language you know best. For the difficult content, you should use the strongest language, whatever it is, so that more learning can go on. Then you have a basis for more learning later. And at some point you can transfer what you've built up. You can transfer a solid base of knowledge and language ability, not just conversational ability. Then it becomes easier to develop academic language proficiency in the second language. So by that argument, using the central national language may mean less learning of curriculum knowledge. And it also may mean weak learning of the national language. Finally, we have to consider the potential negative effect on

identity development of this kind of cultural and linguistic silence of mainstream monolingual education for minority students.²⁹

AK: One particular phenomenon that strengthens the position of the critics who fear the possibility of the disintegration of Iran as a result of more substantial recognition of minority languages is the fact that Iran has been surrounded by countries which are already using Iranian minority languages as their official languages. Turkish in Azerbaijan, Kurdish in Iraqi Kurdistan, and Arabic among the Arab nations of the Gulf might be the best examples. Policy makers fear that elevating the status of non-Persian languages in Iran will automatically draw Iranian minorities closer to their cousins beyond the borders, which will in time bring about their separation from Iran. **How would you reply to this concern as an Iranian mother tongue activist or an educator? Are there similar circumstances anywhere in China or Central Asia?**

SB: First, this is zero sum thinking: 'Either they are for us or against us, and there's nothing in between.' Second, it is Iran-centric. The situation is not at all unique. Turkey has exactly the same situation with people around it. So right now China has almost its maximum historical borders, which were achieved under the last Dynasty, the Qing Dynasty. The Qing Dynasty was founded by the non-Han Manchu people from the Northeast, whose policy was that there are five nations of China—Manchus, Mongolians, Tibetans, Uygurs, and Han Chinese, but had a tolerant policy toward local knowledge and languages in the border areas. They didn't specially fear the people in the border areas. They used both carrot and stick approach with them—'internally, you can teach your language, you can teach your culture, but you must pay your taxes and be loyal subjects They

²⁹ A Yughur researcher in China put it thus: "For more than 10 years of education, the teacher will not say a single word about your nationality, language, history or culture. Thus, this kind of lopsided education fosters students whose spirit and individuality are similarly lopsided" (Tiemuer, 2006, 41).

had a powerful military and could respond severely in the face of rebellion, but seemed to separate political and national security from language and education.

Most Chinese are from the core part of the country and are not familiar with these areas, their cultures or their languages. And, as a result, they may think: 'well we can't trust them unless everybody knows Chinese.' Nevertheless, the official policy is not to assimilate, but to encourage people to learn Chinese well so they can participate in national level discussions.³⁰

AK: So that situation is not unique to Iran?

SB: No, not at all.

AK: Some argue that the concern about the status of minority languages in Iranian educational systems is indeed an ethical stance that might eventually empower the students and create a sense of achievement in minority communities. However, in the context of today's Iran, the consequences of a sudden shift to students' mother tongues would be more harmful than beneficial for the students and their communities. In the present economic and political circumstances in Iran, they say, the elevation of the status of any minority language would only open a can of worms. Who, they ask, is going to pay for the bureaucracy involved in such a move. The logistics needed for such a huge change will impoverish the regions and drain the little money they have. As a result, they conclude, although instruction in mother tongue might appear to be a valuable educational step, it might easily prove to be a Pyrrhic victory. They believe the speakers of minority languages are so sentimental about mother tongue discourses that they cannot see what will happen to them if their languages become official. The current situation is a win-win equation

³⁰ See He (2005) on the suitability of Kymlicka's minority relations approach to China, and a discussion of the relation between minorities, language and the government at different times in China's history; in particular the many periods in which wide linguistic and cultural autonomy was provided to China's nationalities.

for everyone, they declare. **What do you think of this argument? How have the Chinese and the Central Asians had to deal with the practicalities of supporting multilingual education? How did they deal with costs imposed by logistics and bureaucracy? How did they fund their projects and pooled resources? How did the communities they worked with react to such measures considering the practical challenges involved?**

SB: Well the first idea is tied to the ideological assumption that centralization and standardization of curriculum and language of instruction are necessary components of modern quality education. For anyone with a deep-seated belief that centralized control of education is absolutely the only way, any alternative is inconceivable. Yet much research argues that a more decentralized local and/or school-based curriculum development can strengthen learning with lower costs than centralized approaches.³¹

By the way, I heard Jim Cummins mention in a talk that the people who make such arguments about the costs of including minority languages in education do not properly calculate the enormous costs of ineffective mainstream-language education for language minority students. What if the Iranian government was asked to justify the huge investments in English teaching English in Iran? Can it be justified by “cost-benefit analysis”?

AK: Have there been instances in China or Central Asia which could prove that implementing multilingual education is not very expensive after all, particularly when compared with the costs of mainstream monolingual education?

³¹ See Skilbeck, (1984) for arguments in favour of SBCD; and Yang & Zhou (2002) explaining the rationale for China's policy encouraging SBCD as a means of compensating for national curriculum's shortcomings.

SB: I haven't got access to detailed information about costs, but for those nationalities with a written language the national curriculum has generally been translated into minority languages and teachers from those nationalities have been trained. This has been indirectly done in a comparison of two nationalities in west China, the Kyrgyz of Xinjiang, and the Yughurs of Gansu, the first of which was educated in a mother-tongue dominant monolingual model, and the second in a Chinese-dominant monolingual model. Both models had achieved near-universal primary education completion in the 1990s, but there was a much greater survival rate to complete junior-secondary education for the Chinese-educated Yughurs. Otherwise, the survival rate from junior to senior-secondary and from senior-secondary to post-secondary is roughly the same, while post-secondary completion rates are below range from 6 to 9 percent for the latest cohort of both groups (20-24 years old in 2000). As a result, employment is still predominantly in agriculture and herding for both groups. The main argument in China for Chinese-dominant education is greater access to higher knowledge and employment outside of agriculture. Yet we see that any benefits for the monolingual-Chinese model are modest or even marginal. At the same time, my field research documented great concern among the Yughur population that the cost of compulsory monolingual dominant-language education was rapid language shift and impending language loss.³²

As we have seen, although China's language policy allows for a bilingual education model, in most cases its language regime favours strong separation of languages, so that until recently bilingual approaches have been rare. Nevertheless, the Korean population of northeast China, much of which is rural, does follow a model where Korean and Chinese are both used as languages of instruction for most of basic education, and their educational attainment rates for the same

³² See Bahry & Zholdoshaliev (2012) for more on the comparative case study of Kyrgyz & Yughurs, and for more on minority educational in west China and an argument for greater "mutuality" of languages and knowledge perspectives (Bahry, 2015) and an argument for greater interaction between external and internal knowledge perspectives (Bahry, 2015, forthcoming).

cohort are much stronger than for either Kyrgyz or Yughur, and even the majority Han, at all levels higher than primary education.³³ This is an indirect argument for a bilingual model.

Note that converting from a minority-language dominant model to a bilingual model has few additional costs since curriculum and materials have already been prepared in both languages. It is only where shifting from a monolingual Chinese model to a bilingual model where no mother tongue materials have been created that there will be some additional costs. But it is not certain what they would be, because such programmes have not yet been much implemented, and figures on costs are not readily available.

But think of the externalities of low levels of learning and dropout due to poor understanding of dominant language teaching. Education specialists at the Ministry of Education have realized that much of the Chinese population is not learning well with centralized curriculum, which is an enormous waste of national resources and of students' potential. But this is not a minority issue: *Everybody* in rural areas faces this challenge, majority Han Chinese included, who are often in fact speakers of what Chinese call dialects of Chinese that differ enough from the standard language that western linguists consider them separate languages, and so there has been a decision to add local and school-based curriculum to the national curriculum as a means to compensate for the shortcomings of centralized national curriculum and to strengthen learning through greater inclusion of students' interests and prior knowledge. This policy can be used to argue for increased minority cultural and linguistic content in education, although the policy does not speak directly about minority languages or cultures.

³³ See Bahry (2013) and Zhou (2003 & 2004) for more on minority education and language policy in China and Bahry (2011) for review of post-secondary attainment of China's nationalities, including the Korean nationality.

AK: What about costs specifically? Textbooks? Teachers?

SB: According to the traditional centralized logic, making standard textbooks and training teachers is slow and expensive. However, school-based curriculum is supposed to be more flexible and less costly, since it is developed by teachers already familiar with students and the context. With modern technology, it becomes much easier for them to produce low cost school-based materials, using photocopiers, video cameras, computers etc. For example, a minority language folk tale already translated into Chinese and published in a book or magazine can be used to support Chinese learning for those stronger in the heritage language and as a means to learn the heritage language for those whose Chinese is stronger. English teachers can also prepare a parallel English translation to teach English through local minority cultural content and scaffolded by minority and Chinese language versions.³⁴ Schools can also use video cameras to gather their own cultural material, such as songs, stories, customs, dances, games, and art, which they can transform into mother tongue teaching materials as well.

If more authority is given to schools and teachers to interpret the curriculum according to local needs, interests and conditions, they can do this in one, two, three, or four languages according to local demand. We can look to examples of successful reform at rural schools such as Escuela Nueva schools in Columbia and in BRAC schools in Bangladesh, where the curriculum is localized: national curriculum objectives are written to fit local conditions and include local content³⁵. At the same time, we have the examples of successful bilingual programs that often have a similar approach to localization of content. In principle, a strong form of bilingual education

³⁴ Three trilingual folk tales were presented in workshops in June 2015 in Sunan Yughur Autonomous County, Gansu, China: one in Sarigh Yughur (Turkic), Chinese & English; one in Shira Yughur (Mongolic), Chinese & English; and one (prepared with Jia Luo), in Tibetan, Chinese and English.

³⁵ See Farrell (2008) for an extended argument for the localization of education through community schools as a possible solution to the challenges of rural education in developing contexts.

rooted in both local languages, cultures and knowledge, linking to the national and even international language, culture and knowledge could be developed for minority populations in rural and urban Iran that would contribute to additive multilingualism and a broad sense of belonging and loyalty to an Iran that included heritage language and culture as well as Persian language and Iranian culture.

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Who's Afraid of Multilingual Education?

In this concluding section, I review major arguments against mother tongue-based multilingual education and views suspicious of plurilingual pedagogies emphasizing students' translingual identities. Drawing upon the content of my exchanges with Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, Jim Cummins, Ajit Mohanty, and Stephen Bahry, I demonstrate why these arguments are invalid despite their resilient longevity as popular socio-political discourses. I also end the analysis of each argument with questions and considerations that might suggest new directions for further discussion.

Research documenting the benefits of mother tongue-based multilingual education is by no means rare (Baker & García, 2007; Cummins, 1994; Cummins, 2008; Cummins, 2011; Cummins, 1981; Cummins, 2001; García, Skutnabb-Kangas, & Torres-Guzmán, 2006; Nieto & Bode, 2008; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2009; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000; Skutnabb-Kangas & Heugh, 2012). We know that teaching through the medium of students' mother tongues increases academic success. Plenty of research has documented the tight connection between language and identity and hence the impact of the use of students' first languages on the process of learning. Many teachers and researchers are cognizant of the fact that scaffolding students' home languages, employing plurilingual pedagogies, and making space for translingual practices in the classroom will help minority students learn the dominant language more effectively. We also know that by recognizing students' linguistic repertoires and valuing minority languages, we practically engage in the preservation of painstakingly formed cultural heritages and native knowledges. Moreover, there is no lack of examples of the success of mother tongue-based multilingual education—such as the revival of the Catalan language—and we are not unaware of disastrous consequences of policies that force assimilation through compulsory monolingual

dominant-language-medium education—for instance the massacre of the supporters of the Bengali Language Movement and the horrifying experiences of aboriginal students in Canadian Residential Schools. Nevertheless, dominant political discourses, often echoed by the mass media, sometimes ignore all the evidence backing the significance of proactively supporting the use of mother tongues in schools both as the medium of instruction and as a valuable recourse connected to students’ identities. Unfortunately, “empirical evidence typically has minimal impact on these ideological discourses” (Cummins).

Politicians, public figures, and the media—in a variety of political and historical circumstances—have reproduced and repeated discourses against mother tongue-based education as though there were no history of such attitudes ending in disaster and shame and there were no tradition of empirical studies refuting their views. The pattern of creating and spreading such discourses is usually the same. Often for political reasons, clichéd anti-multilingual education discourses are circulated by tapping into the vanity of the speakers of dominant languages and the vulnerabilities of speakers of minority languages, who usually believe that a focus on the “language of success” must be the best way to survive in multi-ethnic and multilingual societies. Typically in a media frenzy of uninformed conversations, the dominant culture is pictured to be threatened by multilingual education and minorities are intimidated to see an attachment to their native cultures as a recipe for failure. A recent example of how sociocultural and socio-political discourses can, despite the prevalence of empirical evidence, work against mother-tongue based multilingual education is the California Proposition 227 (1998) bill, which imposed serious restrictions on Spanish-English bilingual education in the State of California despite much research that recommends the opposite direction.

As a result of this pattern of socio-political reaction to multilingual education, next to numerous empirical projects that have documented the positive impact of the use of mother tongues in educational settings, it is imperative that the experts of the field come together and reply to more populist arguments in debate formats popular with politicians, policy makers, and the media. This book is an endeavour following this vision. The four interviews in the book reflect the responses of some of the experts of the field to most frequently employed arguments against mother tongue-based multilingual education, some of which are indeed old-fashioned clichés but still influential in shaping educational policies. This chapter, accordingly, concludes the preceding interviews by formulating the views that can challenge discourses that by supporting monolingual educational systems, prevent students from having access to their mother tongues (and consequently their identities, cultures, native knowledges, and the support of their family and community members who do not speak the dominant language) in many places in the world ranging from the United States and Canada to countries in the East such as India and Iran.

Although the interviews presented in this book were conducted in a response to the mother tongue debate in Iran, the scope of topics grew beyond the Iranian context to generate conversations that could bolster the position of mother tongue activists and sympathetic teachers and policy makers anywhere in the world. This section, hence, is written to highlight universal issues that have risen internationally in debates about mother tongue-based education and the place of students' mother tongues in schools and other educational settings. Nevertheless, extracting the arguments against multilingual education from the Iranian context has added value to this study in a number of ways, the most important of which are the following. First, the Iranian Plateau has been home to multilingual civilizations for millennia and the debates about

multilingualism in Iran have developed in many complex ways during centuries. A focus on these debates can both help us reframe and formulate universal issues and also make the Iranian context more visible for the international community of researchers and educators interested in multilingualism. Second, because of the history and geographical position of Iran, many conversations regarding multilingual education host themes that deal with colonial and neo-colonial issues, which would reveal dimensions that might not be necessarily visible in many Western contexts.

Inspired by his observations of Iranian literacy traditions, Brian Street (1984)—one of the founders of the literacy movement called the New Literacy Studies—famously highlighted the significance of sociocultural contexts of literacy practices and challenged the dominant cognitive reading/writing theories of the time. I hope the rich and complex linguistic and literacy traditions of the Iranian Plateau can similarly help us better understand the challenges of establishing multilingual systems of education. Rereading the views that deem mother-tongue based multilingual education is particularly important in this historical period since although we might intuitively expect more progress regarding policies that encourage multilingual pedagogies and practices in this day and age, “from the perspective of educational languages rights, the 21st century begins with the echoes of early 20th century restrictionism” (Wiley, 2007, p. 103).

Arguments against mother tongue-based multilingual education can be grouped under six themes. The first group of arguments favour the dominance of a single language in educational systems inasmuch as it is deemed to create unity among citizens from different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds and facilitate better communication between all minorities for fostering commercial and cultural exchange. Second, linguistic and historical arguments are tabled to prove that a certain language has the natural make-up of a *lingua franca* and thus should be

adopted by all minorities thanks to its linguistic characteristics or historical genealogy. Third, there are arguments that claim such a *lingua franca* would be superior to minority languages in that it is the best cultural and intellectual medium for the betterment of society especially when this dominant language has a rich and long written tradition; these arguments often regard oral traditions of knowledge exchange as uncivilized and inferior. Forth, as a result of this cultural superiority, it is argued, the dominance of such a *lingual franca* should be accepted as the natural state of affairs and speakers of other languages should embrace the dominant language as the language of success in a pragmatic move. What, from this perspective, makes this pragmatic move even more worthwhile is the next theme. The fifth group of arguments express concern over the practicalities involved in creating multilingual schools and educational spaces such as the money and expertise needed to fund and support such endeavours. Lastly, there are variations of arguments that are somehow connected to fears of separatism and neo-colonialism. Post-colonial anxieties and fear of separatism have often created conditions that oppress minority cultures and present them to the dominant majority as rebellious and rogue. In what follows, we will assess these arguments.

Argument 1: A common language creates a united nation.

One of the most frequently used arguments against instruction through the medium of mother tongues is the *unity argument*, which (in different variations) claims that a single common language can glue peoples from different ethnicities and cultures into one united nation. The prevalence and popularity of this view is mainly the legacy of 19th-century European nation-state and nation-building theories. Most of these theories favoured the dominance of a single language in centralized compulsory educational systems which aimed to uniformly mould students often by means of universal curricula developed by the speakers of the dominant

language. The supporters of the unity argument believe that the dominance of a single language will guarantee the unity of a nation. The social benefits of such unity, they seem to believe, can justify the demise of minority languages and cultures. A common language in this view can facilitate the process of assimilation into the dominant culture, which is not usually opted democratically or constructed collaboratively and is often forced upon minorities.

This mentality has resulted in disastrous consequences such as educational segregation in the United States, the death of at least 6000 aboriginal students in Canadian Residential Schools (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015), and “the massacre of language activists in Dacca, East Pakistan in 1952, in which over 200,000 were slaughtered, including many professors and students at the university” (Skutnabb-Kangas). Despite all available evidence against it, the unity argument—although sometimes in more subtle ways—is still alive and strong. In Canada, for instance, there is a strong sense of mistrust of policies that foster multiculturalism (Appiah, 2010; Clarke, 1991; Ghosh, 2011; Martin, 2007; Wenthe, Oct. 07 2010) and forced assimilation is still deemed as minority populations’ natural desire for elevation to superior forms of life:

The native people, or First Nations, were here first, but there were not more than a few hundred thousand of them in what is now Canada in the 17th century. They had a Stone Age culture that had not invented the wheel, and which graduated, however brusquely, to more sophisticated levels of civilization. (Black, 2015)

Similarly in Iran (the context of our interviews), there is a strong discourse that regards the dominance of the Persian language in educational settings as part and parcel of the strength of Iranianness. This strong belief in a fixed Iranian identity is partly rooted in the very long

history of Iran with popular narratives that portray Iranianness as an invincible nation-building cultural substance and partly borrowed from 19th European nation state theories.

Despite the self-righteousness in the unity argument and its matter-of-fact tone, this argument is based on two wrong assumptions. First, the one-nation-one-language ideal is only a myth. All states are, to greater or lesser degrees, multilingual; also, many languages (such as English, Spanish, and ironically Persian) are spoken in states politically disconnected. Second, a concern about minority languages should not be interpreted as the omission of other languages including the dominant language. Counterexamples to this argument are not difficult to find:

The obvious example is a country like Switzerland, which has three or four official languages, and is not in any danger of breaking up. The argument that one needs to marginalize or get rid of minority languages in order to maintain cohesion of the country just has no validity whatsoever (Cummins).

Or in Tove Skutnabb-Kangas' words:

Britain and the USA have been said to be divided by a common language, English. The language most commonly spoken in Northern Ireland is English. Has that united the Catholics and the Protestants in Northern Ireland?

If the supporters of monolingual educational systems approached the mother tongue question based on empirical evidence, it would not be difficult to see that what has often created conflict is indeed violations of linguistic human rights rather than multilingual education and instruction in students' mother tongues.

The Sri Lankan situation might have been solved by granting linguistic and cultural rights to the Tamils. ... In fact, it is lack of basic linguistic human rights that contributes to conflict and tension in situations where linguistic hierarchies coincide with political &

economic power hierarchies, as lawyers, e.g. Asbjörn Eide, peace researchers, e.g. Björn Hettne and Johan Galtung, and sociologists of cultural human rights, e.g. Rodolfo Stavenhagen have shown. (Skutnabb-Kangas)

In other words, what creates harm and damage to the unity of the state is *zero-sum thinking* and an *either/or approach* to the mother tongue debate with the underlying premise that the speakers of minority languages can *either* learn the dominant language *or* their mother tongues. Most scholars of multilingual education, in contrast, have often adopted a *both/and approach* to the problem: an *additive* rather than a *subtractive* approach. There is a consensus in the international research community that minority students not only should interact with their mother tongues in different forms at school, they have a fundamental right to be properly trained to use the dominant language as well as the speakers of the language.

The problem is they argue based on the false assumption that if communities and individual children hold on to their mother tongues, it is going to (a) lessen their affiliation to the mainstream culture and (b) result in less accomplished academic learning. Neither of those have any basis whatsoever. (Cummins)

What reveals that arguments against mother-tongue based education are mostly politically and ideologically motivated rather than scientifically is the irony that when multilingual education is discussed as an educational possibility for the elite, there is no sense of unease; multilingualism is frowned upon only when it is recommended for minority students. This double standard indicates that the war against students' mother tongues might in fact be a political factor in a larger ideological plan to oppress minorities.

It just happens to be the languages of oppressed minority groups that are not acceptable. For example, in the European context, it's totally acceptable within the European Union

and strongly supported to have bilingualism in French and English and German and schools spend a lot of time trying to do that. So when multilingualism is serving the interests of dominant groups, it's fine. It's when multilingualism is potentially preserving languages of discriminated minorities that it becomes a problem. (Cummins)

What particularly makes the *either/or* mentality acutely militant is ignoring the difference between the concepts *mother tongue as the medium of instruction* and *official language* (Language adopted by a country for public administrative and institutional use, often including schools (UNESCO, 2007, p. 5)). Most researchers and educators approach the mother tongue debate through cultural and educational paradigms that are concerned about students' identities including all the languages that they interact with and that impact their social and cultural lives. They, thus, emphasize the recognition of home languages in the classroom as crucial, particularly using mother tongues as the language of instruction. In contrast, the supporters of monolingual educational systems often look at multilingualism through the lens of national security and political ideology. They, hence, see the elevation of the status of minority languages as undermining the political status quo. Yet this clash of views is irrelevant and *language of instruction* should not be confused with *official* or even *national languages*.

“The normal use of the term mother tongue, certainly in the international research community, is the first language of the student, the language that is spoken in the home. To talk about mother tongue as the official language of the country is something that is certainly not common within the research or educational communities” (Cummins). “It is perfectly possible to organise MLE for many groups, without making their languages co-official, and even without many groups demanding this co-officiality” (Skutnabb-Kangas). No matter what languages are declared *official* or *national*, students' mother tongues will still be tightly connected to their

identities in any educational setting and thus will impact the process of teaching and learning. In India, for instance, with 22 national languages dominant in different states, “the status of ‘regional dominant languages’ even within the states has created a lot of ‘minority languages’ and has had society deem those languages as ‘minority’? (Mohanty). In short, complicated patterns of student identity formation and negotiation hardly follow official linguistic hierarchies and treat mother tongues as important cultural and intellectual resources.

Although the theoretical refutation of the unity argument, as illustrated above, is not very difficult, the practical and pedagogical consequences of such a view can even more clearly illustrate the failure of this approach to education. Not only have centralized nation states failed to create unity among people by forcing minorities into fabricated national identities, but they have often created alienation, anger, and frustration as a result of literally torturing students in classrooms instead of teaching them:

In many parts of Europe and to a lesser extent in North America these days, the pattern has been one of punishing children for speaking their own languages. In Canadian Residential Schools, for instance, students’ mouths were washed out with soap and students were brutally beaten if they spoke any of their languages. And that was rationalized in pedagogical terms. You’re never going to learn English unless you give up this other language. (Cummins)

A common language, as history bears witness, cannot by itself create a unified nation. Nation-state theories, which gave rise to Nazism and Fascism, have long been considered outmoded in political science. Hence, an important question to ask might be, despite the failure of the nation-state discourses, what ideologies at present re-generate the same mentality, which has always been obsessed with undermining multilingual education? Why, for instance, in some

European countries, such as Netherland and Luxembourge, second generation immigrants face more challenges with the dominant languages than their parents despite constant exposure since their birth in Europe (PISA, 2012, P. 40, Figure 2.6, Table B2.1a)? What ideological substance in neoliberal and late capitalist economic and political theories begets mind-sets that demand and desire laws such as the California Proposition 227 (1998) bill, which imposed serious restrictions on Spanish-English bilingual education in the State of California? Are there any alternative political frameworks—Western and non-Western—that can encourage inclusion rather than *othering* and see land as a cultural and spiritual entity as opposed to property to be owned and shared by a nation? Should we not equip educators with theories that regard difference and plurality as a resource? Also, what educational structures can foster pedagogies conscious of the value of plurilingualism?

Argument 2: Dominant languages enjoy natural superiority because of their linguistic structure and historical privilege.

As an addition to the unity argument, supporters of monolingual schools often offer linguistic and historical narratives that define the dominant language as the best available linguistic body for communication and thus deserving an elevated position in the educational system. In the Iranian context, for instance, many deem the dominance of Persian as a *lingua franca* in the Iranian Plateau a “natural” phenomenon that linguistic minorities should learn to live with. They claim that there is no such thing as Persian ethnicity. A Persian in ancient Persia, they argue, was a citizen of the land regardless of his or her racial, ethnic, or linguistic background. In this sense, Persianness, instead of a racial indicator, is deemed to have been a common culture of citizenship that glued the peoples of the Iranian Plateau together. Linguistically, likewise, Persian, they hold, has never been a language spoken by a particular

ethnicity. Persian, they insist, is a linguistic mix of all the languages spoken in Iran: an Iranian Esperanto equally belonging to all the citizens of the plateau. Persian, thus, they conclude, should remain the main language of schooling and civil service since it belongs to all Iranians including both Persians and non-Persians. These arguments are not peculiar to Iran. In the 19th century, the German *jus sanguinis* (right by blood) in terms of language meant that German would be your language if it was your parents' mother tongue; the French, in contrast, favoured *jus soli* (right of the soil), according to which French would become your language as long as you lived in the French land, although less than half of the population of France at the time were French speakers. Colonial Europe, also, generously funded archaeological research that created accounts of the developments of Indo-European languages which directly or indirectly highlighted the “natural” cultural superiority of Europe based on meagre and questionable evidence (Renfrew, 1988).

Language, of course, can be analysed as linguistic substance or be studied as a cultural factor historically used by certain races or ethnicities, yet these approaches are hardly useful when it comes to speculations about mother tongue-based multilingual education. When students enter classrooms, they do not think of their mother tongues in complicated linguistic or historical terms; language is simply a component of their identity. Language use in the classroom, accordingly, should be regarded as a container for culture and identity and as a communication tool for human expression and creativity rather than a pure semiotic system of genealogical importance. The survivals of Canadian Residential Schools know well that language is more than syntax and morphology: “I got hit. I got hit so much I lost my tongue. . . . I hope nobody has to go through this. We have to have our own language because when we talk to our spirits, they don't understand English.” (Richie, 2008)

The underlying problem with linguistic and historical justifications for the dominance of a certain language, similar to the case of the unity argument, is an *either/or* mentality, which deems the privileged position of a language as proof for the legitimacy of oppressing other languages. I asked for Jim Cummins' thoughts regarding this argument in the Iranian context. He said:

Making a language the official language does not necessarily imply that one has to suppress other languages. So you can have Farsi as the official language, which seems reasonable from one point of view, while at the same time encourage other groups to maintain their languages together with Farsi. ... Farsi is the language of instruction. It is the official language. But that doesn't mean that we need to deny students the right to maintain their language and develop literacy in their language.

Similar to the problem with the previous argument, an obsession with creating grand historical narratives explaining the developments of languages and cultures was a popular 19th scholarly endeavour at the service of building European nation states. Centralized nation states needed encompassing cultural entities such as an official language claimed to be syntactically structured for all and a language that could reflect the *spirit* of the nation. We would like to think that we have passed the age of *master races*. Nevertheless, concepts like *American exceptionalism* are still very popular and impact educational policy making. Shouldn't we, at least in educational contexts, seek new ways of looking at history which, instead of an obsession with hegemony, value cultural and linguistic differences? Do we not need alternative theoretical frameworks that regard cataloguing more varieties of cultures and histories a merit rather than ignoring complexities and contradictions in order to create grand linguistic and historical narratives. Such models might help intellectuals and policy makers to look at language as

connected to students' identities and to locally based needs as opposed to obscure historical and linguistic pasts usually built with uncertain archaeological evidence.

Argument 3: Languages with a long history of written text production are culturally superior to other languages.

The corollary of linguistic and historical narratives that rationalize the “natural” dominance of a certain language in educational settings is the argument that the dominant language is better structured than other languages to record culture and to contain knowledge in written language. This view thus assumes that “if you are orate you are NOT educated or knowledgeable or cultured or sophisticated or well-informed or smart or competent. You are the opposite of all these positive characteristics. ‘Illiterates’ are IGNORANT (Skutnabb-Kangas). This argument particularly gathers strength when the dominant language has a rich written repertoire and the challenges of creating textbooks in minority languages—which may need to borrow modern scientific vocabulary—are highlighted. In Iran, for instance, the supporters of Farsi-only schools claim that the problems involved in creating textbooks in minority languages, including establishing a reliable writing system and translating scientific terminology into local languages, render the prospect of any successful endeavour of this nature unthinkable.

Although challenges in this regard are conceivable, there are many counterexamples that prove creating academic texts in minority languages is possible. In India, local languages are used all through the educational system from primary school to higher education. “In fact, now Indian students can write a book all the way up to the university level. One can write a doctoral dissertation in, for instance, the Bodo language” (Mohanty). In another example, the Kurds in Iraqi Kurdistan write textbooks in Kurdish, while the same practice is deemed implausible in Iran.

Furthermore, the message signalled in calling a different culture inferior is so harmful that one doubts if this glorifying claim of superiority is entirely out of a concern for the academic success of the students. How would minority students react to the stigmatizing notion that historically they have not been civilized and literate enough to manage knowledge in written language? How would this message from the dominant culture impact their learning? Imagining that minorities buy this argument and happily adopt the dominant language to engage with monolingual schools is a miscalculation.

By saying that students come from an inferior culture and race, we disaffirm their identities. Students take that attitude and will not value parental involvement, because parents are speaking this inferior language and they have no culture. This view is a recipe for what we've experienced in many countries with discriminated and marginalized minority groups with schools reinforcing the societal power structure. (Cummins)

The belief that "illiterate" cultures, which have not engaged with written language as much as others, are inferior to "civilized" populations with complicated forms of text production and distribution systems is a familiar concept in the West. Gee (1986) in "Orality and Literacy: From the Savage Mind to Ways with Words" wrote:

In anthropological studies the term *literate* in the dichotomy *literate/nonliterate* came to replace the term *civilized* in the older dichotomy *civilized/primitive* and then how a distinction between different cultures (nonliterate versus literate ones) came to be applied to different social groups within modern, technological societies like ours, characterizing some as having "restricted literacy" and others as having "full literacy." The importance of these developments is the link often assumed to exist between literacy and higher order mental skills, such as analytic, logical, or abstract thinking. (P. 719)

Arguments that claim this kind of intellectual superiority do not purely reflect cultural and educational concerns; they, indeed, are deeply connected to historical, social, and political power relations between different peoples and communities, relations that will be remembered and felt deeply by minority students in the classroom. In order to genuinely move beyond the *civilized/primitive* dichotomy, policy makers and educators need to regard literacy in broader terms. We need to develop a vision, “which sees literacy as necessarily plural: Different societies and social subgroups have different types of literacy, and literacy has different social and mental effects in different social and cultural contexts” (Gee, 1986, p. 719). We should remember Students’ linguistic identities, also, should not be reduced to monolingual worlds; students should be seen as plurilingual pluricultural individuals with rich and complex intellectual experiences. Multilingual education can nurture students’ literacies and intellectual practices whether they are the speakers of minority languages or the dominant language.

Argument 4: Students should adopt the language of success as a pragmatic move.

The next category of arguments, in a more benign tone than the previous claims, states that minority students need to learn the dominant language to succeed economically and hence socially. School, they believe, would be doing minority students a favour to stress the importance of the dominant language instead of students’ mother tongues, which can be learned at home or which, in the case of immigrants, might be lost in the process of assimilation into mainstream culture and into more powerful layers of society. It is a pragmatic approach, they say, to accept the superiority of the dominant language. Interestingly, a lot of minority parents, also, echo the same idea and many policy makers have sold the idea of monolingual educational policies to the public using similar arguments.

This argument is flawed in two regards. First, in contrast with what this view suggests, scholars of mother tongue-based multilingual education never deny the importance of mastering the dominant language. In fact, similar to the right to receive education in mother tongues, learning the dominant language is also a linguistic human right for all minority students. The argument again represents either/or thinking, rather than both/and/and. Second, when the dominant language in monolingual schools is deemed as the “language of success,” the function of language is reduced to a skill that can be mastered by more exposure to the dominant language and the connection between language and identity is ignored. Learning a language, like learning in general, is a complicated process with manifold emotional and social layers which often defy naively simplified notions of pragmatism.

This whole question of having one official language and one dominant language of the country as a pragmatic strategy ... It has never actually resulted in student success—whether it is Farsi in Iran or English in India. This approach has indirectly led to the discrimination of minority languages and therefore even if some people may have thought adopting the dominant language as pragmatic, it has resulted in some kind of cast system. (Mohanty)

People who advocate intense concentration on the language of “success” hardly define what success is and how the prospect of that particular interpretation of success can be undermined by mother tongue-based multilingual education. Such arguments seem to have been intended to target the sense of insecurity of minorities rather than add a new layer to the mother tongue debate beyond the either/or logic, which was discussed earlier. Ironically, a slightly more objective observation reminds us that “knowledge of other languages has always been the hallmark of educated people” (Cummins, 2015). Power generated by knowledge, hence, will be

gained by exposing students to a variety of literacies and languages and also providing them with different channels of expression including students' mother tongues.

Argument 5: Mother tongue-based multilingual education is ideal but not practical.

The fifth group of arguments employed by the critics of mother tongue-based multilingual education usually professes that it might be educationally and ethically ideal to teach through the medium of mother tongues; nevertheless, the critics stress, the idea is not feasible in two regards. First, they argue, logistical reforms of current monolingual schools are almost impossible due to the costs involved, for instance, for training and recruiting multilingual teachers and creating textbooks in students' mother tongues. Second, they say, in linguistically complex contexts with students from a variety of different ethnicities and linguistic backgrounds deciding which language to choose as the medium of instruction alongside the dominant language would be much of a challenge inasmuch as elevating the status of one minority language among many could be interpreted as favouring one minority culture over the rest. For example, in the mother tongue debate in Iran, the supporters of Farsi-only schools warn that elevating any language to the status of Farsi will only trigger protests among speakers of other languages. Declaring *Torki* and Kurdish as official or national languages would disappoint the speakers of tens of other minority languages. They also think there would be the same challenge with choosing one dialect among all dialects of the same minority language. They argue that it is difficult to identify a standard Kurdish in Iran's Kurdistan because there are many Kurdish dialects some as understandable to Kurdish students as Farsi.

“The concern is real in terms of preparation of teachers, materials, etc. and the change has to be extremely well prepared. Regardless of which language is the medium of education, there are many other factors that influence the outcome and there are no “one-size-fits-all”

solutions, and Iran has to find its own solutions” (Skutnabb-Kangas). However, most of these considerations are also applicable to any form of restructuring or maintenance of educational systems—which are inevitable like revising textbooks and training teachers. “The people who make such arguments about the costs of including minority languages in education do not properly calculate the enormous costs of ineffective mainstream-language education for language minority students. What if governments were asked to justify the huge investments in English teaching English internationally? Can it be justified by “cost-benefit analysis”? (Bahry). More importantly, despite the initial challenges, establishing mother tongue-based multilingual education could be a very profitable long term investment:

European economist François Grin (1990; 1994) is very persuasive in his argument and his claim that education in mother tongues does not really lead to higher costs. In fact, it leads to lowers the cost in the long run. And then there is another group of economists who call themselves “heritage economists,” who talk about what are the economic argument in this maintaining heritage – cultural, linguistic, and other - including the heritage sides and all that. And they think, you know considering all the costs they have one doubt there about cost. They think that maintenance of heritage and languages is ultimately more beneficial. For a country to maintain its diversity of heritages – linguistic, cultural and otherwise – it’s much more economically beneficial than not maintaining those heritages. (Mohanty)

Empirical evidence also suggests the concern about costs might actually be exaggerated. Despite the challenges involved, the student engagement generated by multilingual education can benefit society considerably:

Stephen Walter (in Walter & Benson 2012; see also e.g. 2008, 2010) shows clearly in a very big study from Guatemala, with almost 400,000 children, that Mayan mother tongue medium education is cheaper than Spanish-medium education in getting children up to graduation at grade 6 (fewer children are pushed out (“drop out”) in lower grades, meaning the cost per pupil who reaches grade 6 is lower in Mayan-medium schools.

Francois Grin, the Swiss economist of language, has shown in many of his articles and books that the cost of granting minorities language rights, also in education, are amazingly minor even initially, and both states and corporations get long-term profits.

(Skutnabb-Kangas)

Schools of education economics that regard mother-tongue based education as expensive are, by and large, very profit-oriented. They often regard education as an industry to be designed for higher financial turnover rather than a system to accommodate and foster cultural and intellectual practices, and, rather than seeing the right to education as the human right that it is. As shown by the quotations above, there are alternative economic models that find mother tongue-based education culturally fruitful and also economically beneficial in the long run and in more complicated ways than simplistic sales-and-profit and demand-and-supply models. Policy makers could look at the economics of multilingual education through philosophies that value native cultures as important sources of knowledge, creativity, and morality; that regard students as individuals whose identities and self-defined existences are more valuable for society than their immediate profitability; that are far-sighted enough to see the costly problems of alienated youth with crime, drug addiction, mental health, and so forth as rooted in lack of attention to student identity in earlier years of schooling, and in the same manner students’ native cultures and mother tongues.

Argument 6: Mother-tongue based multilingual education will cause separatism and political disintegration.

The mother tongue debate in Iran, mainly because of Iran's rather unique geopolitical position, can provide us with an interesting illustration of the complexities of arguments against mother tongue-based multilingual education in fear of political disintegration and neo-imperial intrigues. Unlike places such as India and Egypt, Iran has never been officially colonized; as a result, Iranian languages have remained alive and helped the Iranians form a very strong sense of identity. Nevertheless, the Iranians have their own share of post-colonial anxieties. They, for example, have experienced frequent destructive Western interventions in their political and social lives (such as the forced abdication of Reza Shah by the British in 1941 and the 1953 military coup supported by the United States to overthrow the democratically elected government of the time). Also, the colonial redesign of the Middle East and Greater Iran tore the lands of many ethnicities in the Iranian Plateau (for instance the Kurds) into Iranian and non-Iranian parts rendering these minorities nationless and vulnerable both politically and culturally. Moreover, the political animosity between Iran and the West after the Islamic Revolution in 1979 has helped the current Iranian government picture the West as an enemy of the nation. As a result of this uncomfortable history, a fear of imperialism and separatism has tightly tied the mother tongue debate in Iran to considerations about national security and political integrity. These anxieties are manifest in the Iranian mother tongue debate in the following four layers, all or some of which might be shared by other international contexts.

First, the pro-Farsi-only camp argues that some among the minorities are camouflaging their separatist desires with demands for mother-tongue based education. This stance, supported by state-run media and nationalistic sympathies of many intellectuals, has left mother tongue

activists, educators that value students' mother tongues, and even researchers in an uncomfortable position since they could be labelled as separatists. Second, Farsi-only advocates believe mother tongue-based education might lead to Iran's disintegration, propelled by surrounding countries that share the same cultures and languages with Iranian minorities such as Azerbaijan, independent Kurds of Iraq, Pakistani Baluchistan, and the Arab states surrounding the Persian Gulf. Third, they also argue, these separatist movements are supported by foreign countries as a result of their imperial plans. International powers, they say, try to undermine the Iranian central government by fuelling separatist movements. They claim this support by neo-colonialists is another factor among many other intrigues aiming to overthrow the regime and to disintegrate Iran as a country. An overemphasis on the mother tongue issue, they say, is more of a political technique than an educational concern. Fourth, the supporters of the dominance of Farsi warn that if the minorities divorce from the Persian language and culture—which have been in organic interaction with minority languages in the Iranian Plateau for millennia—English will devour their educational centres, and thus they will be culturally invaded and colonized by the English speaking world.

Whether or not these anxieties over Iran's security and political integrity are legitimate, historical evidence and available research tell us that mother tongue-based multilingual education not only will not cause separatism, but will actually prevent it. Also, if a minority population seeks independence and happens to achieve it, mother tongue-based multilingual education will not be a serious cause of the separation but a disdain for linguistic rights might.

Actually what is separatist is any discrimination based on language. ... In Assam one of the northeast provinces in India, there was a large tribal language community called Bodo. The Bodoes initially wanted some education for their children in their language

because they thought their language, literature, and culture should be protected—a very simple and non-controversial demand. But the Assamist government rejected this request and it snowballed into a movement. There came a point in the seventies where the Bodo movement became actually a terrorist movement demanding the separation of the Bodo land from Assam. In the early eighties, there was some kind of accord signed between the state government and the Bodo people, which guaranteed some autonomy to the Bodoes. Once that happened and the Bodoes were able to plan education in their own area, unity was restored. (Mohanty)

Security is indeed an important socio-political factor with significant impact on educational policy making. Security is a basic social need, and it is naturally demanded by the majority of citizens. Preventing students from using their mother tongues in the classroom—either as the medium of instruction or an important intellectual recourse—can hardly boost security. Such claims usually amount to “paranoia, which, for instance, still dominates the United States when it comes to Spanish and Latinos. When this rhetoric starts, you generally get a paranoia that is directed at the minority group perceived as being a threat” (Cummins). The resultant atmosphere of such a mentality can easily cripple the whole educational system. “So although we must recognize that governments have these fears, governments need education too. What most minority people want is linguistic and cultural autonomy and bilingualism. But by not teaching children effectively or by creating assimilation through monolingual submersion education, governments can create tensions.” (Bahry)

As the complexities of the connection between postcolonial anxieties and instruction through mother tongues in the Iranian context illustrate, the consequences of colonial aggression are far-reaching and can paralyze civil society for decades if not centuries. The Iranians’ bitter

memories of foreign interventions are taking their toll on cultural and educational life decades later. Unlike colonial human traumas that attract immediate attention such as death and displacement, the damage to education in imperial processes usually remains less noticed. However, the pain experienced in expansionist aggressions inflicts wounds that prove difficult to heal. It is difficult to believe that the last Residential School in Canada closed in 1996, only 19 years ago. Despite the silence about this educational, cultural, and linguistic colonial act, today the outrage over Residential Schools has become a point of gravity in the Canadian decolonization process.

Learning from historical examples, hence, educators can ask: how can we teach languages and literacies under colonial and post-colonial circumstances or during political conflicts? Should we not be aware of power relations latent in education systems that reflect invisible connections between the classroom and politics? How can we challenge dominant power structures in educational spaces to create more space for students' backgrounds regardless of dominant socio-political discourses? Is there the possibility of creating pedagogical approaches that deem the presence of students' families and communities as an essential component of teaching and learning? Can embracing students' cultures create grassroots cultures of resistance that defy definition of education dictated by colonial power relations?

Final Remarks

Mother tongue-based multilingual education is not an academic invention but a pedagogical need inevitably experienced by teachers and students in diverse schools. This need will not disappear as a result of political and ideological stances against multilingual pedagogies. Unfavourable bills and laws can be passed but they cannot change students' plurilingual beings and translanguaging practices. Samad Behrangi (1939-1967) was a *Torki* speaking teacher who

taught Farsi in rural schools of Iranian Azerbaijan. In his book *Investigations into the Educational Challenges of Iran* (Behrangi, 1957)—published far from endeavours in the West that would later create the academic field of multilingual education—Behrangi reported his observations as a village teacher trying to teach Farsi, the official language, in a non-Persian province. He saw the connection between language and student identity and warned against the negative impact of the omission of students’ mother tongues on the process of learning:

Inability to speak Farsi is causing psychological pain among the [*Torki* speaking] students particularly when they interact with Persian students. They feel defeated and this feeling of failure will haunt them forever. (P. 58)

In his book, Behrangi proposed creating and using *Torki*/Farsi bilingual textbooks with a list of considerations that remind us of recent recommendations of the field of multilingual education. Here are the measures he suggested. (1) Bilingual textbooks should be written in collaboration with *Torki* speaking educators. (2) Initial lessons should include and highlight the vocabulary and grammatical structures shared by *Torki* and Farsi. (3) Students’ cultural practices and ethnic traditions should be incorporated in the lessons. (4) Instruction should be provided by bilingual teachers in *Torki* as well as Farsi. (5) Teachers should employ story-telling as an alternative pedagogy, especially using Azari mythology in dual language oral and written texts. (6) Farsi should not only be taught in Farsi classes but across the curriculum and with all subjects.

The precision of judgment reflected in Behrangi’s book is proof that plurilingualism and translanguaging are part and parcel of everyday school life experienced by many teachers in different parts of the world. Students, in a similar fashion, can feel the necessity of creating space for all languages in educational policies. Imaan is a 15-year-old Azari Turk from a low-income

family. In a rare phenomenological study of non-Farsi speaking students' experiences with the Iranian monolingual school system Imaan said:

In other parts of Iran and for communication with other Iranians I need the Persian language, but you know, Iran is like a chair and other Iranian languages are its legs.

When one is damaged or broken, we all will fall down.³⁶ (Hoominfar, 2014, P. 67)

The rationality and open-mindedness of this 15-year-old boy shows that it is not difficult to see that mother tongue-based multilingual education is a commonsensical approach to teaching diverse classes at the service of creating healthier societies.

³⁶ Hoominfar's translation from Farsi to English has been re-edited for this publication.

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