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Introduction, by Amir Kalan

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;

Schechter & 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 Revelation 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

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”).

other major UN treaty which makes reference to the right to education. The CRC is the most 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. 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,

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).

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*

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.

Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (the 'Genocide Convention') and other 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 humanity) 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

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>

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.

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 Macaco 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.

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

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, 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 or 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

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.

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 ('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

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

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?

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). 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?

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

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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