

125. Skutnabb-Kangas, Tove & Phillipson, Robert (1994). Linguicide. In **The Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics**, Pergamon Press & Aberdeen University Press, 2211-2212.

LINGUICIDE

A taxonomy of policies which a state can adopt towards minority languages (Cobarrubias 1983: 71) distinguishes between the following:

- (a) attempting to kill a language;
- (b) letting a language die;
- (c) unsupported coexistence;
- (d) partial support of specific language functions;
- (e) adoption as an official language.

The first policy is overtly linguicidal; the second and third may be covertly linguicidal. Linguicidal policies have at times been overt, for instance US policy in Pacific islands such as Guam in the early twentieth century (Kloss 1977). Calvet (1974) describes French colonial overtly linguicidal policy as '*glottophagie*' ('linguistic cannibalism', dominant languages replacing and extinguishing dominated languages) and in '*la guerre des langues*' (1987), 'linguistic warfare' is not a metaphor but the reality of the politics of language and relations between languages (see Mateene 1985, Phillipson 1992 for further analyses).

Linguicide is the extermination of languages, an analogous concept to (physical) genocide, whereas language death is the withering away of languages, by analogy with natural death (see *Language Death*). Linguicide, by contrast, implies that there is an agent involved in causing the death of languages. The agent can be active ("attempting to kill a language") or passive ("letting a language die", or "unsupported coexistence", also often leading to the death of minority languages). In liberal ideology, only an active agent with the intention to kill languages would cause linguicide, whereas the other two would fall within the domain of language death. Linguicide is the extreme end result of linguisticism (linguistically argued racism) at group level. Seen from the perspective of a conflict paradigm, the causes of linguicide and linguisticism (see *Linguistic imperialism; Discrimination and Minority Languages*) have to be analyzed from both structural and ideological angles, covering the struggle for structural power and material resources, and the legitimation, effectuation and reproduction of the unequal division of power and resources between groups based on language. The agents of linguicide/linguicism can also be structural (a state, e.g. Turkey vis-a-vis Kurds; an institution, e.g. schools; laws and regulations, e.g. those covering linguistic rights or the position of different languages on time-tables in schools; budgets, e.g. for teacher training or materials in certain languages) or ideological (norms and values ascribed to

different languages and their speakers). There is thus nothing "natural" in language death. Languages cannot be treated in an anthropomorphic way, as organisms with a natural life-span. Language death has causes, which can be identified and analysed.

When the United Nations did preparatory work for what was to become the International Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (E 793, 1948), linguistic and cultural genocide were discussed alongside physical genocide, and were seen as serious crimes against humanity. When the Convention was accepted, Article 3, which covered linguistic and cultural genocide, was voted down and is thus not included in the final Convention of 1948 (see Capotorti 1979, 37). What remains, however, is a definition of linguistic genocide, which was defined (in Art. 3, 1) as

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

Some countries commit linguistic genocide openly and brutally, and Turkey is the most blatant example in the contemporary world (see Skutnabb-Kangas & Bucak 1994): imprisonment, torture and killing of thousands of people, in addition to threats, hefty fines and confiscation of Kurdish books, journals and property. But linguistic genocide is today mostly committed in more covert and sophisticated ways, e.g. in educational systems. Here the use of a minority language is prohibited more indirectly, by ideological and structural means. The use of a minority language is in fact prohibited "in daily intercourse or in schools" every time there are minority children in day care centres and schools, but no bilingual teachers who are authorized to use the languages of the minority children as the media of teaching and child care most of the time. This is the situation for most immigrant and refugee minority children in all Western European countries and in the US, Canada and Australia. Immigrant minority education in these countries is thus guilty of linguistic genocide, as defined by the UN. So is the education offered to most indigenous first nations. Dominant or majority languages expand at the expense of dominated (or minorized) languages when minority language speakers are forced to learn dominant languages in a subtractive way (instead of their own languages), where it would be perfectly possible to learn them in an additive way, adding competence in dominant languages to maintenance and further development of their own languages. Linguists estimate that up to 90 percent of today's oral languages (and most sign languages) may not exist in the year 2100 (Krauss 1992). Binding linguistic human rights are urgently needed to prevent linguicide. The UN, UNESCO, ILO, OSCE, OAU, Council of Europe, etc. have been concerned about the 'endangered languages' of indigenous peoples and linguistic minorities, but existing international, regional

and national protection and support are clearly completely inadequate (see Kontra et al., in press, Skutnabb-Kangas 1998, Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson 1994, 1997, Thornberry 1991, 1997, de Varennes 1996). Widespread linguistic, and, occasionally, language death are fatal for linguistic diversity and, through that, also to biodiversity on earth (Maffi et al., in press).

Bibliography

Calvet L-J 1974 *Linguistique et colonialisme: petit traité de glottologie*, Paris, Payot.

Calvet L-J 1987 *La guerre des langues et les politiques linguistiques*, Paris, Payot.

Capotorti F. 1979 *Study of the Rights of Persons Belonging to Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities*, New York, United Nations.

Cobarrubias J 1983 Ethical issues in status planning, in *Progress in language planning: international perspectives*, Cobarrubias, J. & Fishman, J., eds. Berlin, Mouton, 41-85.

Kloss H 1977 *The American bilingual tradition*, Rowley, Newbury House.

Kontra M, Phillipson R, Skutnabb-Kangas T & Varady T (eds.) in press *Approaches to Linguistic Human Rights*. Budapest, Central European University Press.

Krauss, M. 1992 The world's languages in crisis. *Language* 68, 4-10.

Maffi, L, Skutnabb-Kangas, T & Andrianarivo J in press. Language diversity. In Posey, D and Dutfield, G (eds.) *Cultural and Spiritual Values of Biodiversity*. New York, United Nations Environmental Programme & Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Mateene, K 1985 Colonial languages as compulsory means of domination, and indigenous languages, as necessary factors of national liberation and development. In Mateene, K, Kalema, J & Chomba, B (eds.) *Linguistic liberation and unity of Africa*, Kampala, OAU Inter-African Bureau of Languages.

Phillipson, R 1992 *Linguistic imperialism*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Skutnabb-Kangas, T & Bucak, S 1994 Killing a mother tongue - how the Kurds are deprived of linguistic human rights. In Skutnabb-Kangas, T & Phillipson, R (eds.), in collaboration

with M Rannut *Linguistic Human Rights. Inequality or justice in language policy*. Contributions to the Sociology of Language 67. Berlin & New York, Mouton de Gruyter, 347-370.

Skutnabb-Kangas, T & Phillipson, R 1994 Linguistic human rights, past and present. In Skutnabb-Kangas, T & Phillipson, R (eds.), in collaboration with M Rannut *Linguistic Human Rights. Overcoming linguistic discrimination*. Contributions to the Sociology