

*204. LINGUICIDE/LINGUISTIC GENOCIDE

Tove.Skutnabb-Kangas & Robert.Phillipson

In Mesthrie, Raj (ed.). **Concise Encyclopedia of Sociolinguistics**. Oxford: Elsevier Science , 567-570.

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 or linguistic genocide 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 linguicism (linguistically argued racism) at group level. Seen from the perspective of a conflict paradigm, the causes of linguicide and linguicism (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 (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.

But the present Convention has two definitions of genocide which describe most indigenous and minority education in the world:

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).

First language attrition and loss have been described fairly extensively in research literature and fiction. Sandra Kouritzin (1999) describes many cases in Canada where immigrant minority children have lost a language within one generation so that they as adults, for instance, are no longer able to speak to their parents. Lily Wong Fillmore has described the consequences for families in the U.S.A. (1992). Peter Mühlhäusler discusses results of linguistic imperialism in the Pacific (1996). Pirjo Janulf (1998) shows in her longitudinal study that of those Finnish immigrant minority members in Sweden who had had Swedish-medium education, not one spoke any Finnish to their own children. Even if they themselves might not have forgotten their Finnish completely, their children were certainly forcibly transferred to the majority group, at least linguistically. This happens to millions of speakers of threatened languages all over the world. For hearing minority students education through the medium of a dominant majority language often leads to the students using the dominant language with their own children later on. Over a generation or two the children are linguistically and often also culturally assimilated, forcibly transferred to a dominant group. Since there are no alternatives in formal education (i.e. schools or classes which teach mainly through the medium of the threatened indigenous or minority languages), the transfer happens by force. For it to be voluntary, alternatives should exist, and parents would need to have enough reliable information about the long-term consequences of the various choices. None of these conditions are usually fulfilled for indigenous or minority parents and children, i.e. the situations where children lose their first language, can often be characterised as genocide.

Since most Deaf children are born to hearing parents, parents and children do not have the same mother tongue by origin, and many of the Deaf children will in their turn have hearing children. Deaf children of hearing parents are in many countries still taught through oral methods, i.e. taught lip-reading and speaking in a dominant majority language, to the exclusion of a sign language. They are not learning their 'own' language, a sign language, which is for all Deaf children the only type of language through which they can express themselves fully, i.e. it is their mother tongue by competence. Thus both hearing indigenous and minority children and Deaf children, taught predominantly through the medium of a dominant oral majority language, are undergoing linguistic genocide: both groups of children are forcibly transferred from their 'own' language group to dominant majority language 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 caretakers and teachers who are authorized to use the languages of the minority children as the main languages of teaching and learning in child care and at least primary education. 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, and to numerically large but politically dominated groups in most African and many Asian countries (see Skutnabb-Kangas 2000 for details in the claims; see Brock-Utne 1999 for Africa). 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/at the cost 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 linguistic genocide. 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. Several book-length presentations of language rights have appeared in tandem with the increasing salience of language issues and ethnicity in many post-communist and post-colonial trouble spots (e.g. Kibbee 1998, Guillorel & Koubi 1999, Hamel 1997, Benson et al. 1998, Kontra et al. 1999, Phillipson 2000, see also Frowein et al. 1994/95, Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas 1994, 1995, 1996, Skutnabb-Kangas 1996a,b, 1999, 2000, Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson 1994, 1997, 1998, Thornberry 1991, 1997, de Varennes 1996).

Subtractive learning of dominant languages turns these into killer languages, whereas additive learning would support the maintenance of linguistic diversity. Widespread linguistic, and, occasionally, language death are fatal for linguistic diversity and, through that, also to biodiversity on earth (Harmon, forthcoming, Maffi et al. 1999, Maffi (ed.) 2001). Through linguistic, we are also in the long run seriously undermining the prerequisites for life on the planet.

Bibliography

- Benson P, Grundy P & Skutnabb-Kangas T (eds.) 1998 *Language rights*, Special issue, *Language Sciences*, 20:1
- Brock-Utne, B 1999 *Whose Education for All? Recolonizing the African Mind?* New York: Garland
- Calvet L-J 1974 *Linguistique et colonialisme: petit traité de glottophagie*, 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.
- Frowein, J A, Hofmann, R & Oeter, S (hrsg.) 1994/1995 *Das Minderheitenrecht europäischer Staaten*. Teil 1. Teil 2. Beiträge zum ausländischen öffentlichen Recht und Völkerrecht. Band 108/109, Berlin: Springer-Verlag
- Guillorell, H & Koubi, G (red) 1999 *Langues et droits. Langues du droit, droit des langues*, Bruxelles: Bruylant
- Hamel, R E (ed) 1997 *Linguistic human rights from a sociolinguistic perspective. International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 127
- Harmon, D (forthcoming) *In Light of Our Differences: How Diversity in Nature and Culture Makes Us Human*
- Janulf, P 1998 *Kommer finskan i Sverige att fortleva? En studie av språkkunskaper och språkanvändning hos andragenerationens sverifinnar i Botkyrka och hos finlandssvenskar i Åbo*, (Will Finnish survive in Sweden? A study of language skills and language use among second generation Sweden Finns in Botkyrka, Sweden, and Finland Swedes in Turku, Finland). Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis, Studia Fennica Stockholmiensia 7, Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International
- Kibbee, D A (ed.) 1998 *Language legislation and linguistic rights*, Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins
- Kloss H 1977 *The American bilingual tradition*, Rowley, Newbury House
- Kontra, M, Phillipson, R, Skutnabb-Kangas, T & Várady, T (eds) 1999 *Language: a Right and a Resource. Approaching Linguistic Human Rights*, Budapest: Central European University Press
- Kouritzin, S 1999 *Face[t]s of first language loss*, Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates
- Krauss, M 1992 The world's languages in crisis, *Language* 68, 4-10
- Maffi, L, Skutnabb-Kangas, T & Andrianarivo, J (1999). Language diversity. In Posey, D (ed.) *Cultural and Spiritual Values of Biodiversity. A Complementary Contribution to the Global Biodiversity Assessment*, London: Intermediate Technology Publications, for and on behalf of the United Nations Environmental Programme, 19-57
- Maffi, L (ed.) 2001 *On Biocultural Diversity. Linking Language, Knowledge and the Environment* Washington, D.C.: The Smithsonian Institute
- 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
- Mühlhäusler, P 1996 *Linguistic ecology. Language change and linguistic imperialism in the Pacific region*, London: Routledge
- Phillipson, R 1992 *Linguistic imperialism*. Oxford, Oxford University Press
- Phillipson, R & Skutnabb-Kangas, T 1994 English - Panacea or Pandemic? In Ammon, U, Mattheier, K J & Nelde, P (eds) *Sociolinguistica 8. English only? in Europa/ in Europe/ en Europe*, 73-87
- Phillipson, R & Skutnabb-Kangas, T 1995 Linguistic rights and wrongs, *Applied Linguistics* 16:4, 483-504
- Phillipson, R & Skutnabb-Kangas, T 1996 English Only Worldwide, or Language Ecology. *TESOL Quarterly*. Ricento, T & Hornberger, N (eds). Special-Topic Issue: *Language*
- Phillipson, R (ed.) 2000 *Rights to language. Equity, power and education*, Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates
- Skutnabb-Kangas, T 1996a The colonial legacy in educational language planning in Scandinavia - from migrant labour to a national ethnic minority? In *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, Vol. 118. Special Issue, *Language Planning and Political Theory*, Dua, Hans (ed.), 81-106
- Skutnabb-Kangas, T 1996b Educational language choice - multilingual diversity or monolingual reductionism? In

- Hellinger, M & Ammon, U (eds) *Contrastive Sociolinguistics*. Berlin & New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 175-204
- Skutnabb-Kangas, T 1999 Linguistic diversity, human rights and the 'free' market. In Kontra, M, Phillipson, R, Skutnabb-Kangas, T & Várady, T (eds) 1999 *Language: a Right and a Resource. Approaching Linguistic Human Rights*, Budapest: Central European University Press, 187-222
- Skutnabb-Kangas, T 2000 *Linguistic genocide in education – or worldwide diversity and human rights?* Mahwah, New Jersey & London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates
- 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 of Language 67. Berlin & New York, Mouton de Gruyter, 71-110
- Skutnabb-Kangas, T & Phillipson, R 1997 Linguistic Human Rights and Development. In Hamelink, C (ed.) *Ethics and Development. On making Moral Choices in Development Co-operation*. Kampen, The Netherlands: Kok, 56-69
- Thornberry, P 1991 *International Law and the Rights of Minorities*. Oxford, Clarendon Press
- Thornberry, P 1997 Minority Rights. In Academy of European Law ed.. *Collected Courses of the Academy of European Law*. Volume VI, Book 2, 307-390. The Netherlands, Kluwer Law International
- de Varennes, F 1996 *Language, Minorities and Human Rights*. The Hague, Boston, London, Martinus Nijhoff
- Wong Fillmore, L 1991 When Learning a Second Language Means Losing the First. In *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 6, 323-346