



In memoriam: Tove Skutnabb-Kangas 1940–2023

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Tove started life in war-torn Finland, in a frugal but intellectually stimulating bilingual environment, Swedish and Finnish. She attended all-female schools that ensured that its graduates were self-confident. She studied Nordic Philology, Education, and Psychology at the University of Helsinki, and fell in love with a medical student. When her husband went to Boston for graduate study, Tove was incredibly lucky because she was taken on as a research assistant by Einar Haugen at Harvard University, 1967–68. Haugen was a prolific scholar who was creatively establishing the study of bilingualism, language ecology, and language policy. At that time there was virtually no activity in these fields in Europe, so Tove went about building it up.

From the 1960s onwards, large numbers of working-class Finns went to work in Swedish factories, and their language needs in education were ignored. Tove teamed up with a social psychologist, Pertti Toukomaa, to undertake empirical studies that were published as *Teaching migrant children's mother tongue and learning the language of the host country in the context of the socio-cultural situation of the migrant family* (1976) and *The intensive teaching of the mother tongue to migrant children at pre-school age* (1977). Both were published with support from UNESCO. Tove attended conferences at UNESCO in Paris where she met scholars on bilingual education from Canada, India, Australia, and elsewhere. These personal contacts were of decisive influence for the following 50 years.

The governments of the Nordic Countries (Scandinavia and Finland) fund a series of two-week courses aimed at strengthening links in promising research fields. In 1977 a course on 'Interlanguage' was taught in Denmark by Pit Corder (UK), Merrill Swain (Canada) and Jack Richards (New Zealand), which was how Tove and I met. I had emigrated to Denmark in 1973, after working for the British Council for nine years, in Algeria, Yugoslavia, and London.

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In 1977 Tove decided to move to Denmark, mainly because she thought that it was morally necessary, when researching immigrant integration, to have experienced it. She was already a close friend of several scholars in Denmark.

Tove wrote the first book in Sweden on bilingualism in 1981, which was translated into English in 1984 as *Bilingualism or not – the education of minorities*. By then she was working on a project in Denmark with a sociologist, Birgitte Rahbek, which led to the book *Good, better, Danish? On immigrant children's integration in Denmark* (my translation). This documented in which cities it was possible to start effective bilingual education. It argued that if the cultures and languages of immigrants were ignored, a predictable consequence would be that a disaffected generation would feel excluded and would react violently. Politicians ignored such warnings, and persisted with insensitive assimilation policies, with results that can be seen now in shocking street violence in Sweden, and draconian residential policies in Denmark. The risk of societal instability occurring throughout Europe was also stressed in several chapters of the book that I edited to celebrate Tove's 60th birthday, *Rights to Language. Equity, Power and Education* (2000, Lawrence Erlbaum, now Routledge). 50 colleagues who had influenced Tove and who were influenced by her work, agreed to write concisely on a wide range of language policy topics. Enthusiastic endorsements on the back cover of the book confirm that it is still relevant today.

I started writing articles with Tove when we began collaborating with NGOs in Norway and Denmark that were providing assistance for Namibian refugees in exile from apartheid. We twice attended seminars at the United Nations Institute for Namibia in Lusaka, Zambia that elaborated plans for education and language policy in an independent Namibia. Contributing to this work required thorough analysis of experience in East and West Africa. With Hugh Africa we wrote 'Namibian educational language planning: English for liberation or neocolonialism?' that was published in English and in translation into French by the Organisation for African Unity's InterAfrican Bureau of Languages, in *Linguistic liberation and unity of Africa*. Tove was conscious of the risks of Europeans writing about African issues (an issue that also arose after the publication of my *Linguistic imperialism*), but the OAU Bureau's director, Kahombo Mateene, assured Tove that she was the only Western scholar whose work on multilingual education was considered relevant for Africans to learn from.

Tove and I wrote a succession of articles together, which was tough initially, as we came from such different academic and cultural backgrounds, but this soon became a productive routine that saw a great deal published. For details see our personal websites (below). Tove had research funding from Sweden on bilingual education, and had attachments to the universities of Copenhagen and Roskilde University Centre, where I was. It was a pedagogically experimental university, with multi-disciplinary student projects working in groups on problem-based topics. Tove's supervision was extremely popular.

Tove's commitment to seeing discrimination against minorities as human rights violations led to her launching both the term *linguicism* (analogous to racism and sexism) and *linguistic human rights* (LHRs). These are clear examples of her passionate concern with countering linguistic injustice of all kinds, and her commitment to scholarship to promote more just linguistic policies. A lot of conference activity,

longish stays in Australia and India, guest lectures in over 50 countries, and giving PhD courses in India and China mean that we have both learned enormously from impressive colleagues worldwide, as can be seen in our writings.

The complexity of these issues is covered in Tove's magnum opus, *Linguistic genocide in education – or worldwide diversity and human rights?* (2000).

Tove and I were asked by Routledge to produce four volumes of *Language Rights*, mostly of existing texts, with introductions by us for each thematic volume (2017). Wiley-Blackwell asked us to edit a *Handbook of Linguistic Human Rights*. This appeared in 2022 after three intensive years, during all of which Tove was suffering from a serious illness, *arthritis temporalis*. The Handbook, with its 62 contributors and 52 chapters, can be seen as a culmination of efforts that Tove initiated in Swedish a half-century earlier.

Tove's tragic death by drowning on 29th May 2023 triggered an extraordinary outpouring of tributes sent to me from all parts of the world. I have a file of over 6000 words, from which I have extracted a small sample to supplement the more prosaic description of her achievements.

- a great loss to our profession, to academe, and to the world of ideas and advocacy
- the Einstein of the Language World
- so inspired and inspiring
- immensely admirable was her instinctive embrace of and solidarity with the oppressed
- a lighthouse for many of us
- my mentor, an irreparable loss to global Mother Tongue Medium Education
- has done so much in her life to empower the powerless languages and linguistic communities that equals a dozen life-time work
- she would want us, even through our grief, to continue, as best we can, the work she initiated for us all -- the work she showed us how to articulate and to translate into a diverse range of practices
- a “giant” in so many ways
- to me personally – and to many other women in our community – she was also a role model
- her humanity and the integral political and moral beingness she uncompromisingly expressed in her intellectual work and struggles for equality, justice and freedom
- a toweringly inspirational scholar-advocate and warm human being, a beacon to us around the world and across many generations
- she had just published her book in Finnish ‘Minority, language and racism’, which became my most important textbook for a long time ... we went through the villages of the Sámi region ... the results of this decades-long work can now be seen in the Sámi community ... an amazing ability to talk to people from very different backgrounds and cultures
- she will always shine as a tower of fierce strength, determination and integrity in the battle for equal access to education through the languages of children's homes and communities – most especially those of marginalised and Indigenous communities

- warm and very close cooperation with members of sign language communities worldwide lasted through decades
- the World is losing a Titan, although her work will continue to illuminate and inspire
- une grande linguiste, défenseure des droits et de la justice linguistiques dans le monde, ainsi qu'un ami de la cause kurde qui s'en va. Je me souviendrai toujours de sa gentillesse, de son esprit d'ouverture et de sa grande culture humaniste. Elle a laissé derrière elle une oeuvre colossale qui continuera à nous servir longtemps de référence
- her work changed the way I see the world
- a force of nature

On this note I wish to add that for nearly 30 years Tove and I had a smallholding, with sheep, and grew much of what we ate. The combination of living close to the natural world with academic and political commitments was ideal. We had children by earlier marriages. We are grateful for the affectionate support of the many colleagues and friends that we collaborated with. Tove and I were together for 44 happy and productive years. Tove was never a member of any church, but the Swedish Lutheran church is inclusive, and authorized a funeral in the magnificent cathedral in Lund with appropriate secular input. One family member read five short professional tributes, others read poems in Finnish and English, others played and sang moving music. This was a farewell ceremony in Tove's spirit. RIP.

www.tove-skutnabb-kangas.org.

www.cbs.dk/en/staff/rpmssc.

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Robert Phillipson studied at Cambridge and Leeds Universities, and has a doctorate from the University of Amsterdam. He worked for the British Council in Algeria, Yugoslavia, and London before emigrating to Denmark. After employment at the University of Copenhagen and at Roskilde University, he became a research professor at Copenhagen Business School, now emeritus. With Claus Færch and Kirsten Haastrup he wrote *Learner Language and Language Learning*, published in Denmark and the UK. His best-known book is *Linguistic Imperialism* (Oxford UP, 1992). The anthology *Linguistic human rights: overcoming linguistic discrimination* (1994, Mouton de Gruyter, Contributions to the Sociology of Language) edited with Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, pioneered the study of this topic.