The stakes: Linguistic diversity, linguistic human rights and mother-tongue-based multilingual education - or linguistic genocide, crimes against humanity and an even faster destruction of biodiversity and our planet.

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Much work by sociolinguists and educationists on linguistic diversity, endangered languages, linguistic human rights, and mother-tongue-based multilingual education (MLE), is descriptive. It often stops at asking ‘what?’ questions and some ‘how?’ questions. This gives too little prominence to a focus on analysing (= ‘why?’ questions) and, especially, on trying to change the economic, techno-military, social and ideological circumstances that lead to language endangerment and disappearance of linguistic diversity in the first place (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000 – see list of publications on my home page). Documenting endangered languages is often necessary and always positive, but it should be secondary to a holistic/ecological analysis, and change.
Definitions of 3 concepts
(building on Christina Bratt Paulston et al.)

When a language is...

- **Dead**
- **Dying**
- **Neglected**

...what is needed is...

- **Revitalisation**
- **Reversal**
- **Revival**
What is discussed?

A Google search 2 January 2007 gave

249,000 hits on “LANGUAGE REVITALISATION” 
(A LANGUAGE IS “NEGLECTED”)

1,110,000 hits on “LANGUAGE REVERSAL” 
(A LANGUAGE IS “DYING”)

1,320,000 hits on “LANGUAGE REVIVAL (A 
LANGUAGE IS “DEAD”)”
Conclusions on definitions and use

TOTAL 2,679,000 hits

- Most of the entries (49.3%) are about “dead” (=extinct) languages;

- The next largest number (41.4%) is on “dying” (“moribund” = very seriously endangered) languages.

- The smallest number (9.3%) is about “neglected” languages, i.e. those that are still used but are endangered. **These could be maintained if supported, through funds, MLE, research, etc!**
Conclusions on definitions and use 2

**QUESTION 1:** Is most of the work (research and practical) done on “dead” and/or “dying” languages? Is this also true for international organisations such as UNESCO, or Unicef, etc.?

**QUESTION 2:** Do **FUNDS** follow the same principles? More funds for work with “dead” and/or “dying” languages? Less for those still in daily use, i.e. languages that would benefit most from funds?
QUESTION 3: Are researchers more interested in describing and “archiving” languages just before they “die” or when they are already “dead”, rather than working, also politically, for conditions that enable languages to be maintained and developed by the speakers/signers themselves (sometimes with outsider support too)?

QUESTION 4: Do the two exclude each other? Even if some Archivists claim that they are doing both, the results often show that they are NOT.
ABSTRACT

Many positive-sounding concepts in this area, such as diversity, partnership, human rights, etc., suffer and are watered down or narrowed down, through an avoidance of analyses of the full ecological contexts (including economic, biological, techno-military, social, ideological and spiritual contexts) in which people use or stop using certain languages.

‘Linguistic diversity’ is narrowed down to a few hundred languages that ‘can ”realistically” have a future’ (and Sign languages are mostly completely excluded). ‘Partnership’ is between unequals and contributes to enlargement of the gaps between super-haves and never-to-haves.

Human rights violations are either ignored (LHRs in education), or criticized and regretted by the same people/forces that are perpetrators of economic genocide, caused by the implementation of Milton Friedman’s Chicago School disastrous neoliberalism principles (privatization, deregulation, ‘free’ market) - see, e.g. Naomi Klein (2007). The Shock Doctrine, Penguin).
Parents “want” English-medium education and assimilation for their children, hoping this leads to better jobs. But mother tongue learning & identification are often prevented by external forces, presenting English & MT as either/or.

The United Nation’s 2004 Human Development Report links cultural liberty to language rights and human development ([http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2004/](http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2004/)) and argues that there is “no more powerful means of ‘encouraging’ individuals to assimilate to a dominant culture than having the economic, social and political returns stacked against their mother tongue. Such assimilation is not freely chosen if the choice is between one’s mother tongue and one’s future”.
Glorification, stigmatisation, rationalisation

Ideological forces, ‘manufactured consent’, may prevent parents from seeing why MLE would do the job better. Glorification of dominant languages, stigmatisation of ITM languages and the rationalisation of the relationship between them may make ITM groups ‘wish’ to shift languages, and assimilate, through false promises of the benefits accrued. Without solid research-based knowledge of long-term consequences, and without alternatives (e.g. mother tongue-based MLE), this ‘wish’ to shift/assimilate is not based on a real choice.
“Every child in the world has the right to education through the medium of their mother tongue”

Ex Minister of Education in Kurdistan
Abdul-Aziz Taib, interview 15 March 2006
Do we KNOW how dominated group children should be educated? YES: MT-based MLE

Research results about both the negative consequences of subtractive education through the medium of a dominant/foreign language and the positive results of mainly mother tongue medium education for Indigenous/tribal/local and minority children are solid and consistent. The existing (fewer and fewer) counterarguments are political/ideological, not scientific. (Minority = group with little power).
Still, most Indigenous/tribal/local students (with some exceptions, e.g. Saami, Māori), many national minority and most immigrant minority students and many students in post-colonial contexts in the world are being taught through the medium of dominant languages in submersion programmes, at least after the first few grades, often from the start. Provided they attend school at all…
... well-intentioned hot air... also in Africa...

‘[W]e are not making any progress at all’ (Alexander 2006: 9);

‘most conference resolutions were no more than a recycling exercise’ (Bamgbose 2001, quoted in Alexander 2006: 10);

‘these propositions had been enunciated in one conference after another since the early 1980s’ (Alexander 2006: 11);

‘since the adoption of the OAU [Organisation for African Unity] Charter in 1963, every major conference of African cultural experts and political leaders had solemnly intoned the commitment of the political leadership of the continent to the development and powerful use of the African languages without any serious attempt at implementing the relevant resolutions’ (Alexander 2006: 11).

This has led to ‘the palpable failure of virtually all post-colonial educational systems on the continent’ (Alexander 2006: 16).

Similar pronouncements abound on other continents. Minority education is organised against solid scientific evidence of how it should be organised. Resolutions are full of nice phrases.

Will ACALAN’s conference get further? How?
What kind of rational arguments can we use to make politicians wake up? Is it naïve to think that arguments count? Are states acting intentionally in genocidal education?

The rest of the keynote will present four multidisciplinary and overlapping arguments/ reasons why full MLE is rational for individual children, for their groups/ communities/peoples, for society as a whole, and for the world. Full MLE means minimally 8 years of using mainly a mother tongue - or an extremely well-known other language - as the medium of education, with good teaching of additional languages as subjects. Well-conducted MLE, with well-qualified minimally bilingual teachers can achieve the following 4 goals:
1. Prevent linguistic and cultural genocide and crimes against humanity in education, and allow children to succeed in school (see Magga et al. 2005, Dunbar & Skutnabb-Kangas 2008; Expert papers for UNPFII, both downloadable on my home page).

Some of our conclusions are as follows:
Sociologically and educationally most IM education fits 2 of UN Genocide Convention’s 5 definitions of what genocide is

- Submersion models for ITM children fit two of the definitions of genocide that are in the UN International Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (E793, 1948):
  - 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)
Dominant-language medium submersion education for IM children

• prevents access to education, because of the linguistic, pedagogical and psychological barriers it creates;
• may lead to the extinction of Indigenous/tribal/local languages,
• thus contributing to the disappearance of the world's linguistic diversity.
Education is planned language shift

• “More than most other authoritative specialists, the authorities of the educational system are deeply implicated in planned language shift... Education [is] a very useful and highly irreversible language shift mechanism” (Fishman 2006: 320).
Dominant-language medium education for IM children

- often curtails the development of the children’s capabilities, perpetuates poverty, (Amartya Sen, Nobel laureate, economics) and can and does cause serious mental harm.
- It 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.
Dominant-language-only submersion programmes “are widely attested as the least effective educationally for minority language students” (May & Hill 2003: 14, study commissioned by the Māori Section of the Aotearoa/New Zealand Ministry of Education).

http://www.minedu.govt.nz/
Subtractive education through the medium of a dominant language can have harmful consequences

• socially, psychologically, economically, politically:
  • very serious mental harm: social dislocation, psychological, cognitive, linguistic and educational harm, and, partially through this, also economic, social and political marginalization
  • it can also (and often does) cause serious physical harm, partly as a long-term consequence of the educational, economic and political marginalisation
“The various forms of subtractive education ... are now at odds with and in clear violation of a range of human rights standards, and in our view amount to ongoing violations of fundamental rights. They are at odds with contemporary standards of minority protection”.
Crime against humanity?

• “In our view, the concept of ‘crime against humanity’ is less restrictive [than genocide], and can also be applied to these forms of education.
• In our view, the destructive consequences of subtractive education ... are now clear.
• 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”.

See our two Expert papers for the UN PFII, Magga, Nicolaisen, Trask, Dunbar & Skutnabb-Kangas 2005 and Dunbar & Skutnabb-Kangas 2008
All strong successful MLE models (for both IM and dominant group children) use mainly a minority language as the main teaching language during the first many years.
The most important educational Linguistic Human Right (LHR) in education is an unconditional right to mother tongue medium education in a non-fee state school, at least during the whole primary education (minimally 6 but preferably 8 years).
Solid research results show that...

... the longer Indigenous/tribal and minority children in a low-status position have their own language as the main medium of teaching, the better the general school achievement and the better they also become in the dominant language, provided, of course, that they have good teaching in it, preferably given by bilingual teachers. In addition, they learn their own L1(s).
• If we want to learn from research and experience, mainly MT-medium education of Indigenous and minority children should last minimally 8 years. Everything else is irrational and costly compromises.
Some of my concrete recommendations on how good MLE can be organised are in the invited Notes for the (UN) *Forum on Minority Issues* (can be downloaded from my home page under construction, [www.Tove-Skutnabb-Kangas.org](http://www.Tove-Skutnabb-Kangas.org)). They include an Introduction, research-based Recommendations, Commentaries, and references.

They might be useful for the group work here. Only some of the subtitles will be presented here.
Recommendation 1: the mother tongue should be the main teaching language for the first eight years

1a. All Indigenous/tribal and (other) linguistic minority children (hereafter, IM children) should have their first or own language (or one of them, in case of multilingual children) as their main medium of education, during minimally the first eight years (but absolutely minimally the first six years), in non-fee state schools.

1b. Even if the mother tongue might no longer be used as a teaching language after grade 8, it should be used orally in the classroom, and it should be studied as a subject throughout the entire education process.
Recommendation 2: good teaching of a dominant local or national language as a subject

2. IM children should have good teaching of a dominant local or national language as a second language, given by competent bilingual teachers, from grade 1 or 2. It should be studied as a subject throughout the entire education process. It should be studied as a second (or foreign) language, using second/foreign language pedagogy/methods; it should not be studied as if it were the children’s mother tongue.
Recommendation 3: transfer from mother tongue medium teaching to using a dominant local or national language as a teaching language

3a. Some subjects can be taught through the medium of a dominant national language and/or an international language in the upper grades, but not before grade 7 and only if there are competent teachers.

3b. If necessary one or two practical subjects (physical education, music, cooking, etc) can be taught earlier through the medium of a second language, but cognitively and/or linguistically demanding subjects (such as mathematics or history) should be taught in the child’s first language minimally up to grade 7, preferably longer.
Recommendation 4: additional languages as subjects

4. IM children should have an opportunity to learn further languages as school subjects, including a language in international use such as English, Spanish, French, Russian, Hindi, etc, if it is not a dominant local or national language mentioned in Recommendation 2 above.
Commentary to recommendations 1-4

Research conclusions about results of present-day indigenous and minority education show that the length of mother tongue medium education is more important than any other factor (including socio-economic status) in predicting the educational success of IM students, including their competence in the dominant language (e.g. Thomas & Collier 2002, May & Hill 2003, May, Hill & Tiakiwai 2003, Alidou et al. 2006, Heugh et al. 2007).

There are studies comparing several types of programmes for IM children (this includes children in Africa and Asia in countries with many different ethnolinguistic groups and no numerical majorities, and often with an ex-colonial language as a dominant language).
Commentary to Recommendations 1-4

The following types of programmes have been compared: **a)** completely dominant-language medium education from grade 1; **b)** early-exit transitional programmes, with mother tongue medium education for the first 1-2 years, followed by using a dominant language as the teaching language; **c)** late-exit transitional programmes where the transition from a mother tongue medium programme to a dominant language medium programme is more gradual but is mostly completed by grade 5 or 6; and **d)** programmes where the mother tongue is the main medium of education at least for the first eight years, or even longer.

Research results comparing academic achievement of these children show unanimously that the children from programme types **a)** and **b)** are as a group never likely to reach a native-like competence in the dominant language, at the same time as they will not learn their own language properly either (they do not learn to read and write it, for instance, even if a writing system and materials exist) (e.g. Williams 1998, 2006; Ramirez et al. 2001a, b, Thomas & Collier 2002, Alidou et al. 2006, Mohanty 1995, 2000, 2006, 2008, 2009, Skutnabb-Kangas 2000). Their academic achievement results are mostly very poor at a group level (even if some individuals may manage). Children in late-exit transitional programmes (**c)** fare somewhat better, but even their results are much below what they could be.
Ethiopia has 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 decentralized implementation plans. Some regions transfer to English medium already after 4 or 6 years. 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, forthcoming). 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 8 years of MTM education plus English as a subject perform better across the curriculum (including in English) than those with 6 years or 4 years of mother tongue medium.
2. Good MLE can lead to enhanced cognitive growth and creativity, and, through these, to innovation and investment; this is the only way towards eradication of poverty in Amartya Sen’s sense.
Creativity, innovation, investment - results of additive teaching and multilingualism
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- Multilingualism can enhance creativity: High-level multilinguals as a group often do better than corresponding monolinguals on tests measuring several aspects of 'intelligence', creativity, divergent thinking, cognitive flexibility, etc. (see Baetens Beardsmore 2008).
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Creativity, innovation, investment, multilingualism versus homogenisation

- Homogenisation, also in education, kills creativity. Homogenisation is bad economics.
- MLE works against homogenisation; it maintains diversity and fosters creativity.
- Human survival depends on creative solutions to the global and local problems of our own making.
3. Save children from monolingual reductionism, especially English-monolingualism, and thus maintain and develop linguistic diversity and high-level multilingualism. English (even if it were learned well in submersion programmes - and it isn’t) is not enough.
Supply and demand theories predict:
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When many people possess what earlier was a scarce commodity (near-native English), the price goes down. The value of ‘perfect’ English skills as a financial incentive decreases substantially when a high proportion of a country’s or a region’s or the world’s population know English well.
WHY MT-BASED MLE?
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Mother tongue-based MLE can “produce” high levels of multilingualism, including but not restricted to English.
4. Killing linguistic diversity also hastens the killing of knowledge about how to maintain biodiversity, because of the correlational and causal relationships between linguistic and cultural diversity and biodiversity; much of TEK (Traditional Ecological Knowledge), a prerequisite for human life on earth, is encoded in the small languages of Indigenous/tribal/local people/s. MLE supports maintenance and development of linguistic diversity.
ONE REASON FOR MAINTAINING ALL THE WORLD’S LANGUAGES

• Linguistic diversity and biodiversity are correlationally and causally related.

• Much of the knowledge about how to maintain biodiversity (especially in biodiversity hotspots) is encoded in the small languages of Indigenous and local peoples.

• Through killing them we kill the pre-requisites for maintaining biodiversity.

Iroko tree (Chlorophora excelsa)

Myths can protect valuable natural resources. These are, for instance, seen as sacred, or dangerous. Many bat trees are very valuable spiritually, commercially, nutritionally and medically. The iroko tree of Africa is no exception. Long before its timber had achieved its present commercial star status, the iroko tree was revered by the people who lived with it. Perhaps trees achieve sacred status because their wood builds rot-free boats and houses, because a preparation from bark, roots or leaves cures human maladies, because the trees' twig toothbrushes prevent tooth decay, because their branches burn slowly and warmly on cooking fires and their fruit destroys hunger. Perhaps for these reasons and for others, the iroko tree is a sacred tree.
“In the forest there is a giant tree called by the Yorubas the “Iroko,” which is shunned by all people, for in it lives the spirit of an old man who prowls about at night with a little torch and frightens travellers. Anyone who sees the Iroko-man face to face goes mad and speedily dies. Seeing the thick branches and mighty trunk of the Iroko, woodcutters are often tempted to cut the tree down and make use of the wood, but this is very unlucky, as it rouses the displeasure of the Iroko-man and brings misfortune on the woodcutter and all his family. In any house which contains furniture made of Iroko-wood, there can be heard at night strange groaning and creaking. In any house which contains furniture made of Iroko-wood, there can be heard at night strange groaning and creaking noises; it is the spirit of the Iroko, imprisoned in the wood, who longs to wander about again through the forest with his little torch”. http://www.sacred-texts.com/afr/yl/yl10.htm; see also http://www.church-of-the-lukumi.org/sacredtwo.htm for another legend about the iroko tree.
Biocultural diversity
(= biodiversity + linguistic diversity +
cultural diversity)
is essential for long-term planetary survival
because it enhances creativity and adaptability and thus stability.

Today we are killing biocultural diversity faster than ever before.
Lack of political will - costing missing?

In addition to new codified Linguistic Human Rights (LHRs), especially in education (which might be developing through UNESCO’s latest plans?), we need implementation of the existing good laws and intentions. But the political will for that is mostly lacking. Neville Alexander’s analysis of reasons for it (2006: 16) states:

The problem of generating the essential political will to translate these insights into implementable policy … needs to be addressed in realistic terms. Language planners have to realize that costing of policy interventions is an essential aspect of the planning process itself and that no political leadership will be content to consider favourably a plan that amounts to no more than a wish list, even if it is based on the most accurate quantitative and qualitative research evidence.

What Alexander advocates necessitates the type of multidisciplinary approach that minimally includes sociolinguists, educators, ethnobiologists, lawyers and economists. Some of us work like this...
Grin: market failure

What would, then, be reasonable costs for maintaining indigenous/tribal and minority languages, respecting children’s LHRs, and should it be the state that pays them? François Grin offers through his discussion of ‘market failure’ (2003) excellent arguments for resisting market dominance for public or common assets/goods like cultural products:

Even mainstream economics acknowledges that there are some cases where the market is not enough. These cases are called “market failure”. When there is “market failure”, the unregulated interplay of supply and demand results in an inappropriate level of production of some commodity (Grin 2003: 35).

In Grin's view, many public goods, including minority language protection, ‘are typically under-supplied by market forces’ (ibid.). The level becomes inappropriately low. Therefore it is the duty of the state(s) to take extra measures to increase it.
Francois Grin and his team are just finishing a Swiss National Science Foundation project on the economics of the multilingual workplace. “One significant finding of the project is that we can, for the first time, provide estimates of the share of GDP due to bi-/multilingualism. As far as I know, this is a world premiere -- the often mentioned ELAN study is confined to the effects on the export sector”.
“But this is only a very indirect approach, because exports are only a part of GDP (which roughly varies from 10% to 50% in most economically important countries), and language is used for many more purposes than only selling exports (e.g. for accessing supplies, for internal communication, etc.) and language increasingly matters domestically (clearly in multilingual countries like Switzerland, but also in any country [with large-scale] multilingualism).”
“We're presenting the first estimates at a series of events in Berne over November and December [2008], but as a "sneak preview", I can mention that even after controlling for the input of capital and labour (taking account not just of hours worked, but also of the work experience and educational level of the workforce), the net contribution of multilingualism to the Swiss economy probably represents about 9% of GDP, which is considerable”.
“This opens up new ways to assess the relevance of investment in multilingualism (essentially macroeconomic, as distinct from the microeconomic perspective applied in rates-of-return estimation procedures). One of the advantages is that this approach, though technically more complex, is less data-hungry than the microeconomic approach, which is based on so-called "Mincerian" equations requiring micro-data that are expensive to collect. The offshoot is that estimates could in the future be produced for less affluent countries”. (from a personal email from Francois Grin, 20 Oct. 2008)
When assessing the empirical question of why one should maintain minority languages, Grin uses both ‘positive’ and ‘defensive’ or ‘negative’ arguments, but both are then used within a welfare-considerations based paradigm (i.e. not within a moral considerations based argumentation, such as violations of human rights). He asks both what the costs and benefits are if minority languages ARE maintained and promoted, and what the costs (and benefits) are if they are neither maintained nor promoted.
Grin’s conclusions

Some of Grin's promising conclusions are as follows:

- ‘diversity seems to be positively, rather than negatively, correlated with welfare’
- ‘available evidence indicates that the monetary costs of maintaining diversity are remarkably modest’
- devoting resources to the protection and promotion of minority cultures [and this includes languages] may help to stave off political crises whose costs would be considerably higher than that of the policies considered’ [the peace-and-security argument].
- ‘therefore, there are strong grounds to suppose that protecting and promoting regional and minority languages is a sound idea from a welfare standpoint, not even taking into consideration any moral argument (Grin 2003: 26).
I agree.
The question whether states can afford MLE should rather be: can states afford *not* to implement MLE?
WHY MOTHER TONGUE-BASED MLE?

Mother-tongue medium MLE for Indigenous/tribal/local children and national minorities, for at least the first 8 years of education is necessary for the access to education and for EFA. MLE is cost-effective, both in short-term and in long-term. MLE is necessary for maintenance of linguistic and cultural diversity on earth and for creativity, and, through them and Traditional Ecological Knowledge, for the maintenance of biodiversity. Biodiversity is necessary for any future for humans on the planet.
WHY MOTHER TONGUE-BASED MLE?

The costs of NOT implementing mother tongue-based MLE properly NOW are catastrophic for humanity.

The practicalities CAN be solved.
The facts presented (including those on linguistic genocide and crimes against humanity) are NOT controversial.

They are results of solid often long-term and large-scale research.

What might seem controversial is that I present them in a direct way, with few softeners and with little hot air.
‘The mainstream media persistently label Pinter's politics as "controversial." Far from being an innocent word, it carries, in this context, a densely ideological load. When an idea is interpreted as "controversial," it says more about the politics of the interpreters than the targeted idea. The purpose is to discredit the targeted idea by suggesting that it is not acceptable to the majority. But why should it be "controversial" to oppose, as Pinter did, Turkey's policy of linguicide, Israel's suppression of the Palestinian people, or US and UK war crimes in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan?’