

Linguistic Human Rights and Language Revitalization in the USA and Canada

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Linguistic human rights (LHRs), especially in education, are one of the most necessary (but not sufficient) prerequisites for the maintenance of the world's Indigenous/tribal, minority and minoritized (ITM) languages and communities. An unconditional right to mother tongue-based bi/multilingual education in non-fee state schools is the most important LHR if ITM languages and communities are not to remain seriously endangered. This chapter describes and analyses educational linguistic rights in international law, in the USA and in Canada. All Indigenous/tribal/First Nations languages in North America, with the possible exception of Inuit in Kalaallit Nunaat/Greenland, are seriously endangered and in need of revitalization. For them, education using the ITM children's ancestors' mother tongues in Indigenous mother-tongue-based multilingual and revitalization immersion programs should be a linguistic human right. This right does not exist today, either in law or in practice – linguistic and cultural genocide continues. Attempts to counteract this genocide are presented.

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Indigenous languages in North America are severely endangered. Andrea Bear Nicholas, testifying before the Senate Aboriginal Peoples Committee in Fredericton, New Brunswick on December 2, 2010, gave one example of this endangerment and its social and educational effects (summarized here):

At present barely 10 to 20% of Maliseets speak their mother tongue fluently; they are predominantly over 60 years. Most First Nations languages have no child speakers. Existing core programs of around 30 minutes a day of language instruction are completely useless for maintaining or creating fluency. The active destruction of First Nations languages in schools, even on reserve, continues in a variety of other subtle ways, through the imposition of provincial curriculum in English or French on First Nations schools, through the ready funding of English language pre-school programs for Indigenous children, and through the university training for Indigenous people to become teachers

which exists only in English or French. The imposition of dominant languages on Indigenous children is now considered to be the single most important (and correctable) factor in the “drop-out” rate of 50% experienced by First Nations youth (compared to the 10 to 15% in the immigrant population). With half of all First Nations youth being pushed out of school, they and our communities are condemned to experience well-known and disproportionately high rates of poverty, addiction, incarceration, and suicide. (Bear Nicholas, 2010)

The experience detailed in Bear Nicholas’s testimony above reminds many ITM people of their history and present circumstances. Bernard C. Perley, interviewing a Maliseet elder, was told that nuns in school called the elder’s Maliseet language “the devil’s tongue” (2011, pp. 51, 125). When one of us presented in Australia in July 2012, several Aboriginal people cried and said the presentation described their parents and grandparents.

Linguistic and Cultural Genocide in Education

Can the education of the Maliseet and other ITM children, historically and to a large extent today, be seen as genocide if it is conducted through the medium of a dominant language in submersion (sink-or-swim) programs – that is, in a subtractive way, where the dominant language is learned at the cost of the children’s mother tongue? The United Nations’ 1948 *International Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide* has five definitions of genocide in Article 2 (emphases added):

In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with *intent to destroy*, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) *Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;*
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) *Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.* (United Nations, 1948, Article 2)

All the negative consequences of subtractive education that seeks to replace the child’s home culture with another culture have been well known for a long time, not only by ITM peoples but also by researchers, governments, NGOs, churches, and international organizations (Skutnabb-Kangas & Dunbar, 2010). Some of the main causes of educational failure in multilingual societies were correctly diagnosed centuries ago as linked to submersion in dominant languages, and Indigenous peoples knew this very early. For instance, Handsome Lake, a Seneca from the U.S. born in 1735, described the devastating results. Thomas (1994) quotes from Handsome Lake’s Code, “The Good Message”:

We feel that the white race will take away the culture, traditions, and language of the red race. *When your people’s children become educated in the way of white people, they will no longer speak their own language and will not understand their own culture. ... We feel that when they become educated, not a single child will come back and stand at your side because they will no longer speak your language or have any knowledge of their culture* (emphases added; pp. 41-42).

Churches and educational authorities also knew that subtractive education was cruel and

inhuman and had negative consequences. Historian John S. Milloy (1999) provides extensive documentation of its history in Canada:

For most of the school system's life, though the truth was known to it, the Department of Indian Affairs maintained the fiction of care.... In 1967, after nearly a century of contrary evidence in its own files, the Department contended that the schools were "operated for the welfare and education of Indian children." (pp. xiii-xiv)

These residential schools became "a system of persistent neglect and debilitating abuse...lasting beyond their closure in the 1980s"; it was "violent in its intention to 'kill the Indian' in the child for the sake of Christian civilization" (Milloy, 1999, pp. xiv-xv). In Canada, the last of these schools were closed in 1986. Canada's Indian Department and the churches "became fully aware of the fact that the school system's discipline, its excessive regimentation, unfitted many children, abused or not, for life in either Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal communities. The schools produced thousands of individuals incapable of leading healthy lives or contributing positively to their communities" (Milloy, 1999, p. xvii; for similar accounts from Nordic countries see Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson, 1989).

At least since the late 1800s, state and educational authorities in the U.S. (including churches) also had knowledge about the negative results of subtractive teaching and positive results of mother tongue schooling. The 1879 report of the Board of Indian Commissioners included testimony from missionaries running a bilingual school that,

first teaching the children to read and write in their own language enables them to master English with more ease when they take up that study...a child beginning a four years' course with the study of Dakota would be further advanced in English at the end of the term than one who had not been instructed in Dakota. ... by beginning in the Indian tongue and then putting the students into English studies our missionaries say that after three or four years their English is better than it would have been if they had begun entirely with English. (quoted in Reyhner & Eder, 2004, p. 79)

Colonial educational authorities (including churches) also had this knowledge, and some even suggested remedies consistent with today's research; however, these were not followed. For example, a government resolution was formulated in (colonial British) India in 1904 by Lord Curzon, the Viceroy, expressing serious dissatisfaction with the organization of education in India and blaming Macaulay for the neglect of Indian languages (see Phillipson, 2009, for background). The excerpt below shows its present-day relevance, and suggests that postcolonial education and most ITM education has failed to learn from earlier experience.

...[W]hen the teaching of English has begun, it should not be prematurely employed as the medium of instruction in other subjects....As a general rule the child should not be allowed to learn English as a language [i.e. as a subject] until [s/he] has made some progress in the primary stages of instruction and has received a thorough grounding in his mother-tongue.....

The line of division between the use of the vernacular and of English as a medium of instruction should, broadly speaking, be drawn at a minimum of age 13. (Curzon, quoted in Evans, 2002, p. 277).

It is thus very clear that subtractive education through the medium of a dominant language at the cost of ITM mother tongues has "caused serious mental harm" to children, and often also physical harm such as that inflicted in the boarding schools (Skutnabb-Kangas & Dunbar,

2010). This form of education has also often succeeded in forcibly “transferring children of the group to another group,” because the children did not have any alternative (e.g., mother tongue-medium education). Although UNESCO’s 1953 publication, *The Use of Vernacular Languages in Education*, included firm expert recommendations on how multilingual education could best be organized, these recommendations were often not followed. Similar informed consultations went into drafting UNESCO’s 2003 position paper, *Education in a Multilingual World*. There is very strong research evidence on how ITM education should be organized, and this has been clear among researchers at least since the 1970s. The remaining few counterarguments against strong models of mother tongue-based multilingual education (MLE) are political and ideological, not scientific (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000).

What about the requirement of “intent” in Article 2 of the Genocide Convention? For obvious reasons, no state or educational authority today can be expected to *openly* express an intention to “destroy” a group or even to “seriously harm” it, even if some politicians in strongly assimilationist countries express what can be seen as a wish to forcibly “transfer its members to another group.” However, the intention can be inferred in other ways, by analyzing structural and ideological factors and practices that cause the destruction, harm or transfer. Skutnabb-Kangas and Dunbar (2010) compared current situations with older, more overt ways of forced assimilation. If state school authorities continue to pursue educational policies that use a dominant language as the primary medium of education for ITM children, even though the negative results of this policy have long been known both through earlier concrete empirical feedback (as shown in the examples above from Canada, the United States, and India) and through solid theoretical and empirical research evidence, this refusal to change the policies constitutes, from discourse-analytical, sociolinguistic, sociological, psychological, political science, and educational policy perspectives, strong evidence for an “intention” as required in Article 2 above.

Structural and ideological factors have also appeared in some legal interpretations of the concept of discrimination in education. Gynther (2003) pleads for cooperation between lawyers, sociologists, and educationists and a broadened analytical framework in clarifying some of the basic concepts which are used when subjugated minorities are denied access to education. She traces a trend in academic discourses from a concern with “evil motive discrimination” (actions *intended* to have a harmful effect on minority group members) to “effects” discrimination (actions have a harmful effect whatever their motivation) (2003, p. 48; emphasis added). However, she also points to “a trend from the deconstructive social criticism of the 1960s and 1970s to a watering down of the conceptual framework of systemic discrimination towards the 1990s” (2003, p. 48). Furthermore, when discrimination and racism, including linguicism, “permeate society not only at the individual but also at the institutional level, covertly and overtly ... racial control has become so well institutionalized that the individual generally does not have to exercise a choice to operate in a racist manner. Individuals merely have to conform to the operating norms of the organization, and *the institution will do the discrimination for them*” (Gynther, 2003, p. 47; emphasis added). Ringelheim (2013) discusses a landmark judgment in which the European Court of Human Rights makes clear that no intention to discriminate is required for the discrimination to exist: the sole fact that a measure has a disparate impact on a minority is sufficient to establish the existence of differential treatment – whatever the intent behind the policy. This opens the possibility of addressing structural or systemic forms of discrimination. (pp. 104-105)

As a point of comparison, the Minority Ombud in Finland, Johanna Suurpää (2010), states that Saami children’s access to services through the medium of Saami, especially in day-care, is vital for the maintenance of Saami languages and culture. In deciding whether children get the services that Finnish laws grant them (see, e.g., Aikio-Puoskari, 2009; Aikio-Puoskari & Pentikäinen, 2001), the Commission on Discrimination has stated that Saami children have

been discriminated against on the basis of their ethnicity because relevant Saami-medium day-care was not made available. Reasons such as nonavailability of Saami-speaking staff or municipal lack of financial resources are not legally acceptable – the laws on children’s rights to mother tongue-medium day-care have to be respected. Thus, even if the intention of the relevant municipalities has not been discriminatory, the structural organization of the services has resulted in discrimination.

The same kind of reasoning needs to be tried in court in the Americas in relation to the interpretation of “intent” in the Genocide Convention. Past genocide in education is the main reason language revitalization is urgently needed. The lack of working-age adult generations and children able to speak Indigenous languages is one reflection of earlier linguistic and cultural genocide (for a discussion in the Saami case, see Olthuis, Kivelä, & Skutnabb-Kangas, 2013).

Language Rights in Education in Scholarship and International Human Rights Law¹

This subtitle has been deleted – see Note 1

Language Rights in the United States

In the United States, the 1776 Declaration of Independence that led to the formation of the Union listed “unalienable Rights” that “included Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness” (*Declaration*, para. 2). However, the same document demonized Indigenous peoples, calling them “merciless Indian Savages, whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions” (*Declaration*, para. 2). Despite calling for freedom of religion and speech, in its Constitution the new U.S. government set about undermining Indigenous lives, liberty, and happiness by expropriating American Indian lands and forcing tribes to move westward. In the 1880s the federal government banned Indian religious practices, including the Sun Dances of the Plains Indians and the potlaches of Northwestern tribes, and required all instruction for Indian students to be in English. Students were forced to attend boarding and day schools where their hair was cut, they were forced to wear “civilized” (Western) clothes, and were often given new names. Locked rooms were used as “jails,” and corporal punishment was employed to enforce school rules that often included a ban on speaking students’ tribal languages (Adams, 1995). Long-time Indian agent and educator Albert Kneale reported that American Indian students “were taught to despise every custom of their forefathers, including religion, language, songs, dress, ideas, methods of living” (1950, p. 169). The alternatives present were annihilation or total assimilation (then called “civilization”). Schooling was enforced using tribal police appointed by government Indian agents and in extreme cases the U.S. Army was called in to enforce the agents’ directive. In one 1894 case 19 Hopi men who resisted sending their children to school were sent to the military prison in San Francisco Bay (Reyhner & Eder, 2004).

The post-World War II civil and human rights movements created a climate for more culturally appropriate schooling and American Indian self-determination. In 1968, the U.S. Congress passed the Bilingual Education Act (Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act). Although Title VII was initially targeted for Spanish-speaking students, American Indian tribes quickly saw the value of Title VII programs. However, in most cases the teaching of tribal languages in Title VII-funded programs was very limited. As the late Blackfeet language educator and activist Darrell Kipp pointed out,

[B]ilingual programs are designed to teach English, not your tribal language. We aren't against English, but we want to add our language and give it equal status.... Bilingual education typically teaches the language fifteen minutes a day. (2000, p. 3)

In 1975, Congress passed the Indian Self-Determination and Educational Assistance Act (Public Law 93-638), which provided for greater Indian control of Indian education. This was followed in 1978 with the Indian Religious Freedom Act (P.L. No. 95-34). At the urging of Native Hawaiians and American Indians, the Native American Languages Act (P.L. 101-407) was passed in 1990. In it Congress found that “the United States has the responsibility to act together with Native Americans to ensure the survival of these unique cultures and languages” and made it the policy of the U.S. to “preserve, protect, and promote the rights and freedom of Native Americans to use, practice, and develop Native American languages” (Secs. 102.1, 104.1).

The desire of Indigenous peoples to maintain their languages conflicts with a nationalistic ideology that “good citizenship” requires speaking the national language, which constitutes the nation-building “glue” (see e.g., U.S. English’s webpage <http://www.us-english.org/view/727>). This is understood as speaking the national language only.² In the U.S. this belief is being promoted vigorously by groups such as U.S. English (<http://www.us-english.org/>), English First (<http://www.englishfirst.org/>), and conservative politicians who advocate laws and even an amendment to the U.S. Constitution to make English the nation’s official language and to limit the use of other languages. In 2012 hearings were again held in the Republican-controlled House of Representatives on an “English Language Unity Act” that would mandate government documents and services be provided only in English. In 2012, 31 of the 50 states had some kind of law making English the official state language. Louisiana’s 1811 law is the earliest of these, and Oklahoma’s 2010 Constitutional amendment is the most recent. This concern over the importance of English is comparatively recent, as over 80 percent of the states with these laws passed them since 1984.

The U.S. does not have an official language at the federal level. Faingold (2012) summarizes state policies:

Of the 50 states, 8 have designated English as an official language in their constitutions and 14 in statutory provisions; all 22 have also established language provisions to protect the official language. An additional 5 states have designated English as their official language in their status (i.e. not constitutions) but without protection or obligations. Twenty-one states “are silent on language in their constitutions. (2012, p. 139)

Hawai‘i in 1978 declared English and Hawaiian as official languages.

As state governments pressed to make English more dominant, tribal governments began passing policies to protect and promote their languages. In 1984 the Navajo Nation’s Tribal Council adopted educational policies that called for Navajo language instruction in schools, stating, “The Navajo language is an essential element of the life, culture and identity of the Navajo people” (Navajo Division of Education, 1985, p. 7). The Navajo Nation Council reiterated the importance of their language in 2005 with the passage of the Navajo Sovereignty in Education Act that states, “The Navajo (Diné) language must be used to ensure the survival of the Navajo (Diné) people and their future, to maintain the Navajo way of life, and to preserve and perpetuate the Navajo Nation as a sovereign nation” (Navajo Nation Council, 2005, Sec. 3 §53).

The strongest U.S. efforts for language revitalization are in Hawai‘i both with immersion public schools and various Hawaiian public charter schools that teach in Hawaiian (see also Iokepa-Guerrero & Wilson, this volume). Two small public immersion schools in Arizona are also showing success: Puente de Hózhó (Bridge of Beauty) School in Flagstaff (McCarty, 2012), and Tséhootsoóí Diné Bi’ólta’ (The School at the Meadow Between the Rocks) in Window Rock (Arviso & Holm, 2001). Test scores on English language tests in these multilingual schools are comparable to or better than in those in English-only schools and

classroom observers point out how the social interaction in these schools mirrors Navajo culture, with a climate of mutual respect and teachers speaking softly and using kinship terms to address students (Johnson & Wilson, 2005).

Language Rights in Canada

In Canada there have been no positive rights accorded to Indigenous languages; the country's history is dominated by linguicide (Bear Nicholas, 2011). Residential schools for Indigenous children were established with the same euphemistic but destructive goals of civilizing and Christianizing Indigenous peoples as in the U.S. A variety of Christian denominations worked closely with English colonial authorities to establish and run residential schools for ITMs. After Confederation in 1867, residential schools were operated under contract with the federal government. Day schools were also established in many First Nations communities. When no day schools were available, children were forced to attend residential schools where they were forbidden to speak their language, submersed in the English or French culture and language, and subjected to extreme forms of physical, emotional and sexual abuse. While Canada has consistently denied that the practices in these schools constitute genocide under Article II b and d of the Genocide Convention (see above), the government's position has become increasingly indefensible as evidence mounts that it knew the harmful consequences of its policies for many years (Chrisjohn et al., 2002).

In contrast, Moravian missionaries educated Inuit children in Greenland beginning in the early 1700s entirely in the medium of Inuktitut with an emphasis on cultural continuity in all elements except religion. This system of education continued under the Danes for two centuries until the middle 1900s when Danish language and culture were imposed on Inuit children. By the late 1700s the Moravians were also teaching Inuit in Labrador through their own language. By the end of the 1800s, a majority of Labrador Inuit were literate. But when Labrador and Newfoundland joined Canada in 1950, education through English was imposed; literacy levels among the Inuit immediately dropped. A similar trajectory occurred with the Cree of northern Ontario; by the end of the 1800s their literacy rate was deemed to be "one of the highest...in the world" (Bennett & Berry, 1990). As soon as they were forced to attend residential schools in the early 1900s, their literacy rates dropped dramatically.

In an attempt to hasten assimilation, Canadian authorities launched a policy of integrating Indigenous children into public schools in the early 1950s. Over a decade later when school dropout rates among Indian youth were still around 97 percent, the government commissioned a major study to identify the causes. Rather than examine or critique integration, this report openly promoted assimilation and suggested that Native cultures and languages were at the very least useless, if not actually the problem (Hawthorn, 1966-67).

With the publication of the assimilationist *Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy*, which called for the termination of treaty obligations and special status of Indian peoples (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 1969), the National Indian Brotherhood (NIB) reacted sharply. In 1972 the NIB issued *Indian Control of Indian Education (ICIE)*, which flatly rejected the government's goals of assimilation and termination, and made a number of demands, including full control of schools on reserves and a national program of teacher training for Native peoples (National Indian Brotherhood/Assembly of First Nations, 1972). With over 60 percent of all Indian children attending provincial schools at that time, the new policy refrained from criticizing integration, and advocated, instead, the inclusion of Native culture and Native people in public schools, in the hope of making integration work.

Ironically, the *ICIE* demand for Native peoples to be trained to teach had serious unintended effects on Indigenous languages, since universities were prepared to train teachers to teach only in English or French, and not in Indigenous languages. Thus, most newly trained

Native teachers taught primarily in English or French, effectively "transferr[ing Indigenous] children to another group" (Article II d of the Genocide Convention).

Provisions in the James Bay and Northern Québec agreements of the 1970s guaranteed the Inuit and Cree full control over education. The Inuit used their mother tongue as the main language of instruction (LoI) in the primary years. The Cree, having initially established English or French as the LoI, instituted Cree immersion a decade later, having observed the destructive effect of dominant language instruction.

The Mohawks of Kahnawa:ke launched another important school immersion program in the late 1970s, followed by ones at Akwesasne and Six Nations, and in a few other First Nations across the country. This was not sufficient to stem the accelerating decline in First Nations languages: Only three languages (Cree, Ojibway and Inuktitut) out of more than 60 Canadian Aboriginal languages are estimated to survive another century (Norris, 1998). The NIB's (now the Assembly of First Nations') first major studies in 1988 (AFN, 1988a, 1988b) detailed an array of needs (e.g. greater control of education and additional funding support; official status for Aboriginal languages).

Another report by the AFN (1992) detailed huge discrepancies between Canadian law and practice, pointing out that, "language rights are included as an Aboriginal right in section 35(1) of the Constitution Act 1982" (p.). Still, federal and provincial governments refused to accept any legal responsibility for maintaining Indigenous languages and were unwilling to treat Indigenous languages as inherent traditions. Section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights guaranteed equality between cultures and freedom of choice in language, but apparently only to English and French populations, and not to Indigenous peoples.

Later studies have produced variations on the themes and recommendations first made by the AFN in 1988 (AFN 1990; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996; Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures, 2005). While some began to call for Indigenous rights to mother tongue medium education at government expense (AFN, 1994, 2000), none of the government studies, including the massive five-volume *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (1996), has admitted any culpability for the dire state of Aboriginal languages, much less issued an apology.

Another set of studies documented the precipitous decline of Canada's Aboriginal languages. While more than 90 percent of Aboriginal People in 1941 could speak their mother tongue, only 36 percent reported an ability to do so in 1989 (Kinkade, 1991; Statistics Canada, 1991), and only 26 percent could do so in 1996. By 2010, every Indigenous language in Canada, including Cree, Ojibway, and Inuktitut, was judged to be endangered to some degree, with more than half having only grandparents and great-grandparents able to speak them (First Peoples Heritage, Language and Culture Council, 2010; Norris, 2010b). In contrast, the three Inuktitut languages of Greenland, which are closely related to the Inuktitut languages in northern Canada, are still considered to be relatively healthy because they have speakers in all generations and domains (Norris, 2010a).

In all there are over 60 First Nations schools in Canada with some level of Indigenous-language immersion programming. A handful have been in operation for more than three decades. Unfortunately this represents only 17 percent of all First Nations schools. Even the strongest programs wage a daily struggle to survive; none receive extra funds from the government to implement immersion. Considering the huge disparities in per capita funding for First Nations schools compared to non-Indigenous schools, the very existence of any immersion programs represents remarkable effort and sacrifice on the part of the communities and individuals involved (AFN, 2012; McIvor, 2006; Norris, 2004, 2006; SAE, 2007). The province of Manitoba and the Yukon and Northwest Territories have legislation according respect for Indigenous languages, but none actually includes provisions for funding to maintain or revitalize them.

Research results demonstrate concrete benefits, both educational and linguistic, from immersion education (e.g. Barac & Bialystok, 2011; Bear Nicholas, 2009; Cummins, 2008; DeKorne, 2010; McDonald, 2011; Taylor & Wright, 2003; Usborne et al., 2011). Considering the current hand-wringing in Canada over the enormous gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal school completion rates, it will be difficult for politicians and educators to ignore these results.

Many Indigenous people see language as the key to their identity – who they are as human beings – and question whether one can retain that identity without speaking their mother tongue. One’s sense of identity is critical to mental and physical health (Reyhner, 2010, 2011). The loss of traditional values and the languages in which they are expressed has led to the disintegration of many American Indian communities and families. For example, Hallett, Chandler and LaLonde (2007) examined data from 150 First Nations communities in British Columbia and found that communities with less conversational knowledge of their Native language had teen suicide rates six times those with more knowledge.

Why Have the USA and Canada Not Come Further?

Indigenous communities make up about 4-5 percent of the U.S. population and First Nations about 4.3 percent in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2013). This relatively small size, compared to Māori (15 percent of the population in Aotearoa/New Zealand) and many Indigenous populations in Africa and Asia, limit their political power, including voting strength. Despite some support for language revitalization, especially the three Native American Languages Acts (1990, 1992, and 2006), the U.S. is currently experiencing a very strong countervailing drive for “national unity” and national educational standards built around the exclusive use of English. Furthermore, current efforts to improve the U.S.’s allegedly failing public schools through state and national “one-size-fits-all” educational standards undermines the Native American Languages Act and the efforts of tribal nations to promote the use of their languages in schools (see the discussion in McCarty, this volume).

The Canadian Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures (2005) included in its final report every major recommendation of the previous two decades. Still, there has been no action on them, despite continuing strong advocacy on the part of the AFN (McDonald, 2007) and the national Inuit organization, Inuit Tapariit Kanatami (2011). Even the 2008 *Statement of Apology to Former Students of Indian Residential Schools* (Harper, 2008) failed to produce any concrete action when common justice ought to entitle Indigenous languages in Canada to serious financial support due to the damage done by residential schools. In stark contrast, Greenland recently accorded official status to one of the three Inuit languages of Greenland together with Danish (Hartley et al., 2010).

At the same time, the initial refusal of both the U.S. and Canada to endorse the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2009 seriously tarnished both countries’ international reputation. Though both finally endorsed the Declaration (Joffe, 2010), it remains to be seen if either country will view its linguistic rights provisions as obligations, rather than mere aspirations, before it is too late.

In Greenland, the Indigenous language functions as the medium of education throughout the first nine years, while Danish is learned as a second language subject. After this, much of further education is in Danish. Over 50 percent of all children in Greenland do not continue their studies after the first nine years (and many do not take or pass the final exam). Outside of urban centers the percentage is close to 70. Half of those who continue “drop out” without finishing their study (Rottbøll 2013, p. 4). Just as with their counterparts in Canada and the U.S., Indigenous Greenlanders are, despite “home-rule” (a kind of partial autonomy) still suffering the consequences of colonialism as well as rapid “modernization” with enforced change of traditional occupations, economically, socially, educationally, and psychologically.

Ethnocentrism and conservative political ideology of many voters emphasize national unity through one official language, or in the case of Canada at most two. Many conservatives in the U.S., for example, would like the U.S. to withdraw from the United Nations. While national, and even more importantly, world unity is important, it is respect for freedom and human rights, not speaking a single language, that will promote this unity. Power politics weighs more than respect for (linguistic) human rights.

Notes

¹ A more thorough presentation can be read online in Chapter 2 of Skutnabb-Kangas and Dunbar (2010), at <http://www.e-pages.dk/grusweb/55/>, the main source of this section.

² Former U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt's thinking, in a statement he drafted during World War, I was: "We must have but one flag. We must also have but one language. That must be the language of the Declaration of Independence, of Washington's Farewell Address..." (Roosevelt, 1917, p. 85).

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