



Setting Standards in Recognition of Language Rights

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Main Points

i

Diversity, bilingualism and endangered languages:
fragile, unstable, fading; globalisation has ambivalent effects

ii

Reversing language shift:
difficult, society-wide action needed

iii

Three kinds of work needed:
ideological action, socio-cultural action, linguistic-
communicative action

The Silent Crisis

23 July message for 2008 International Day for the World's Indigenous People, Secretary General Ban Ki-moon:
"the silent crisis confronting many of the world's languages".

Linked action for indigenous languages to fighting marginalization, poverty, expropriation of indigenous people's traditional lands and human rights.

Globalisation: Not New But Important

'the widening, deepening and speeding up of world wide interconnectedness'

combines political-economic change with cultural change

(Held, McGrew, Goldblatt and Perraton, 1999; Suarez-Orozco and Baolian Qin-Hilliard, 2004).

Globalisation: Ambivalent Effects

Both negative and positive readings possible of globalisation in relation to endangered languages.

Most language shift is towards national languages under unilingual state ideologies.

These threaten minority languages as much as or more than globalisation

Some Positives from Globalisation

The Internet

- ~ e.g. VIC-NET ~
- ~ Tigrigna: Melbourne-Bologna-Eritrea ~
- ~ River Nile: Melbourne-Horn of Africa-Argentina ~

Globalisation

- ~ multi-polar: China, Brazil, India, EU ~
- ~ rights: EU: 1992 Charter, Regional and Minority ~
- ~ UN: emergent sense of LM as a human right~

Improved Knowledge

- ~of effective Language Planning~
- ~of bilingual benefits~

Three Possible Standards

i

US Native American Languages Act
Affirmative Symbolism to Practical Action

ii

Philippines Indigenous Peoples Rights Act
Concrete Empowerment of Tribal Languages

iii

Sri Lanka's Constitutional Rights to First Language
EFA, Vernacular Literacy Rights

NALA

1990-2006

In 1990 Congress approves its most bilingualism-promoting declaration; Native American Languages Act.

"It is the policy of the United States to preserve, protect, and promote the rights and freedom of Native Americans... to use, practice and develop Native American languages"

(Congr. Rcd 1990; P.L. 101-477; October 30, part of the Tribally Controlled Community Colleges Bill, PL101-477).

IPRA 1997

“To safeguard indigenous peoples from deception by unscrupulous elements, the ...law required ...all project proponents first secure free and prior informed consent (FPIC) from the indigenous peoples ...if... projects intrude into ... traditional territories”

Indigenous People's Rights Act Philippines

Act stresses use of indigenous languages for education campaigns, public hearings and contract signing purposes

(Castro, 2002: 69).

Continuous First Language Education Laws

Education in Swabhasha, Sinhala and Tamil, for all
Sri Lankan children

High levels of school participation

High rates of female attendance

Universal literacy

S. Asian Literacy Rates

	%	%	Ratio
	Male	Female	GPI*
Bangladesh	67.2	60.3	0.90
India	84.2	67.7	0.80
Nepal	80.6	60.1	0.75
Sri Lanka	95.1	96.1	1.01

*Gender Parity Index (in Lo Bianco, 2008)

Early Policy

UNESCO 1953

de-colonizing in African and Asian countries > supporting vernacular languages 'axiomatic' that the best teaching language is a child's mother tongue (MT).

Scandinavia 1970s

(1976 Finland) immigrant children's fluency in MT related to acquisition of dominant language
~ 'semi-lingualism' and 'double semi-lingualism'~

Early Negativity

Early studies show bilingual deficit:

e.g., Saer 1923 in Wales; Margaret Mead 50s NYC

Problems with control of language proficiency, social class and sociolinguistics

Watershed Studies

two break-through studies using rigorous research designs
>> general consensus today

Peal and Lambert (1962)

IQ bilinguals outperform monolinguals on IQ
(possibly overcompensated)

Hakuta and Diaz (1985)

Longitudinal research isolating independent contribution of
bilingualism..

... two sobering thoughts ...

(i)

"... benign neglect is better than deliberate language planning..."

Andrew Gonzalez

(ii)

"...schools are unreliable allies of language maintenance frequently and appreciably leading to language shift..."

Joshua Fishman

Ideological Work

... directed at undoing past policy,
contesting inherited negative
beliefs and attitudes from dominant
or replacing languages related to
the value and vitality of indigenous,
vernacular or immigrant minority
languages...

socio-cultural work

...re-producing disrupted home transmission of local languages, reconstituting their role for intimacy, intra-family and intra-community use-functions, i.e. finding new spaces in community and family life. ...an essential the base for policy intervention and standards..

linguistic-communicative work

...involves re-establishing intact discourses, i.e., making communication in minority languages natural, persisting against discouraging effects of code-switching and limited initial expressive abilities....



RLS

what appears to work

Ideology

- ~ contesting negative outsider representations ~
- ~ implanting positive insider representations ~

Intimacy

- ~ preserve transmission in primary language socialisation ~

Connections with Material Reward

- ~ either diglossia with H language OR identify some material rewards ~

Intact Discourses

- ~ naturalising use of minority language for identity discourses ~

Separate Domains (Distinctiveness)

- ~ establish links between learning and use ~

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