Language rights: linking the local and the global

UNESCO/UNU
27 August, 2008

Professor Stephen May
School of Education
University of Waikato, New Zealand
s.may@waikato.ac.nz
Globalization

the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa. (Giddens 1990: 64)
1. Language rights

• Tolerance-oriented rights ensure the right to preserve one’s language in the private, non-governmental sphere of national life.

• The key principle of tolerance-oriented rights is that the state does ‘not interfere with efforts on the parts of the minority to make use of [their language] in the private domain’ (Kloss, 1977: 2).
• Promotion-oriented rights regulate the extent to which minority rights are recognized within the public domain, or civic realm of the nation-state.

• For Kloss, they involve ‘public authorities [in] trying to promote a minority [language] by having it used in public institutions – legislative, administrative and educational, including the public schools’ (1977: 2).
1. National minorities
   - Established minorities
   - Indigenous peoples
   
as of right (on the basis of history)

2. Significant minorities have a *reasonable*
   expectation to some form of state support for
   their language(s)

   ‘where numbers warrant’
2. Language and Mobility

• Language use = language value

• Language value = language status

• Result:

• Minority languages accorded little value or status
Language and Mobility

• Majority languages are ‘vehicles’ of modernity, minority languages are (merely) ‘carriers’ of identity

• Learning a majority language leads to greater economic and social mobility

• Speaking a minority language limits mobility

• If minority language speakers are ‘sensible’ they will learn the majority language

• The choice between a majority or minority language is seen as oppositional, even mutually exclusive.
Last year our government spent nearly $10 billion abusing children.

Deprive a child of an education. Handicap a young life outside the classroom. Restrict social mobility. If it came at the hand of a parent it would be called child abuse.

At the hand of our schools and funded primarily by state and local government, it's called bilingual education. A massive bureaucratic program that's strayed from its mandate of mainstreaming non-English speaking students. Today, more money is spent teaching immigrants in their native languages than teaching them English.

With over one million members nationwide, we're U.S. ENGLISH, the largest non-profit, non-partisan organization working to preserve our common bond by making English the official language of government.

While we support initiatives in several states to reform bilingual education, U.S. ENGLISH is concentrating on passing federal legislation to help ensure that every child has a chance to learn English.

To learn how you can help, call 1-800-U.S.ENGLISH. Write us at the address below, or visit our website at http://www.us-english.org.

THE LANGUAGE OF EQUAL OPPORTUNITY™

Source: U.S. ENGLISH Foundation, Bilingual Education in the United States
Photo: Larry Silver
3. Promoting Bilingualism

• Language use/value is not the same as language reach

• ‘advocates for positive language and education policies must constantly articulate the value of bilingualism, and to be able to do so in varied terms that respond to a protean environment of public discussion’. (McGroarty: 2006: 5-6)
References


