On the financing of language policies and distributive justice

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Rights to Language

Equity, Power, and Education

Celebrating the 60th Birthday of Tove Skutnabb-Kangas

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Contents

Preface ................................................................................................................. 5
Acknowledgements .......................................................................................... 7
Teve
  Francisca Sanchez ......................................................................................... 9
Part I. Language: Its Diversity, Its Study, and our Understandings of It.... 11
  Such a Treasure of Knowledge for Human Survival
    Kerttu Vuolantie ........................................................................................ 13
  Language and Biological Diversity: The Inextricable Link
    Laina Meffly ............................................................................................... 17
  Rethinking Language Defense
    Joshua A. Fishman and Gella Schweid Fishman ................................... 23
  Maintaining, Developing and Sharing the Knowledge and Potential
  Embedded in All Our Languages and Cultures:
    On linguists as Agents of Epistemic Violence
      Jan Bronson and Don Miller ................................................................... 28
  The Politics of A-political Linguistics: Linguists and Linguicide
    Amir Hassanzadeh ..................................................................................... 33
  Language Emanicipation: The Finnish Case
    Anna-Kettu Lindgren ................................................................................ 40
  Linguistic Pluralism: A Point of Departure
    D. P. Pattanayak ......................................................................................... 46
  Birch - Wind - Looks
    Lilja Liukku ............................................................................................... 48
  Culture, Sharing and Language
    Prabod Dangiupta ...................................................................................... 49
  'Spirit of the Earth'
    Constance M. Beutel ................................................................................ 52
Part II. Rights: Language Rights, their Articulation and Implementation 55
  Language Maintenance as an Arena of Cultural and Political Struggles
  in a Changing World
    Nae Ramooli .............................................................................................. 57
Contents

Human Rights: The Next Fifty Years
Cees Hamelink................................................................. 62
Tolerance and Inclusion: The Convergence of Human Rights and the
Work of Tove Skrumhild-Kangas
Fernand de Varennes .................................................. 67
Unity in Difference - Belonging
Pirkko Leporanta-Morley ............................................. 72
Discourse and Access
Teun A. van Dijk .......................................................... 73
Language Rights for the Language of Norfolk Island
Peter Mäkiläusler ......................................................... 79
The Latvian Language Law Debate: Some Aspects of Linguistic Human
Rights in Education
Ina Droviets .................................................................................. 83
Use of Language Rights by Minorities
E. Annamalai ................................................................. 87
(Un)Writing the Margins: Steps Toward an Ecology of Language
Mark Fettes ........................................................................... 92

Part III. Equity: Justice for Speakers of All Languages ............... 95
Writing for Diversity
Ngïgï wa Thiong'o ......................................................... 97
On the Financing of Language Policies and Distributive Justice
François Grin and François Vaillancourt ................................ 102
Towards More Fairness in International English: Linguistic Rights of
Non-native Speakers?
Ulrich Ammon .......................................................... 111
Linguicism in Action: Language and Power in Academic Institutions
Masaki Oda ................................................................. 117
Equality of Opportunity and Assimilation. Or: We German Left-wing
Do-gooders and Minority Language Rights
Anja-Katrin Mende ..................................................... 122
Science and Policy - When does Science Matter?
Ingegerd Municio-Larsson ........................................... 127
From Historical Shame to Present Struggle
Jarmo Lainio ............................................................... 132

Part IV. Power: Policies for Multilingualism ......................... 149
Paradoxes of Plurilingualism. For better? For worse? And Beyond?
Angéline Marty ........................................................ 151
Promoting Multilingualism and Linguistic Human Rights in the Era of
Economic Rationalism and Globalization
Michael Clyne ............................................................. 160
Language Resilience and Educational Empowerment: Philippines and
Australia
Jeremy J. Smolice and Margaret J. Secombe .................. 164
Language Policy and Planning in South Africa: Some Insights
Neville Alexander ......................................................... 170
Mother Tongue Education: The Key to African Language
Development? A Conversation with an Imagined South African
Audience
Zubeida Desai ............................................................ 174
Coercion or the Co-construction of 'Utopia'
Shelley K. Taylor ........................................................ 179
Creating a Bilingual Family in a 'Monolingual' Country
Leena Huss ................................................................. 187
The Reindeer on the Mountain, the Reindeer in the Mind: On Sami
Yoko Lyrics
Harald Gaski ............................................................. 193

Part V. Education: Affirming Diversity, Confirming Rights .......... 201
The Linguistic Human Rights of Sign Language Users
Markku Johinen ........................................................ 203
The Linguistic Problem Child has Many Names
Pertti Taanomaa ........................................................ 214
Creating a Successful Minority School
Markku Peura ........................................................... 219
Bilingual versus Bilingual Education: The Case of Slovakia
Istvan Lantyay ............................................................. 227
### Contents

**Giving Good Weight to Multilingualism in South Africa**  
Kathleen Heugh .................................................. 234

**Education for All - In Whose Language?**  
Birgit Brock-Utne ........................................... 239

**Language: A Diversity Category Beyond All Others**  
Ofelia García .................................................. 243

**'This Place Nurture my Spirit': Creating Contexts of Empowerment in Linguistically-diverse Schools**  
Jim Cummins ...................................................... 249

**Dual Language Models and Intergenerational Inspirations**  
Dawn Wink and Joan Wink ................................... 259

**Integrative Comment: Living with Vision and Commitment**  
Robert Phillipson ............................................. 264

**Contributors** ................................................. 279

**Bibliography** .................................................. 289

**Index** .......................................................... 305

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**Preface**

This volume brings together cutting-edge scholarship in language, education and society from all parts of the world. It celebrates the 60th birthday of Tove Skutnabb-Kangas on July 6, 2000. The book is inspired by her work in the fields of minority education, multilingualism, linguistic human rights, and language and power. The contributors, all of whom are people whose work has influenced and has been influenced by Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, were encouraged to distill into relatively few words something of the essence of their professional experience. They were also invited to sketch out a vision of how the challenge of our multilingual diversity might be handled in a better world.

The fields named in the title of the volume were to permit a thematic grouping of the papers into five parts of roughly equal size, starting with *Language and Rights*, and moving via *Equity and Power to Education*. Each part includes a range of chapters on these cross-cutting themes. The volume provides a provocative challenge to our ways of thinking about language, about how language rights are formulated and implemented, how speakers of all languages can be treated more equitably, and how multilingualism can be promoted in the wider society and more specifically in education. The rich mix of chapters serves to underline that the issues are comparable worldwide, that many apparently disparate topics can cross-fertilise each other, and that our understanding of the issues can benefit from coverage that is global, reflective, and committed.

There is considerable variety among the types of paper: retrospective and philosophical; comparative, local, and universal; activist and professionally iconoclast; literary and visionary. The contributors come from many scientific specialisations, including anthropology, communication, economics, education, law, linguistics, literature, political science, psychology, and sociology. Collectively they exemplify how sociolinguistics has developed dynamic, multidisciplinary approaches to complex real-world problems. Such methods and insights are essential for language policy and language pedagogy in the contemporary world.

The book reflects the complexity and diversity of topics that are central to bilingual education, English as a Second Language, applied linguistics, and sociolinguistics. Many of the themes are brought together in the concluding 'integrated comment', which analyses the chapters in terms of the role of the critical intellectual, issues of scientific approach, monolingualism in a global age, seeing language dominance affairs, economic gospels, hopeful ways forward, and a broader vision of how some of our language policy utopias can be brought to life.
On the Financing of Language Policies and Distributive Justice

François Grin and François Vaillancourt

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to briefly examine some aspects of the distributive dimension of language policies. The distributive dimension remains among the least-explored in language policy, including in the growing economic literature on the subject, which for a number of reasons has tended to prioritise the allocative dimension. In this chapter, we shall not attempt to provide a full coverage of the question, about which much has never been investigated. Rather, we shall attempt to posit a few basic notions, leaving necessary elaboration for further work. Nevertheless, we hope to provide some of the necessary orientation into the issue.

This set of issues is not just significantly under-researched; it also coincides, to a large extent, with some of the strategically most important questions in the analytical combination of distinct traditions and perspectives in research on language policy. More precisely, the distributive dimension and its linkage with the allocative dimension is the locus where the technical, often (though not necessarily) top-down perspectives on language policy meet issues of democratic citizenship and linguistic human rights. These have long been among Tove Skutsch-B-Kangas’s central concerns, and it is therefore fitting that a paper on economic aspects of language policies included in a Festschrift honouring her work should address these issues. Hence, this contribution, in addition to expressing our indebtedness to Tove Skutsch-Kangas’s unyielding scientific and social commitment to these issues, aims at signalling some of the socially and politically important points of articulation between complementary perspectives on the evaluation of language policies.

The first section of this chapter contains some definitions. In the second we present the essentials of the economic approach to the problem of ‘distribution’ in public policies. The third section moves on to the more specific problem of the financing of public policies. In the fourth, these tools are applied to language policies, particularly those aiming at the maintenance and promotion of a possibly threatened minority language. The final section provides a brief summary and conclusion.

One key (and paradoxical) result from this preliminary examination is that financial support for minority languages, if financed, in whole or in part, by members of a majority community, will often be easier to justify on allocative than on distributive grounds - that is, in terms of efficiency rather than justice.

Some definitions

Since this chapter combines considerations on language policy and economic issues, definitions of notions encountered in both fields are required.

No distinction will be made between ‘language policy’ and ‘language planning’; both terms will be used here interchangeably, to refer to a systematic, rational, theory-based effort at the societal level to modify the linguistic environment with a view to increasing aggregate welfare. It is typically conducted by official bodies or their surrogates and aimed at part or all of the population living under their jurisdiction (Grin, 1999).

The field of investigation of economics as a discipline can be broken down in various ways, such as micro v. macro-economics, but one fundamental distinction is that between the allocative and the distributive dimensions.

They can be easily contrasted with each other in terms a general definition of economics as a discipline. Although there are several views of what economics is about, we adopt a broad definition, according to which economics is first and foremost about the efficient allocation of scarce resources which have alternative uses, no matter the nature of the ends pursued or of the resources used. Hence, economics is not confined to the study of the production, exchange and consumption of goods, services and factors; rather than being defined as a subject area, economics is defined as an approach. Whenever there is a problem of allocating scarce resources, the problem has an economic dimension. Of course, this in no way implies that it does not have other dimensions as well, nor does it mean that the economic dimension so defined is always important. Depending on the issue examined, the problem of the allocation of scarce resources can be more or less salient.

However, the pure allocation problem is only one side of economic inquiry. If we agree that, by and large, social actors do allocate their time, money, energy, influence, etc. in a way that is advantageous to them, we may have a general framework for the analysis of behaviour, but two important comments must be made.

First, efficient allocation of their own resources by actors does not necessarily result in overall efficiency. This would be the case if the ‘invisible hand’ did work