

**Human Rights in Education, Literature and Art**  
The 42nd TESOL-Greece International Convention  
The James E. Alatis Honorary Plenary

# **Linguistic Human Rights and Language Pedagogy**

Bessie Dendrinou, Professor Emerita  
National & Kapodistrian University of Athens



**My participation in the 42nd TESOL-Greece convention is a tribute to its first and current president, Lilika Couris – the ageless, energetic, full of enthusiasm and life and professional zest Lilika, with whom I had the pleasure of working, 43 years ago, for the foundation of this organisation, which has offered a professional home to hundreds of EFL professionals and created one of the first EFL teacher communities in Greece.**

**This keynote address is in honour of two renowned scholars and activists in the area of Linguistic Human Rights:**

**Robert Phillipson and Tove Skutnabb-Kangas**

**For information about them and their work, as well as brief recites by both see the Appendix of this ppt presentation.**

## **Civic Human Rights**



## **Linguistic Human Rights**

# Civic Human Rights

---

The UN defines Human Rights (HR) as rights inherent to all, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status. HRs include, most importantly, the right to life and liberty, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to work and education. Everyone is entitled to these rights, without discrimination.

HRs are based on shared values like dignity, fairness, equality, respect and independence – concepts which are open to interpretation (but by whom?) and protected by law (but who enforces the law)?

So, though HR can never be taken away (or can they?), but they are restricted when, for example, a person breaks the law, puts oneself or others in danger – though this is a matter of judicial decision (but the question is if the judicial system is independent from government control).

# Linguistic Human Rights

---

Article 2 of the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” (1996) states that “all individuals are entitled to the rights declared without discrimination based on language”. These include, among others, the right:

- to one's own language in legal, administrative and judicial acts
- to education in their own language, to learning and cultivating their own language and culture, and to serving the needs of their linguistic community(ies).
- to media in a language understood and freely chosen by those concerned

**Identity, free expression** and **education** are the key issues here.





# LHRs in education

# What do LHRs entail?

---

- Education through the “minority” students’ “Mother Tongue” [MT] (not necessarily the language spoken by the one’s mother; it refers to the first language(s) one learnt (hence referred to as L1), or to the language(s) spoken at home or the home community)
- Bilingual or immersion education (though this depends on which languages are included and how the educational programme is realised)
- Education attending to students’ literacy development in their MT
- Assisted learning in the school language, so that students can respond to curriculum demands on the basis of attainable standards of performance
- Choice in the school and classroom to shift from one language to another
- Choice of language learning style (as this is often related to culture)
- Classroom activities which cultivate care and respect for “minority” students’ values and cultural practices
- School environment where “minority” students feel safe and secure.

# Benefits of education considerate of students' MT

---

Research has shown that students:

- ✓ learn better and faster in a language they understand
- ✓ enjoy school more, feel more 'at home', can develop bi-literacy
- ✓ display increased self-esteem
- ✓ are supported by increased parents' participation in their schoolwork and school activities
- ✓ use their bi-/multilingual proficiency for studies/employment later
- ✓ stay in school longer

It is also widely recognized that education which ignores students' MT, and disregards languages they have as a resource, is an important factor in the loss of a significant cultural capital in society.

Note: There are millions of children around the world who receive education in a language that they hear for the first time when they go to school



# What about LHRs in Greece?



# The LHRs reality in our country

---

- The only minority language recognised is Turkish in Thrace
- Bilingual education in Thrace is built around two separate curricula (one in Greek and one in Turkish)
- Children of immigrant families are not offered any special support or opportunity for MT literacy
- Migrant and refugee students receive special education, and are thus excluded from mainstream education
- Multilingual schools and classrooms are treated as monolingual spaces.

# Yet, academia in Greece is trying...

---

The Centre of Excellence for Multilingualism and Language Policy (CEM) of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, which aspires to research and develop language and language education policies, and to act as a consultant to the state on issues of language education and language education policy is now a reality.

CEM has institutionalised a **Multilingualism Observatory** for issues of linguistic social justice.

# Echos on Greek FLT/ELT

---

- The role of L1 in the FLT classroom maybe somewhat different than it used to be in the past (when FL teachers were told that the use of L1 should be banned from the classroom, assuming that a FL should be learnt through that language, just as one learns their mother tongue\*)
- The constructive use of L1 has been discussed in the context-specific scholarship, supporting that:
  - the learner's L1 is an important determinant of FLL – a resource which learners use (sub)consciously to help them re-arrange the FL data in the input and to perform as best as they can
  - the cultural/discursive/textual features connected with the L1 use can be put to good effect when learning and teaching the FL
  - FLL is a developmental process to which L1 can be a contributing factor.

\* Of course the goals that students should learn a second or third language in the way the learnt their MT and achieve 'native speaker' competence are both inappropriate and unachievable.

# What about FLT/FLL and identity?

---

As research on the relationship between foreign language teaching and learning is still in infancy, we might ask the following questions to start us thinking:

- What **is** the relation between language, language learning and identity?
- Are we in processes of identity construction each time we communicate?
- Do we speakers demonstrate our (fixed, stable) identity in an L2/L3 through our L1?
- Do language learners preserve their L1 norms (for example, their L1-accented speech) not as a sign of negative transfer but to mark their identity?
- What kind of identity are we speaking about – social identity, sociocultural identity, cultural identity, ethnic identity, other?
- Can we see identity in terms of our subjectivity defined simply as ‘our sense of ourselves’ and explain subjectivity in terms of power; i.e., learners as either agents of power or subjects to power?
- Is there **identity reconstruction** (maybe a new identity and self) through learning another language?

# What about linguistic social justice?

---

Linguistic Social Justice refers to relationships between the way language is used in society and its institutions, and to the challenge of providing equal opportunities in the society, regardless of one's gender, ethnic identity, wealth, educational background, or other identifiers.

Studies in LSJ attempt to:

- show the significance of language in how social structures in a society are produced and maintained (viewing language as social practice rather than adopting narrow views of language that underestimate its power)
- display how such critical awareness of the role language helps us understand issues of social concern and create a platform to contribute to empowerment of people
- emphasize the pedagogical implications of adopting a critical language awareness perspective for social justice in education.



# What does social justice have to do with language education?

---

It has to do with the fact that not all languages and linguistic practices are equal and associated with the same opportunities and privileges in and beyond educational contexts.

**Linguistic injustices are never just about language.** Economic factors but also factors such as race, social class, ability, are intrinsically linked to language and shape local, national, and international language attitudes, ideologies, and policies.

The question is then “how can we support students in becoming socially conscious, critical, and engaged members of society and what kind of resources, skills, and teacher support do we need to achieve this?”

# What can language teachers do?

---

Social justice is not something that can be brought about by an individual. It needs a community, and teachers working together (in associations like TESOL-Greece), raising relevant questions, such as the ones below:

- How can language education be a space where students and teachers learn together to see and challenge existing patterns of privilege and injustice?
- What is needed to support teachers in promoting linguistic and cultural equity and equip them to support each other in developing/implementing respective pedagogies?
- How can language education and research support, respect, and better understand each other with the goal of making language education more equal and accessible for all learners?



# IN LANGUAGES WE LIVE VOICES OF THE WORLD



- Linguistic diversity is a major guarantee for cultural diversity. It contributes to sustainable development, the strengthening of dialogue, solidarity and peace.
- The recognition of multilingualism in social spaces helps social cohesion, intercultural dialogue and prosperity, because it plays an important role in the integration process of all into societies.

# Why is multilingualism important?

---

- Language, as a fundamental component of culture, is not just a means of communication but an essential factor for establishing the identity of individuals and groups.
- Through language, people build, understand and express their emotions, intentions, values, notions and practices.
- Languages are also strategically important to meet the great challenges facing humanity.
- However, over 50% of the world's 6,000 languages are endangered. An overwhelming percent (96%) is spoken by 4% of the world's population, and less than 25% are used in the internet.

# Multilingualism in Europe

---

- Europe has an essential role to play in sustaining its rich linguistic and cultural wealth by promoting linguistic diversity and intercultural dialogue
- Both the EU and the Council of Europe have been working toward developing and/or facilitating:
  - 1) policies and actions to safeguard the languages spoken in Europe
  - 2) standard-setting instruments
  - 3) multilingualism in science, culture, public administration, commerce and technology
  - 4) multilingualism in education.



# Examples of European actions

---

- Policies and actions:  
[https://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/multilingualism/about-multilingualism-policy\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/multilingualism/about-multilingualism-policy_en)
- Standards-based instruments: [CEFR](#), [CEFR Companion Volume](#), the European Language Portfolio, the European Language Label
- Collaboration between EU and the [ECML](#) of the Council of Europe for a variety of tools and instruments, including:
  - teacher and learner resources for the learning/teaching of languages
  - teaching guides that enhance plurilingual and pluricultural education
  - the use of digital media in language education
  - early language learning

# The multilingual turn in education



# The multilingual turn in education

---

The so-called “multilingual turn in education” has initiated:

- Whole school policies and planning language across the curriculum
- Plurilingual/multilingual pedagogies
- Bilingual education that aims at teaching children the school language but not at the cost of their L1
- Plurilingual education so that children learn how to take full advantage of their linguistic and semiotic repertoire
- Development of plurilingual and pluricultural competence
- Translanguaging
- Development of cross-linguistic mediation competence.

# Plurilingual and pluricultural competence

---

- We should distinguish between **multilingualism** (the coexistence of different languages at the social or individual level) and **plurilingualism** (the dynamic and developing linguistic repertoire of an individual user/learner) – CEFR CV (2018: 28)
- Plurilingual competence, which is not static but potentially developing, means that the learner is able use all his semiotic resources to communicate
- Plurilingual competence as defined in the CEFR involves the ability to call flexibly upon our inter-related, uneven, semiotic repertoire to make meanings for ourselves and others.

# Plurilingual ethos of communciation

---

Having developed plurilingual competence mean that we can:

- ✓ switch from one language, dialect, or language variety to another
- ✓ express oneself in one language, (dialect or language variety) and understand a person speaking another
- ✓ call upon the knowledge of a number of languages (dialects or varieties) to make sense of a text
- ✓ recognise words from a common international store in a new guise
- ✓ mediate between individuals with no common language (dialect or variety) even with only a slight knowledge oneself
- ✓ bring the whole of one's linguistic equipment into play, experimenting with alternative forms of expression
- ✓ exploit all our semiotic resources (mime, gesture, facial expression, images, sounds, etc.).

# Rethinking language education

---

- How can we begin to rethink about foreign language education from the perspective of multi-/plurilingualism?
- What types of foreign language education pedagogies are appropriate for the development of plurilingual competence(s)?
- How can coherent plurilingual pedagogies be translated into pedagogical action?
- What types of tools are needed to measure and formally recognize plurilingual competences and multiliteracies?



# Have we been rethinking language education in Greece?

---

- Language teachers working together?
- Language professionals working in a collaborative fashion?
- Language teacher educators collaborating?
- Language teacher training?
- Academic discourse about language teaching and learning?

# Some efforts for innovative approaches to language education in Greece

---

- Innovatory foreign language education
- English programme for Early Language Learning
- The Integrated Foreign Language Curriculum
- The multilingual foreign language proficiency suite
- Foreign languages in school

# More European support for multilingualism

---

- The launching of the [European Civil Society Platform for Multilingualism](#) (ECSPM)
- The construction of a [European Education area](#) (by 2025)
- The [European Language Grid](#)
- The [European Language Resource Coordination](#) (ELRC)



# Appendix

Information on Robert Phillipson and Tove Skuttnab-Kangas

# Who are they?

---

**Tove Skutnabb-Kangas** is a bilingual speaker from birth in Finnish and Swedish, who studied at the University of Helsinki, Finland and taught at the University of Roskilde, Denmark. She has researched and been politically active globally on issues regarding Linguistic Human Rights (LHRs), multilingual education, the subtractive spread of English, and the relationship between linguistic and cultural diversity. Her work has been translated in more than 50 languages and in 2003 she was the recipient of the UNESCO International Linguapax – an award to honour actions carried out in different fields in favour of the preservation of linguistic diversity, revitalization of linguistic communities and the promotion of multilingualism.

**Robert Phillipson** is an Emeritus Professor at the Copenhagen Business School, in Denmark, who now lives in Sweden. British by origin, he is one of the few Brits who speak several languages. He studied at Cambridge and Leeds in the UK but received his doctorate from the University of Amsterdam, in the Netherlands. He's famous for his *Linguistic imperialism* (OUP, 1992) and for his *English-only Europe? Challenging language policy* (Routledge, 2003), which was updated and translated into French in 2019.

He coedited the encyclopaedia for Language Rights four volume series with his wife, Tove Skutnabb-Kangas (2017) and he was awarded the UNESCO Linguapax prize in 2010.

# Their most recent work

---

*The Handbook of Linguistic Human Rights*, Wiley-Blackwell, expected in 2021

A multidisciplinary collection of more than 50 chapters looking into LHRs' issues from the perspective of political theory, international law, economics, education, social psychology, social theory, linguistics and language policy.

It sheds light on the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and its LHRs activity. It also elucidates UNESCO's involvement in promoting LHRs and discusses the impact of 'global' English and of its litigation.

It presents case studies of violation of LHRs in many parts of the world, but also "success stories". Its thematic concerns also include the role of interpreters and translators, language proficiency assessment, documentation of language diversity, the promotion of Sign languages, and the challenges of promoting LHRs in dialogue and peace promotion.

# In Robert's words...

---

"There was a time when English Language Teaching (ELT), in its Anglo-American variant, was seen as practical pedagogy, and divorced from any political or ideological contamination. Then along came Bessie Dendrinis with ideas on the hegemony of English, while I started to look at the origins of ELT and developed an analysis of the linguistic imperialism that permeated the English language export business. Tove and I started working together in the early 1980s, and outraged the British applied linguistics community, at least its establishment representatives, by writing in its newsletter about racism and sexism in how the British Association of Applied Linguistics functioned. When we later met one of the Association's august academics, he commented that Tove must have been the person who had made me go wrong, letting down the side - I was a good chap earlier, when I worked for the British Council in Algeria, Yugoslavia, and London. Well I am happy that I became a critical scholar. I have aimed at raising awareness of how English is being misused in education in many parts of the world, and how respecting the linguistic human rights of speakers of all languages can and does lead to both more social justice and more success in education. My more recent work has concentrated more on the language policies of the European Union, and how these are working through in the education systems and universities of member states. This is an important challenge that Bessie's work for the European Civil Society Platform for Multilingualism, that she heads, is continuing. Working together with Tove on many of these language policy challenges still keeps us busy. Linguistic justice is a huge issue worldwide. So it is a joy to see that the theme of your conference is 'Human Rights in Education, Literature, and Art', and who better to set the tone for your deliberations than our inspiring, energetic Bessie Dendrinis."

# In Tove's words...

---

"Supporting Linguistic Human Rights (LHRs) takes a life-time. You may encounter some prejudices. Once I talked to a bunch of young female students at the beginning of a conference – they did not know who they were talking to. When they heard my name, one of them burst out with "But we thought you were dead long ago!" Then, becoming embarrassed, they said: "it's because your name has been around for such a long time".

Another instance: I was printing out the keynote text that I was going to give in Australia. It was long. A young man, waiting for his turn saw my name on the paper. He gave me a long lecture about how much inspired he had been by this Tove Skutnabb-Kangas. In the end I told him it was me. First he did not believe me. Then he said: "I always thought it was a male – NO woman can write anything as strong as that. And if you are a female, at least you must be BLACK and BIG and STRONG – not a little blond lady." So, you are listening to a dead big black male...

The absolute opposite of Linguistic Human Rights (LHRs) is linguistic genocide. Much Indigenous and minority education today all over the world fits at least two of the five definitions of genocide in the United Nations 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide: (Articles 2 (b) "Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group"; and 2(e) "Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group".). I have been documenting this in writings for over five decades (see my latest, 2020). But not much has changed, even if many people and organisations now have to admit that education where minority mother tongues are ignored IS genocidal.

Can you in any way be part of this, in teaching English or other foreign languages? You don't teach them at the cost of people's mother tongues (as in genocidal education), but in addition to them. But people who want to champion the cause of Linguistic Human Rights (as Bessie does), and note that linguistic and cultural genocide continue, especially in education, must be prepared to discuss this with the perpetrators. Many people believe that genocide "only" means physical killing of people (Definition 2(a) "Killing members of the group"; they do not know that this is only one of the five definitions of genocide in the UN Convention (see details, including all five definitions in my 2020).

Continued – next slide



## And Tove concludes:

In trying to make people aware of the need for LHRs and thus also of genocide one often encounters denial, anger, and in the best case, guilt and shame from perpetrators of linguistic and cultural genocide. Many deny not only the validity of the concept, but also their own agency. One way of counteracting the inevitable first negative feelings of perpetrators might be to support them in analysing their own role. Many claim to have a positive motivation; they are “helping” Indigenous and minoritized people to learn a dominant or “international” language, and unfortunately that means no place for their mother tongues. Still they may be participating in linguistic and cultural genocide, because they do not question the ways their institutions function.

The assimilatory, genocidal principles in much of minority education permeate today’s societies not only at the individual level but also at the structural, institutional level, covertly or overtly. That means that the linguistic, discriminatory and often racist control has become so thoroughly institutionalised that the individual, for instance a teacher or a school administrator, generally does not have to exercise any conscious choice to operate in a racist/assimilationist/linguicist manner. Individuals merely have to conform to the operating norms of the system, and the institution [ e.g the school or the university] will do the discrimination for them. Thus linguistic genocide can continue. Legally, we are about to move from ‘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).

Instead of making some people angry (or pessimistic), listening to and reading Bessy can and often does make people optimistic and full of energy for starting to make necessary changes, also in counteracting linguistic genocide. I hope that all of you are or become ardent protectors of Linguistic Human Rights.”

Skutnabb-Kangas, Tove (2020). Linguistic Genocide - a Global Crime. In Göçek, Fatma Müge and Greenland, Fiona (eds). *Cultural Violence and Destruction of Communities: New theoretical perspectives*, pp. 58-75. London & New York: Routledge.

[www.Tove-Skutnabb-Kangas.org](http://www.Tove-Skutnabb-Kangas.org)