

***Social justice through multilingual education.*  
Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, Robert Phillipson, Ajit K. Mohanty  
and Minati Panda (eds) (2009)**

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As stated by Aikio-Puoskari, '[t]he world was a great deal smaller [...] when one's identity was interlaced with one's first language [...]' (p. 241). Nowadays, most countries are dealing with the challenge of multilingualism. Despite efforts to impose multilingualism in certain specific environments, the tendency is quickly becoming to view this 'challenge' as a means of enforcing the 'right languages' onto people. *Social justice through multilingual education* is an attempt on the part of researchers worldwide to eradicate the spreading concept of 'wrong languages'. In doing so, researchers hope to help 'save the 50% of Indian tribal children' that 'never reach grade 5' and to increase the number of successful children in schools, of which 'only 20% [...] survive the years of schooling to take the high school examination'. Applied linguists thus propose multilingual education as a potential answer to the problematic situation created by a globalizing world.

In chapter 1 which by itself constitutes Part One (pp. 3–18) of the volume under survey, 'Multilingual Education: A Bridge too Far?', Mohanty offers a bird's eye view on the current situation, drawing our attention to 'an unresponsive system that devalues the language, culture, identities' of minority language populations. He describes a schooling system that submerses the children only

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to reject them, generating 'poor educational performances, subtractive language learning, loss of mother tongue and loss of linguistic identity'.

Part Two (pp. 19–84) 'Multilingual Education, Approaches and Constraints' starts with chapter 2, a description of the 'Fundamental Psychological and Sociological Principles Underlying Educational Success for Linguistic Minority Students'. After providing a broad definition of 'bilingual education', Cummins presents challenges that multilingual education (henceforth abbreviated MLE) may be faced with when applied to everyday life. Based on a broad review of the literature about the (positive) relationship between the development of academic skills in first and second languages (p. 20), it is concluded that long-term programmes are the most successful ones. Moreover, additive bilingualism is associated with a greater meta-cognitive awareness and an 'increased ability to focus intellectually' (p. 22) despite the apparent need for five extra years to catch up with the majority language's (or their speakers') linguistic expectations. Cummins also points out the contradiction between the results of psycholinguistic studies and the recurrent struggle for implementing bilingual education for minority language speakers in the schooling system, accusing the 'centrality of societal power relations'. In contrast, MLE would encourage selective acculturation as opposed to full assimilation while promoting the students' 'self-esteem and academic achievement', eventually reversing the pattern of underachievement (p. 27). In chapter 3, Skutnabb-Kangas places the discussion in the politic context of (post)colonization. For her, politicians consciously choose to eliminate minority languages from schools' curricula to avoid the higher academic achievement of indigenous populations (p. 41). Many compare weak MLE to strong MLE programmes, the former being characterized by the dropping of the minority language after a couple of years (in contrast, strong programmes maintain the minority language; p. 42). In chapter 4, in an attempt to limit misunderstandings due to different interpretations of expressions related to bilingual education programmes, Benson briefly describes the different MLE systems. She insists on the importance of developing full mother tongue competence. Benson then reviews research-based thinking concerning language and education. Benson points out the negative effects of the de-contextualized and abstract nature of a non-native academic language at the primary school level. According to her, the problem no longer lies with MLE's proofs of success, but educating stakeholders and teachers on the underlying principles of language acquisition, determining educational and linguistic goals and looking at available resources in each context (p. 77).

In Part Three (pp. 85–200), global and local tensions and promises in MLE are presented. Phillipson opens chapter 5 by introducing the readers to 'The tension between linguistic diversity and dominant English'. In his article,

Phillipson discusses both diachronic and synchronic views of the place of the English language in a worldwide perspective. Widely used concepts like ‘lingua franca’, ‘global’, and ‘international’ are discussed, and the ‘neutrality’ of English as a lingua franca is refuted. A table illustrates the increasing rate of the English language (p. 91). Following this same line of reasoning in chapter 6, Heugh presents the history and state of ‘Literacy and Bi/multilingual education in Africa’. She blames the collective loss of memory and a postcolonial attitude for encouraging the diminution of African language values, and accuses them of neglecting ‘the historical use of local languages in education’ (p. 106). She then reviews the educational systems of several countries in Africa. Ironically, she points out the educational success of mother tongue education in countries like South Africa during times of segregation. If mother tongue education is the goal, the question remains why linguistic communities are marginalized by the choice of particular languages. For Heugh, ‘dynamic multilingualism rather than a static monolingual variety is the African lingua franca’ (p. 104). In chapter 7, McCarty presents four lessons having to do with ‘Empowering Indigenous Languages’ and teaching minority languages in Native American Education (in the U.S.A.). Of the languages of traditionally oral societies, 210 were still spoken in 2008 ‘but 67% only by grand-parents’ (p. 125). The example of the Navajo language is illustrated in the first part of the paper. The most efficient programme appeared to be one of Navajo immersion which resulted in a 50/50 English and Navajo competency, allowing for participating students to surpass their peers even in maths (p. 135). Subsequently a sociolinguistic study revealed linguistic shame among the speakers of Navajo minority languages due to the association with poverty, traditionalism and backwardness. Educators described youth in deficit terms and the resources of minority language students in terms of language were mostly ignored. The author concludes her article by presenting the successful experience of an immersion schooling programme, and encourages the readers to continue ‘to crash through barriers’ where they still exist. In chapter 8, García proposes to portray how teachers and educators can use multilingual children’s resources to optimize their learning. This approach is based on the language practices of bilinguals more than on the language itself, and aims at stopping the process of stigmatizing the same within the school system. She retraces the story of subtractive and additive bilingualism. She contests their legitimacy, underlining that both models begin or end in monolingualism. To emphasize the value of heteroglossic discourses, she argues that ‘languaging bilingually’ (p. 145) or ‘translanguaging’ should be considered the norm. In the end, she fights against monoglossic ideologies that consider languages to be autonomous systems. In ‘Privileging Indigenous Knowledges’ Hough, Thapa Magar and Yonjan-Tamang draw a socio-historical sketch of the languages and ethnic groups of Nepal. In

Nepal, around 50% of the population speaks a language other than Nepali. In Nepal around 200 languages are spoken that have been through 500 years of discrimination (p. 160). For speakers of other languages, discriminatory practices resulted in experiences of humiliation, retarded cognitive development and increased drop-out rates (p. 160). The authors describe indigenous pedagogy, which, when combined with MLE (p. 175), may have the power to transcend negative contradictions of globalization, and the ability to empower democratic governance through the enhancement of indigenous values. In chapter 10, Taylor points out the high linguistic diversity of Canada; in Toronto alone, approximately 300 languages are spoken. Although English was an L2 for 70% of the population, MLE was still illegal in Ontario in 2008. She mentions numbers of 'innovative approaches [...] limited to mainstream classroom settings' (p. 178), and the exclusion of populational groups 'at risk' from immersion programmes not being justified by any sound argumentation. On page 180, a table represents minority languages according to the Canadian census of 2001. The author asks for structural changes such as authorizing instruction through the medium of non-official languages and training teachers about how children learn languages. She offers didactic strategies that might raise awareness concerning the learners' needs in their teachers (p. 184). She shows that discrimination against minority language children 'can occur by institutionalizing structures of unequal access to educational opportunities' (p. 196).

In Part Four (pp. 201–300), MLE is presented in both theory and practice. In chapter 11, Jacobsen Pérez underlines the role played by language perceptions with regard to the meaning certain practices manifest in bilingual education. In Peru where 42 indigenous languages are spoken, two regions have developed a bilingual education system. However, bilingual programmes that were considered mainly assimilationist did not show satisfactory results until other methods were introduced, including the postcolonial perspective on education encouraging the development of cultural revitalization. Problems arose when attempts were made to convince teachers of the utility of using Quechua as a medium of instruction and the importance of translating academic texts into Quechua. This led the author to question the validity of Quechua as an academic language, which invokes a fear of the 'colonization of knowledge' (p. 213). In chapter 12, Bear Nicholas describes two linguistic communities. Bear Nicholas points out positive and negative factors that have influenced the evolution of the Mi'kmaq and Mohawk languages. She concludes her paper reporting on the negative correlation between the level of fluency in the minority language and the overall educational level. In chapter 13, Aikio-Puoskari discusses 'The ethnic revival, language and education of the Sámi, in Finland, Norway and Sweden' (pp. 238–262). The author claims that the importance of education lies in its ability to

‘provide [children and young people] with the chance of growing up and living their lives as [...] citizens who know their own culture, have good skills in their own language and have a strong identity and a sound self-esteem’. In chapter 14, Jhingran describes the challenges of primary schools in India as regards languages, its impacts on children’s learning outcomes, and the policies of language planning at school; she considers these to be challenges that must be met urgently. She first draws a landscape of the languages of India. This begins with the difficulty of defining the status of language as opposed to dialect. Out of the 1652 mother tongues identified in 2001, 26 are used at the educational level as a medium of instruction. Schools are thus faced with extreme heterogeneity in children’s linguistic abilities. As a result, the classroom activities are almost always passive. Efforts to introduce minority languages into the school system or to train teachers from ethnic languages have suffered from severe limitations, having been implemented without a full understanding of how children learn a second language. In conclusion, the author proposes some suggestions for policy makers based on the principle of mutual intelligibility. In chapter 15, Mohanty, Mishra, Reddy and Ramesh explore the ways in which we might overcome ‘the language barrier for tribal children’. They explain the double nature of languages: what may be ‘instruments of power for some’ are reasons for ‘shame and guilt’ in others (p. 283). Indeed, despite scientific evidence, ‘submersion of minority children in [...] majority language classrooms [...] continues to be the most pressing issue in multilingual settings’ (p. 283). Homogenization and standardization are always preferred to diversity and multilingualism, which are both generally considered obstacles to social harmonization. Minority language children are still commonly viewed from a deficit perspective and their languages continue to be stigmatized. Ignorance concerning fundamental principles of the nature of languages and of language learning processes is propagating stereotypes and myths. These disadvantages reinforce the vicious circle of school and society drop-out for language minority children and intensify the exclusion of languages generating ‘direct negative consequences for educational performances, socioeconomic well-being and sense of identity’ (p. 286). However, the authors insist on the fact that this vicious circle is ‘socially constructed’. The language barrier constitutes a content barrier and a cognitive and socioeconomic burden (p. 289) that engenders social discrimination within the walls of the classroom. Through Indian experiences, the authors establish the basis for MLE which starts with the development of curricula, textbooks, teaching and learning materials, and teacher training about the children’s cultural and daily lives.

In Part Five (pp. 301–344), researchers turn to ‘Analyzing Prospects for Multilingual Education to Increase Social Justice’. In chapter 16, Panda and Mohanty discuss ‘Language Matters, so Does Culture: Beyond the Rhetoric of Culture in Multilingual Education’, based on a programme called MLE+. The

authors clarify the definition of ‘culture’ and its implications for good practices in multilingual classroom settings. Following Vygotsky (1987), the authors argue that formal instruction gives children access to scientific concepts that they may reconceptualize in their everyday experiences. Therefore, they conducted thorough ethnographic surveys of minority language children’s everyday practices in order to make documentation available to teachers and ‘to train teachers to look at everyday activities [...] from the children’s learning perspectives’. In doing so, Panda and Mohanty enabled teachers to develop activities and pedagogic tools that remained interculturally informed and centred around children. This interweaving practice also offers alternatives to the ‘initiation–response–evaluation format that pervades classroom talks’ (p. 312). Their goals of increased attendance and greater community involvement were reached through MLE+ programmes anchored in ‘holistic, culturally situated and historically informed of culturally embedded social, mathematical, literacy and science practices’ and based on exchanges between culture and classroom. In chapter 17, ‘MLE Concepts, Goals, Needs and Expense: English for all or Achieving Justice?’, Skutnabb-Kangas, Phillipson, Panda and Mohanty accuse the failure of the ‘education for all’. Skutnabb-Kangas draws our attention to plans that have not yet been implemented: different adaptations of MLE around the world which show that the concept may have different historical backgrounds in different cultures. According to the authors, concepts like ‘balanced’, ‘additive’ and ‘subtractive bilingualisms’ or ‘monolingualism’, ‘bilingualism’ and ‘multilingualism’ are now becoming inadequate when it comes to dealing with linguistic heterogeneity and the complexity of globalization. As a result, these concepts should be rethought. Societies are confronted with the scholastic failure while trying to help minority language children to adjust to their surrounding environments worldwide. This issue consistently gains importance in a quickly globalizing world. At least in Europe more and more didactic, research-oriented and pedagogical programmes are being financed in order to unearth examples of good practices, hoping for a way out of this vicious circle of drop-outs. *Social justice through multilingual education* is an essential book for all linguists, teachers and specialists in education that offers answers to theoretical and didactical questions, as well as providing an index of most useful terms (pp. 381–389), and a mine of examples of successful practices grounded on experiences that have been carried out in Africa, Canada, South America, Northern Europe and Asia. In short: a ‘tiny little lantern to show the way’ to more social justice (Mohanty, p. 3).

## Reference

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978) *Mind in society*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.