

M AINTAINING LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY THROUGH MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION

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Abstract:

This paper focuses on the educational system of two states with different cultural backgrounds. On the one hand, this paper examines the current situation of Sami teaching in Finland and on the other hand, it describes the development of Kurdish education in Turkey. Through this paper I point out how education in minority languages can contribute to the maintenance of linguistic diversity in the above mentioned multilingual societies. In the multilingual Sápmi area the existing linguistic relationships are constantly changing, while the concept of linguistic diversity is redefined. In the last half decade, Turkey began taking into account the reality of multilingualism of the linguistically heterogeneous state. Today there are several possibilities to study the Kurdish language as a mother tongue.

Rezumat:

Această lucrare se concentrează asupra sistemului de învățământ din două state cu diferite medii culturale. Pe de o parte, această lucrare analizează situația actuală a predării limbii sami în Finlanda și pe de altă parte, ea descrie dezvoltarea învățământului în limba kurdă din Turcia. Prin această lucrare subliniez cum educația în limbile minorităților poate contribui la menținerea diversității lingvistice în societățile multilingve menționate mai sus. În regiunea multilingvă Sápmi relațiile lingvistice existente sunt în continuă schimbare, în timp ce conceptul diversității lingvistice este redefinit. În ultima jumătate de deceniu, Turcia a început să țină cont de realitatea de multilingvism al statului lingvistic

eterogen. Astăzi există mai multe posibilități de a studia limba kurdă ca limbă maternă.

Keywords: Finland, Turkey, Sami, Kurd, minority languages in education, linguistic diversity

The individuals living in the multiethnic and multilingual society of Europe must meet the unique needs of the multicultural environment.¹ According to the objectives of the EU related to language policy it is important to safeguard multilingualism. The EU encourages its citizens to learn at least two languages in addition to their mother tongue. When a speaker of a majority language learns a minority or a less known language he or she familiarizes with the traditions of that minority group and thus extremist ideologies are easier to be kept away. With the increase in the level of tolerance the language learner indirectly contributes to the maintenance of linguistic and cultural diversity.

Democracy, equality, diversity, universal rights, multiculturalism and particular attention to the individual can be considered those pillars of Western societies that define their attitudes to human and linguistic rights. It should be noted, however, that these rights were not equally available to the citizens, but in recent years a number of efforts were aimed at compensating them. This is true both about Finland and Turkey which needs to know that the EU has strict procedures that have to be met. The EU reminds the Turkish government that progress is needed in relation to the Kurdish problem in order to safeguard the country's stability, democracy and unity.

All states should recognize that subtractive education and subtractive programs which do not consider bilingualism as their objective and which see the learning of the official language or national language of the state the ultimate goal of instruction may lead to the eradication of

¹ Orsolya Nádor, "From Monolingualism to Multilingualism in the EU - Through Bilingual Minorities", in *Nations and National Minorities in the European Union*, ed. B. Bodó, M. Tonk (Cluj-Napoca: Scientia Publishing House, 2009), 67-74.

linguistic and cultural diversity.² However, if we consider the maintenance of linguistic diversity as a basic human interest, we should all sustain the application of multilingual education programs.

Sami languages and linguistic diversity in Finland

The Samis (Sami: *Sámi*) are the only indigenous people living in the northern parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. In Finland there are about 6000 Samis. 4000 of them live in *Sápmi*, in the region of Enontekiö, Inari, Utsjoki and Sodankylä. They make up one third of the total population in this area, but before World War II they represented half of the population. In Utsjoki they form a majority, whilst in other cities they are a minority. Three Sami languages are spoken in Finland: North Sami (*Davvoisámegiella*), Inari Sami (*anarâškielâ*) and Skolt Sami (*sää'mkïöll*).

In Finland there are specific curricula developed for the Sami education. The urban schools functioning in the traditional areas follow this Sami curriculum. In recent years, the *Sámediggi* was responsible for the developing and adaptation of the Sami curriculum.

In the case of Inari Sami there are several children who speak this language almost as a mother tongue. In the school of Inari about twelve children learn the Inari Sami language. For them immersion programs are offered whose goals are achieving competency in Inari Sami and gaining appreciation of the Sami culture. At school children use their mother tongue when encountering Sami pupils from other regions of *Sápmi*. This possibility has a beneficial influence on language revitalization and at the same time on helping language diversity forge ahead.

The teachers apply teaching methods which require active participation in the class, the language of instruction being solely Inari Sami. Their way of conducting instructional activities is part of the traditional Sami pedagogy, namely the transfer of cultural ideas and patterns of behaviour along with the Inari Sami language. Nevertheless, the differences among the distinct Sami languages and dialects impede the language maintenance. Different Sami languages or language varieties are used in the language nest and in the family, often causing the children to speak the official language in

² Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, "Linguistic Diversity, Human Rights and the "Free" Market", in *Language: A Right and a Resource. Approaching Linguistic Human Rights*, ed. M. Kontra et al. (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1999), 187-222.

the educational institutions. The maintenance of the integrity of the Sami linguistic environment is not unhindered because new children arriving at the language nest usually speak Finnish to the instructors. Although children are not allowed to speak Finnish during the lessons, a bilingual environment is created in the Inari language nest due to the fact that children socialize with each other in Finnish. Therefore, the group of Sami children present at the language nest can be described as heterogeneous from the identity and language background point of view.

In the language nests the children are acquainted with the Inari Sami vocabulary linked to the traditional Sami lifestyle, occupations and northern environment.³ In addition, Inari Sami textbooks, exercise books, spelling-books, idiom dictionaries, children's books, readers, psalm CDs, religious books, workbooks and parlour games are also accessible to the children attending the language nest. All the activities encourage the use of Inari Sami.

Sevettijärvi (Skolt Sami: Če'vetjǎ'urr) is the largest Skolt Sami village where 90% of the residents are Skolt. The school in this village began to introduce immersion teaching methods for the Sami in the early 1990s. The goal of this immersion program is achieving bilingualism for their pupils. The teachers' pedagogical approaches aim to help children develop bilingual competence through diverse creative writing tasks in the Sami language. In 1993 the village had the possibility to open a Skolt Sami language nest which eight years later was replaced by an adult education program called *Kultur siida*. The goal of this centre is to encourage the Sami language use in the family circle, to support language revitalization efforts, language maintenance as well as linguistic and cultural diversity.

Unfortunately, not all schools respect the immersion programs and consequently some children use the majority language at kindergarten or school and thus the use of Sami is tied only to communication with family members. However, language revitalization activities should not be left only to the families. Sami pupils even opt for the use of Finnish language at school owing to the language choices their schoolmates make.

Students completing the second level education can study North Sami in Oulu and Rovaniemi (North Sami: *Roavenjårga/Roavvenjårga*, Inari

³ Annika Jansson, *Sami Language at Home and at School: a Fieldwork Perspective* (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2005).

Sami: *Ruávinjargâ*, Skolt Sami: *Ruä'vnjargg*). The University of Oulu (Finnish: *Oulun Yliopisto*) is the only higher education institution in Finland where Sami can be studied as a mother tongue. The subject-matter of instruction is fully taught in North Sami, but the studies include the other Sami languages too, especially Inari and Skolt Sami. The students deal with subjects like history of the language, language theory and general linguistics. The North Sami can be chosen as a major since 1980, whereas Inari Sami can be studied as a minor and foreign language, and also interpreter training programs are available.

The Sami language and culture may also be studied at the University of Helsinki (Finnish: *Helsingin Yliopisto*), University of Lapland (Finnish: *Lapin Yliopisto*) in Rovaniemi, Sami Education Centre (Finnish: *Saamelaisalueen koulutuskeskus*, SAKK / Sami: *Sámi oahpahusguovddáš*, SOG) in Inari and Rovaniemi University of Applied Sciences (Finnish: *Rovaniemen ammattikorkeakoulu*, RAMK).

The activities of the Sami Education Centre: in the Sami Education Centre the official languages of instruction are Sami and Finnish, yet courses are taught also in other languages. The education centre aims to preserve and develop the Sami culture and support the writing and publication of Sami textbooks. In this establishment North or Inari Sami language and culture can be learnt along numerous professions.

The Sami language teaching, the existence of Skolt and Inari Sami language nests and the language revitalization projects hold these languages in higher esteem in the view of Sami speakers and have led to their greater use⁴.

Broadening democracy in Turkey

The Kurds (Kurdish: *Kurd*) are an indigenous ethnic minority inhabiting Kurdistan, which includes parts of Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria. In Turkey there are about 10–12 million Kurds and they make up 20% of the population.

In order to solve the Kurdish problem, it is important to recognize that it is a problem of ethnic origin. It is necessary to clearly and publicly acknowledge that the Kurds form a group which has its own cultural

⁴ Sari Pietikäinen et al., 'Regulating Multilingualism in the North Calotte: The Case of Kven, Meänkieli and Sámi Languages', *Acta Borealia* 27 no. 1 (2010): 1–23.

identity. After that the primary goal should be the ensuring of cultural autonomy. The linguistic and cultural diversity should be guaranteed by Turkish laws. The Turkish government ought to perform rapid changes related to minority language use. In the field of cultural reforms the following are essential: Kurdish language education at all levels, granting permission for publication, allowing various cultural events and festivals.⁵

In 2003 the Regulation on the Teaching of the Different Languages and Dialects Traditionally Used by Turkish Citizens in Their Daily Lives was published (Official Gazette - No. 25307). This regulation refers to the opening of private courses in these languages and dialects. In accordance with the provisions of Article 2 of the Regulation the Kurdish language can be taught only in private courses:

“Article 2: This Regulation covers the private courses, which can be opened in line with Law No. 625 on opening private courses to teach different languages and dialects traditionally used by Turkish citizens in their daily lives and the same functions and procedures for the language and dialect lessons which the Council of Ministers has decided for the education and teaching of different languages and dialects in line with Law No. 2923 on Foreign Language Education and Teaching and Teaching Different Languages and Dialects to Turkish citizens.”

Yet, the Turkish Government has taken the following measures to control the functioning of these courses: for the opening of institutions and starting teaching permission must be granted from the Ministry of Education. Therefore, these language courses are difficult to access in cities like Van, Batman and Şanlıurfa. Despite the fact that the Turkish authorities are waiting for the EU membership, they remain adamant against the claims of national minorities. The European Parliament, however, expects a solution to the Kurdish question as a condition of their access.

The members of the Kurdish Academy encourage the use of local dialects in order to maintain linguistic and cultural diversity. Holder (2008)⁶ also emphasizes the importance of protecting social and cultural rights in the case of indigenous peoples.

⁵ Henri J. Barkey and Graham E. Fuller, *Turkey's Kurdish Question* (Lanham Boulder, New York, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1998).

⁶ Cindy Holder, 'Culture as an Activity and Human Right: An Important Advance for Indigenous Peoples and International Law', *Alternatives* 33 (2008): 7-28.

The recognition and grant of minority language educational rights influence the intergenerational transmission of the language that is a vital factor in its maintenance. On the other hand, when a state recognizes exclusively the official language it violates the linguistic rights of its indigenous people.

Vizi (2005)⁷ points out that each state should respect its linguistically and culturally diverse society and all members of the society should be granted equal and unlimited educational, cultural and social rights. Skutnabb-Kangas (1998)⁸ considers that education is a fundamental human right which is essential in terms of language maintenance, enhancement and maintaining the linguistic and cultural diversity of a certain society.

Recent developments in the Kurdish language education

The importance of mother-tongue schooling has recently been recognized by the Turkish government. Turkey has taken steps to ensure the implementation of mother-tongue education. Thus it introduced the Kurdish language education in Turkish universities.

Higher education institutions that recently offer education in Kurdish language:

At Mardin Artuklu University⁹ (Turkish: *Mardin Artuklu Üniversitesi*, Kurdish: *Zanîngeha Mardin Artukluyê*) The Institute for Living Languages¹⁰ (Turkish: *Türkiyede Yaşayan Diller Enstitüsü*, TYDE) offers Kurdish language and literature courses, but for the time being only master's and doctoral university programs are provided. The master's program provides a two-year training approved by the Council of Higher Education (Turkish: *Yüksek Öğretim Kurulu*, YÖK). Students having a master's degree are given the opportunity to continue their research without interruption in a doctoral program. These graduates will be Turkey's future Kurdologists. Students may choose the Zazaki or Kurmanji/Kurmancî dialects as the medium of instruction. It is encouraging that many students consider Kurdish their mother tongue despite the fact that they cannot even demonstrate

⁷ Balázs Vizi, "Az európai integráció és a kisebbségi nyelvek", in *Nyelvi jogi környezet és nyelvhasználat*, ed. J. Péntek, A. Benő (Kolozsvár: Anyanyelvápolók Erdélyi Szövetsége Kiadó, 2005), 174–183.

⁸ Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, 'Human Rights and Language Wrongs - A Future for Diversity?', *Language Sciences* 20, no. 1 (1998): 5–27.

⁹ Opened in April 2010.

¹⁰ Opened in September 2010.

competence in this language. Even though Turkey is a multiethnic and multilingual state, few know the languages spoken in the country.

The Institute for Living Languages offers students a three-month Kurdish language course where they can study not only literature but also Zaza and Kurmanji dialects. After completing this course students are entitled to teach Kurdish language at universities. Optional Kurdish language courses are provided by Tunceli University (Turkish: *Tunceli Üniversitesi*).

The Bilgi University (Turkish: *Istanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi*) in Istanbul is the first Turkish university where Kurdish language, literature, history of the language, dialectology and lexicology can be studied. The Faculty of Letters offers Kurdish lectures from 2009.

The Sabanci University (Turkish: *Sabancı Üniversitesi*) in Istanbul also offers Kurdish language courses.

Furthermore, private training centres provide Kurdish language education at basic, intermediate and advanced levels. The first language course in Istanbul started in 2004, but similar courses are offered also in Riha, Êlih, Adana, Wan and Amed.

The private educational centre in Istanbul offers various programs for the language learners with different needs: programs for speakers whose mother tongue is Kurdish, but they cannot speak or write in Kurdish, programs for Turkish speakers who do not understand Kurdish and finally programs for those who would like to master the academic language.

The Turkish president, Abdullah Gül, stressed the importance of pluralism and the fact that it is the responsibility of the Turkish government to broaden democracy and to maintain linguistic and cultural diversity. In A. Gül's opinion the multitude of cultures secures Turkey's welfare and this welfare should be preserved. Moreover, the Kurdish culture is part of the existing cultures in Turkey and this fact cannot be denied. Özhan and Ete (2009)¹¹ share the same view.

Conclusions

In the multilingual *Sápmi* area the existing linguistic relationships are constantly changing, while the concept of linguistic diversity is redefined.

¹¹Taha Özhan and Hatem Ete, 'A New Agenda for the Kurdish Question', *Insight Turkey* 11:1 (2009): 97-114.

Today, the Sami languages are part of the primary and secondary school curricula as mother tongues and foreign languages. Thus the national curriculum is respectful of human rights and linguistic diversity, as well as students' cultural identity and mother tongue.¹²

In the last half decade, Turkey began taking into account the reality of multilingualism of the linguistically heterogeneous state. Today there are several possibilities to study the Kurdish language as a mother tongue, and the directors of various educational institutions claim that the speakers are interested in taking Kurdish language courses and university lectures. Moreover, relearning their mother tongue seems to be important to the Kurdish speakers.

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