

Language Policies and National Consciousness among the Northern Minorities

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Language Policies and National Consciousness among the Northern Minorities

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During the past thirty years, much sociolinguistic work has been done on the maintenance and significance of native languages among ethnic minorities. Although such studies have made a notable progress, they have mainly been concerned with the languages of either native or immigrant minorities in the Western industrial societies. The fates of these minority languages have usually been described with sympathy and humanity, but, at the same time, very little attention has been paid to the global aspects of language endangerment in regions such as the circumpolar North.

1. INTRODUCTION: AIM AND BACKGROUND OF THIS STUDY

In contrast to the relatively small number of languages spoken by the ethnic minorities living within the Western industrial societies, minority languages in many wild and remote areas of the developing countries, and also in the former and present socialist countries, have seldom been regarded as suitable objects of serious study, although such languages have sometimes sentimentally been called "vanishing languages". Scholars of sociolinguistics could obviously not find an effective framework in which minority languages of pre-industrialized societies could be dealt with on an egalitarian basis. Perhaps also, however seriously they may actually have been concerned about the fate of these languages, they may for various reasons have pretended to be indifferent to the issue.

Multilingualism in developing countries is generally, partly due to their having been historically under the colonial control of some European countries, much more complicated than in most European countries, where, especially in recent years, a more or less clear socio-political power relationship has been established between the dominant and the minority languages (more precisely, between the speakers of these languages). The majority of Western countries have gradually created language policies which recognize the rights of minority languages in their territories. Under such policies there is no need for the dominant languages to compete with minority languages for political supremacy. Thus, progressive bilingual education programs, as described by Fasold [FASOLD 1991: 311] as "conciliatory policies", have been possible to implement in some European countries, although educational, not to mention economic, benefits are not to be

expected of them. Such programs are accepted simply because they do not appear to do any harm, either.

On the other hand, most of the developing multiethnic countries, which have just gained freedom from the direct control of colonial states, with a lot of problems remaining to be solved, are confronted with many other urgent issues connected with the socio-political unification and the economic modernization of the state. After the numerous examples of nation-building in Europe, these aims of unification and modernization are often thought to be possible only through the adoption of a national language by means of standardizing, developing and popularizing a single modern written language. In many cases, such a language is simply the language of the majority, but, when a majority language is not available without heavy disputes, it can, for the time being, also be the colonial language left by the foreign rulers.

It is not rare that this whole process of language planning in developing countries is, in the eyes of the Western World, undertaken in quite an undemocratic or violent way. However, language planning is normally considered to be an internal domestic affair of each political state, and it would obviously be too intrusive to build up a political confrontation for the sake of minority languages in situations where the very existence of people is under threat, facing the dangers of poverty and famine. For the leaders of many developing countries, multilingualism is far from being a cultural resource. Rather, it is an annoying problem, blocking the way of the country towards national unity [LASINBANG & al. 1992: 335]. For them, any comments or advice from outsiders concerning the language rights of ethnic minorities are only uninvited and unwelcome help.

Unfortunately, many industrialized countries are not free from responsibility, either, for they do also offer examples of linguistic crisis among their own indigenous minority peoples. In particular, far in the north of our globe, there live dozens of ethnic groups whose languages are today seriously endangered due to the colonial exploitation of their lands by countries representing developed industrial societies. These ethnic groups used to have their own cultures, own languages and own societies, all of which the ruling states have tried to integrate totally into their dominant systems. The extent and acuteness of this problem have only recently been more generally recognized.

The socialist countries, on the other hand, always used to treat minority languages according to their own established principles and policies. It was probably only because these policies were officially presented in much more favorable terms than their counterparts in the Western world that very few people came to realize what the actual ethnic and linguistic situation of linguistic minorities under socialism was in countries such as the USSR¹⁾. The most serious problem encountered by any sincere attempt to study the situation was, however, the absence of any information through other than the official channels. Only the sudden flood of information after the dissolving of the USSR unveiled the true conditions of the linguistic minorities. We came to know, among other things, that the languages of

the so-called Small Peoples of the Far North are in a critical state [JANHUNEN 1991], just like the languages of the Northern minorities elsewhere. This realization, on the other hand, has finally led to some serious and extensive study, with real content, of the Northern minorities living in the territory of the former USSR.

We may agree, for various reasons indeed, that it would be profitable to account for all the Northern minority languages of the world as a single coherent group. Unfortunately, very few attempts have been made so far to describe the sociolinguistic problems of the Northern minority peoples in a holistic framework. The most prominent work, published in 1990 by UNESCO as an output report of a 1980 conference of Northern language specialists in Novosibirsk, offers only a few reserved discussions concerning the issue, reflecting perhaps the atmosphere characteristic of the former Soviet academic circles. Moreover, the diversity of the descriptive methods applied in the volume, together with the unbalanced selection of the topics treated, makes the whole UNESCO publication somewhat obscure. In spite of this, it contains a number of interesting individual articles with valuable concrete data.

In order to carry out a study of the Northern minorities with a purpose to improve their ethnic and linguistic situation, it is mandatory to establish a theoretical framework that is capable of dealing with the multitude of various data available on each language. One of the most crucial factors to be accounted for in this study, is the attitude of the ruling states toward their minorities, as manifested by the official language policies ²⁾. As far as the Northern minorities are concerned, their relation with the states has until very recently been particularly strongly unilateral in favor of the state structures. This must be one of the factors responsible for the present situation of the Northern minority languages.

2. THE CURRENT LANGUAGE POLICIES FOR THE NORTHERN MINORITIES

It is important, first of all, to understand, that language policy does not constitute an independent sphere of linguistics with its own methodology, for it represents simply one aspect of the sociopolitical complex that may be termed nationality policy (ethnic policy, minority policy), in general. A state's attitude toward a certain ethnic group is supposed to be reflected, both substantially and symbolically, in its language policy toward the language spoken by the group concerned. It is therefore not surprising that a state can adopt both positive and negative measures with regard to ethnic languages spoken within its territory.

Anderson [ANDERSON 1990: 127–130] has tried to divide alternative state policies toward minorities roughly into four types along a continuum, ranging from extreme persecution to the most tolerant treatment. The main criterion in this division, though not mentioned explicitly, is the degree of readiness to accept demands presented by minorities. Each stage along the continuum has presumably a direct counterpart in the field of language policy. However, in the following

classification of the language policies adopted toward the Northern minorities, I will adopt a slightly simplified model, paying more attention to the specific forms taken by these policies. Below I will present three major types of language policy.

1) Assimilating or exterminating policy. Under this heading we are dealing with a thorough and consistent assimilative policy, aiming at eliminating minority languages through a total ignorance of ethnic and linguistic rights by banning the use of minority languages in administration and education. In contrast to the third type below, an ideology oriented one, we may call this first type an *ideal-oriented* one, in that it seeks to establish an ideal political state of one nation, one language and one country. In extreme cases, as observed both historically and currently in many parts of the world, violent and offensive actions have been taken to get a language out of existence. Such actions may involve the destruction of linguistic materials, the annihilation of language monuments or the execution and deportation of minority leaders, intellectuals, teachers, etc. In more moderate cases, as we are going to see hereafter from numerous examples taken from the North, this type of policy may take the form of forced or voluntary assimilation to a privileged language through various means. Even a most tactically organized bilingual education program can result in linguistic assimilation and extermination.

This type of language policy has been prevalent in most contacts of the American and Japanese authorities with their native peoples. It is notable that the period of political expansion over aboriginal areas roughly coincided with that of political and regional unification of the state structure in both Japan and the United States. The idea of linguistic unification may have corresponded to the intentions of state configuration.

Without repeating unnecessarily the history of the American expansion toward the West, I will only point out a couple of facts. The westward colonization was made to appear 'legal' by means of the so-called Indian treaties, which confined the aboriginal ethnic groups to particular limited territories. In 1887, when the famous Dawes Act was passed, Indians were allotted plots of land, with the intention of finally integrating the native population into the state's citizenship structure. During this time strong linguistic assimilative policies were adopted and applied. Native children were separated from their linguistic and cultural surroundings by sending them into boarding schools. Children were forbidden to speak their own languages even under threat of physical penalty. No positive steps were taken towards the American native languages before the 1960s [ZEPEDA & HILL 1991: 138].

The situation in Alaska was pretty much the same. The notable thing here is that during the last period under the Russian colonial rule, some languages actually benefited from the policy of the Russian Orthodox Church, as represented, especially, by Ioan Veniaminov (1797–1879), who provided several native peoples with written languages and literatures of their own. This favorable policy ended with the adoption of the anti-native language policy launched by Sheldon Jackson,

who, for example, forbade the use of native languages at school. Krauss [KRAUSS 1980: 15] evaluates the period of the Russian Orthodox language policy by saying that

the third Russian period in Alaska was not only more beneficial in the history of Alaska Native languages and cultures than the earlier Russian periods, but also more beneficial than any of the following American periods.

It was only as late as 1967 that the well-known Federal Bilingual Education Law was passed in the United States. However, it only *permitted*, but did *not require*, bilingual education for children whose mother tongue was other than English [KRAUSS 1980: 28].

The Japanese conquest and occupation of Hokkaido, the genuine Ainu land, during the 18th through 19th century, was carried out in no less brutal way. The Edo government, competing with Japanese merchants for easy profits obtained from trade with the Ainus, expanded its control over Hokkaido through force and conciliation³⁾. These efforts were further intensified after Russia's aspirations in the region became more evident. In 1855 the Edo government put Hokkaido under its direct control, after which a strong assimilative policy was adopted toward the Ainus. In 1902 special schools were opened for the Ainu, with the aim of assimilating the natives both linguistically and culturally. These schools prohibited children to speak their Ainu mother tongue by means of punishment and humiliation. Up to the present day the Japanese government has not taken a single step in favor of the Ainu language. Until quite recently it has not even admitted the fact that Japan is a multi-ethnic country.

2) Arbitrary and egocentric policy. This type of language policy exhibits no integrated approach to the question of minority languages. The state's attitude is indifferent towards the fate of linguistic diversity. In their contacts with aboriginal populations, the authorities tend to be concerned with immediate profit only. However, the existence of minority populations and languages in this framework is not necessarily regarded as negative from the point of view of the state's interests. Occasionally, the attitude of the state can even be quite positive, and a protective hand may be extended to the minorities, especially when this secures the prospects of profitable cooperation.

The language policies of the Nordic countries have been, until quite recently, mainly of this type. The first contacts of Norsemen with Sami probably began more than a millennium ago in the form of peaceful trade exchange along the northern coasts of the Scandinavian Peninsula, though possibly also in the form of plundering expeditions by the Vikings to the inner Sami area. In any case, the aim of the intruders was not to occupy or exploit Sami land directly, for they depended heavily on the productive activities of the Samis. Later, when the Nordic political states expanded and defined their territories, the crowns even tried to restrict the influx of alien people into the Sami area, apparently in order to protect the

economic interests of the states themselves. Even in the Border Treaty of 1751 (the so-called "Lapp Codicil"), concluded between the Nordic powers, which in practice for the first time divided the Sami Land (Lapland) 'officially', the state authorities tried to take into consideration the needs of the Samis to pursue their various activities across the state borders. But later, in the second half of the nineteenth century, when European national romanticism began to stimulate the national consciousness of the majority people in each Nordic state, assimilative policies were gradually adopted with regard to the Sami populations.

Under such historical circumstances, the evolution of the general ethnic policies was almost precisely reflected by that of the corresponding language policies. Cultural and linguistic activities among the Samis were initiated in the 16th and 17th centuries by Christian missionaries, who followed the expansion of the state structures towards the North. During this period some Sami dialects were supplied with alphabets and some reading materials, but the latter were mostly of a religious kind. Children in some areas were occasionally taught to write and read in Sami at so-called church schools, but a general literacy among the Sami population was neither intended nor achieved. Meanwhile, the states took no active part in these activities until the period of national unification mentioned above. From this time on, the states exercised an active policy of linguistic assimilation by prohibiting the use of Sami in schools.

The Russian Czarist regime may also be included in this category. During the long period of expansion towards the east and north, the Russians were certainly no more human than the Americans or the Japanese were in their contacts with indigenous peoples. But it may be said that the general attitude of the Russians towards the cultures and languages of the peoples of Siberia was rather lenient, and little was done by the Russian government to interfere with the linguistic diversity of the region. There were even cases suggesting that the Czarist regime had a rather enlightened understanding of the needs of indigenous peoples, especially along the eastern borderlands of the empire. According to Kreindler [KREINDLER 1984: 346] such cases would include, for instance, "Catherine's Educational Commission that recommended schools among the non-Russians that would take into account their language and way of life, [and] Speransky's Siberian Reforms in 1822 that included a special provision granting the natives the right to use their own languages for their official purposes."

A similar inclination could be found among the Orthodox missionaries of the Czarist era. The most prominent example is offered by the work of N. I. Il'minskii, who tried to introduce native language education to the peoples of the Volga region by training mother tongue teachers⁴). Also the activities of the Russian Orthodox missionaries in Alaska, as mentioned above, may be regarded as an expression of the same policy.

Although the ultimate aim of all missionary work has, of course, always been the religious conversion of alien populations, many early missionaries working in the North were actually the first outsiders to be interested in the local ethnic

languages. It was these enlightened persons who created functioning writing systems for several native languages, left written records in these languages, and probably also taught native children to read and write in them. In addition to the work of the Russian Orthodox church in Siberia and Alaska, such work was successfully carried out by the Anglican church in Alaska and by the Nordic Protestant churches in northern Scandinavia. On the other hand, there are examples of churches and sects that have, to the contrary, made every effort to persuade people not to use their own native languages.

3) Ideology-oriented wholesale policy. In human history, the USSR was second only to the short-lived French Revolution to hold a universal principle as the groundwork of nation building: the latter universal human rights, and the former the idea of class struggle. Yet both differed greatly from each other in their treatment of the ethnic groups within their respective territories.

It is, indeed, interesting to note that even when such a multinational state as France or Russia recognizes the principle of the universal equal rights of all nationalities and peoples, the actual effects from the point of view of the linguistic rights of minority groups may turn out to be either positive or negative. France tried (as it is still trying) to unify the republic at the expense of its minorities. We know very well the disastrous consequences of the early language policies which aimed at imposing French, the *langue d'Oil*, upon all provinces and regions where so-called *patois* were spoken [JACOB & GORDON 1985: 112–114].

On the contrary, the USSR provided an example of how a universal principle can be used for carrying out epoch-making massive experiments with languages. The Soviet state, during its early phase, decided to support the continuing existence of ethnic groups and ethnic languages. This meant the implementation of a consistent program of language planning in order to equip native languages with new social functions. This program also involved the creation of new written standards and literary languages, itself a complex process. It goes without saying that in the course of this work, several types of problems were encountered.

Czarist Russia had conquered Siberia by resorting to force whenever it was necessary, but the Czar had no reason to interfere linguistically in the newly-conquered territories. By contrast, the Soviet state, soon after it had established its power in the northern and eastern parts of the Russian empire, adopted the view that minority populations should be integrated into the new system by educating them in their own languages⁵). The Soviet government was, however, poorly informed about the Northern peoples, whose ways of living were definitely different from those of industrialized societies. In addition to investigating their social and linguistic situation, the authorities therefore decided to improve their standard of living in order to make it easier for them to enter the new society. At the same time, for practical reasons, the notion "Small Peoples of the Far North" was coined. For field work, the government employed scientists and politicians who had been exiled to Siberia during the former regime. Contemporary reports show

how passionate the atmosphere was in which these researchers of the early Soviet period carried out their field work in the North under most difficult conditions. However, this period of enthusiasm and positive language policy did not last long.

When Stalin's infamous totalitarian campaign began to override the Leninist nationality policy in the late thirties, it affected also the Northern minorities. Maintaining a superficial resemblance to the original policy, Russification and assimilation of the peoples then continued till the late eighties. It was not rare that even some direct methods, such as those mentioned under the first type above, were applied to undermine the status of native languages — this happened, for instance, in the Ukraine, in the Volga region and in the Central Asian Islamic states. However, even after half a century of such policy, the linguistic conditions of the Northern minorities in the territory of the former USSR are somewhat better than those of their counterparts in Japan or the United States. Though many populations are at the verge of extinction, the general rate of native speakers is higher in the Russian North and the use of the aboriginal languages is formally maintained for such advanced purposes as literature and broadcast. We may attribute this to the explicitly written laws and decrees which aim at securing the official regional status of local languages.

The theory and measures of the Soviet nationality policy were also adopted, at least in principle, by China soon after the victory of the communist regime. In practice, however, China's minority policy has been realized in a somewhat different way, for the centralizing inclination of China was from the very beginning predominant. This explains part of the differences observed today in the linguistic conditions of minority populations in China and Russia.

To the end of this list of examples of ideology-oriented policies, we must add the recent developments in Scandinavia, Canada, Greenland as well as, partly, the United States (with Japan remaining far back of the others). These developments also reflect an ideology-oriented approach, though not one based on the socialistic nationality theory but, rather, on the principle of multilingualism and human linguistic rights. In the mentioned countries, especially since the second half of the eighties, remarkable changes have been taking place in favor of minority languages. In the Finnish Samiland, for instance, the Sami language has finally obtained the status of a regional official administrative language, and this status is gradually being corroborated by various kinds of additional measures, as required by an official language. This example was soon followed by the Norwegian Samiland.

In the United States the 'Native American Language Act' was passed in 1990, after the resolution formulated at the 1988 *International Conference of the Native American Language Institute*. This legislation is epoch-making in the history of the US language policy, in that it assigns the responsibility to the states to preserve, protect, and promote the rights and freedom of Native Americans to use, practise, and develop Native American languages, and to encourage the use of native languages as a medium of instruction in schools [ZEPEDA & HILL 1991: 151–152].

We should perhaps emphasize once again that the three main types of language policy listed above (1 to 3) are not necessarily sharply distinct from each other, nor are they mutually exclusive. Even under a single political power, the practical measures applied by the authorities with regard to minority languages are not always uniform or consistent. For instance, it may come as a surprise to some that in the USSR, in the midst of Stalin's totalitarian campaign, believed to have oppressed minorities by all possible measures, education in local aboriginal languages actually flourished, especially when we look at the number of different languages used for school instruction [KREINDLER 1982: 10, LALLUKKA 1990: 183]. We should also bear in mind that the actual content of any language policy may change radically in a short time, depending on the general nationality policy of a government.

3. POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF LANGUAGE POLICIES

What kind of practical effects have the different types of language policy, together with the underlying general nationality policies, brought about to the Northern minorities in different countries?

It is, first of all, necessary to admit that there are many positive results, achieved in different frameworks of language policy. To single out one field of such positive results, we may mention the creation of writing systems and literary languages, as achieved during the early years of the Soviet language policy. The new literary languages were meant to be part of a program involving so-called *corpus planning*, whose ultimate aim was to broaden the functions and the social domain of the minority languages concerned. Although some of the literary languages thus created remained in nominal use only, the overall effects of the program are not to be underestimated. Emerging at a very early stage, almost half a century ahead of similar attempts elsewhere, the Northern literary languages of the USSR did have a very favorable impact on the existence of the corresponding ethnic groups, all of which had previously lacked access to literacy in any language. We may compare the Soviet situation with that observed in both Japan and North America just a decade or so ago. It is not difficult to see that none of the Northern literary languages of the former USSR have declined so radically as Ainu or many North American Indian languages. Of course, this should not conceal from us the fact that most of the Northern languages of the USSR are seriously endangered today.

The potentially most important positive step that can be taken under a language policy is the granting of an official status to minority languages within their assigned territories of use. Such a status will constantly require attention from the administrative authorities, so that the minority languages declared official are used in a variety of situations and domains (publications, mass media, speeches at official ceremonies, etc.). This naturally contributes to the awakening of an ethnic and linguistic consciousness among the minorities concerned. Unfortunately-

ly, very few countries have taken this step with regard to their linguistic minorities, and almost no cases are known from the North prior to World War II. Early examples of relatively successful official languages can again be found in the eastern parts of the former USSR, where some large minorities, such as the Yakuts and the Buryats, not included in the list of the "Small Peoples of the Far North", have for several decades been developing the official functions of their native languages.

The list of negative effects caused by various types of language policy is long. All of these are on the responsibility of the political states within whose territories the affected minority groups live.

First of all, there are the effects of the **intentional policies** which expressly aim at undermining the functions, domains and user bases of minority languages. As a result, the use of the targeted minority languages tends to decline, at least in public settings. In the long run, the number of native speakers also diminishes and the transmission of the languages to new generations is discontinued. These effects can be obtained by depriving minority populations of access to public media (press, broadcasts, etc.) in their own languages. Sometimes, as it has happened in the USSR and China, minority languages, especially when they have written standards, are transformed, under the camouflage of "modernization" and "civilization", in the direction of the dominant state languages by the forced introduction of alien lexical and grammatical features.

However, in many cases, the direct use of intentional policies aiming at exterminating a minority language does not lead to the intended result. To the contrary, an attempt to restrict the functions and domains of a language may also lead to a reaction from its otherwise dormant speakers, who under the threat of a hostile language policy awaken to realize the significance of their inherited linguistic identity. It is therefore not surprising that many serious and fatal cases of language endangerment have actually been caused by seemingly **unintentional policies**, perhaps innocent and well meant in their original administrative context. Such policies are not so easily noticed by the affected minority populations, so they are not likely to stimulate any positive reactions.

The most common way to promote a mainstream language is to adopt a language policy that is expressly favorable only to its users, while other languages are simply ignored. Under such a policy it is only the dominant majority language that is included in programs of corpus planning (enriching and broadening the functions and domains of a language by institutional authorities). Cases of public use (official documents, speeches, economic and cultural activities, press, broadcasts) will then increasingly be restricted to the favored dominant language, which will also be the only language in which education is offered to citizens.

Naturally, the inapplicability of a language to purposes other than everyday affairs will reduce its speakers' linguistic confidence in their own identity. Restricted chances to use one's own language outside the sphere of home and family will increase the motivation of the affected minority to learn and use the dominant

majority language. The status of the latter is often enhanced by the uncontrolled influx of majority individuals and groups to minority territories (new settlers, government officials and civil servants, teachers, workers). Under such circumstances the increasing exclusion of the original local language from all public channels of mass media easily makes minority children believe that their language is, indeed, underrated in the surrounding society. As a result, children lose their interest in learning their own language, while parents also give up speaking it to their children, thus leading to a complete language shift within just three generations. Such cases of rapid language shift are known to have taken place even among populations that previously seemed to be completely monolingual in their own native language. For instance, it has happened that all the children in a native Sami-speaking community suddenly started using Finnish with each other when the village received its first Finnish-speaking family [KOMITEANMIETINTÖ 1973: 209].

In alienating minority children from their mother tongues, schools have also played a significant role. Boarding schools, in particular, are known to have been detrimental to the continuity of minority languages from generation to generation, in that they have separated minority children both physically and mentally from their natural mother tongue environments at a very early age. The early school age, especially the years before the age of 12, is now correctly regarded to be the most critical period in the development of the linguistic competence of a child.

It is also known that in many countries, and under many different types of official policy, ignorant school teachers have simply prohibited minority children from speaking their language or languages under the threat of physical or mental punishments, ranging from minor slapping to hanging a heavy piece of wood on the child's neck. It is surprising, indeed, how universally similar the forms of such "education" have been, and still are, at the grass root level in different countries. Examples have been recorded from, for instance, the United States from a period as late as the seventies [ZEPEDA & HILL 1991: 183].

In connection with the problem of linguistic assimilation it may be suitable to account here for some aspects of **bilingual education**. Examples can be drawn from the Soviet experience. Although the principle of mother tongue education was introduced to minority schools during the early years of Soviet power, the curriculum also incorporated an increasing amount of Russian language studies. A knowledge of Russian, it was explained, was necessary for the purposes of interethnic communication. However, the role of Russian as a language of instruction in non-Russian schools continued to grow to the extent that it finally became the main or sole language of all primary education. The 1958 Educational Reform replaced the principle of mother tongue education in school instruction by that of "free choice of language". This change of policy caused a fatal damage to many middle-scale languages of autonomous republics all over the USSR, notably to several Finno-Ugric languages of the Volga region [LALLUKKA 1990: 186-], for after the reform the number of schools that used native languages decreased

sharply.

As far as the Northern minorities are concerned, the original aim was to use the native languages in primary classes only, while Russian was planned to take over gradually during the higher grades. Unfortunately, due to the lack of teachers and teaching materials in the native languages, many schools for the Northern minorities have always been working in Russian from the very first grade. With the native languages taught only nominally and under generally unfavorable conditions, a large part of minority children in the Soviet North has not been able to resist to the pressure towards language shift, with monolingualism in the dominant Russian language as the inevitable and deplorable result.

Thus, the implementation of so-called bilingual education for the Northern minorities has tended to lead to monolingual results. Even some Soviet scholars almost openly admitted that bilingualism among minorities could only be a transitional stage towards monolingualism in the dominant language [FEDOROV 1983: 40-41, ISAEV 1977: 200-201]. Even when some sort of bilingualism was achieved, it tended to involve a restriction of the functions and domains of the minority languages:

The transition of the small peoples of Siberia to bilingualism resulted in the narrowing of the sphere of application of the native language[s] and in the curtailment of its [their] functions. [These] are a necessary phenomenon under modern conditions. [FEDOROV 1983: 41]

Beginning with the 1960s Soviet sociolinguists carried out intensive studies on the bilingualism of different nationalities, arriving at various tentative classifications of the Soviet languages with regard to their social functions. We now know that these studies were actually meant to pave the way for the coming programs of systematic Russification and Sovietization.

Elsewhere in the world, starting with the late sixties, some scholars began to warn against the dangers of what they conceived of as some kind of insufficient bilingualism. Their argument was based on the assumption that the ability of a child to learn simultaneously two or more languages has certain restrictions which, under unfavorable conditions, can lead to the phenomenon of so-called semilingualism (or "half-lingualism", as used in the Nordic linguistic terminology). In this framework, it was thought that a child (for instance, a minority child) who starts receiving school instruction in an alien language (for instance, in the dominant majority language) ends up with knowing both languages imperfectly, a situation likely to affect the later psychological and intellectual development of the individual. Although similar problems arising from the imposing of an alien language on a child had been noticed much earlier⁶⁾, they had generally been ignored by both parents and authorities. The new argument of semilingualism, however, aroused wide attention and resulted in sensational consequences among minority parents and teachers in many Western societies. The issue was immediately exploited by the Samis to support their claim of native language

education [SYOOZI 1990: 892–895].

After the semilingualism debate, new theories and methods have been sought for bilingual education. It is almost inevitable for most minorities to live within the sphere of one or more mainstream languages. Several models have by now been presented which are intended to minimize the harm of bilingualism to minority languages, allowing them to coexist with the mainstream languages. Comparative experiments with such methods as the *additive* bilingual method and the *subtractive* (transitive) bilingual method have been carried out since the seventies in the United States, Canada, Greenland and Samiland. During the eighties a nearly complete system for native language education has been introduced in Samiland. It is also remarkable that the possible dangers of semilingualism have been noted in China, where native language education has been tentatively applied in several minority areas [SYOOZI 1987: 1208].

4. NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND LANGUAGE MOVEMENTS

We have seen above how profound effects, both positive and negative, the national language policies in different countries have had on the fates of northern minority languages. The decisive role of language policies is also emphasized in many recent sociolinguistic studies, when they try to predict the rates of viability and the prospects of survival of languages in terms of language ecology, etc. However, there are other factors of relevance to linguistic survival. Without going into all of them here, I will concentrate on the increasing significance of language movements among minority populations. These are closely connected with the new wave of ethnic consciousness which now seems to be emerging among the indigenous peoples of the North.

It is usually taken for granted that language movements are strongly motivated by an innate feeling of people concerning the importance of language as an ethnic symbol — indeed, as the most inseparable part of their ethnic identity. Numerous historical examples imply, that people do instinctively stick to their native languages, while native languages also delimit ethnic groups from each other, further corroborating the ethnic consciousness of their speakers. We are thus persuaded to accept the well-known views of the eighteenth to nineteenth-century European national-romanticists, such as Fichte, Herder and Humboldt, on the existence of a link between language and national identity. It seems, however, that the concept of such a link is not a self-evident truth to all ethnic groups. For some ethnic groups, the issue of linguistic identity is not important, and it may even be totally irrelevant. Several field linguists and anthropologists have reported cases of people who are obviously not afraid of abandoning their inherited language. In some cases, a community may even be ready to adopt the language of its enemies as its new dominant first language [BREZINGER et al. 1991: 35–36].

At the time when the peoples of Europe were seeking to strengthen their national consciousness in order to form their own national states, it was the

Romantic idea of language as the most natural boundary of a nation which inspired ethnic groups to political independence. From the philosophical point of view, this idea was from the beginning irrational, prescriptive and moralistic, hence it was also potentially energetic and emotional. We now know that it has led to the emergence of some of the most arrogant and aggressive political states in the world. Even today, when the relation between language and nationality has been studied much more profoundly and comprehensively, the old romantic passion lives on, this time within the national movements of minorities. The same spirit is now followed by minorities in their attempts to recover the rights for their native languages from the control of nation states. What the latter have sown in their field a century ago is now growing in their backyard.

Although nothing rules out the possibility that the notion of the existence of a relation between language and national identity may emerge independently in situations where either language or national identity, or both, are felt to be in danger, the nationalistic ideas among minorities today may mainly be regarded as the result of external transplantation. Some ethnic groups simply got such ideas infused into their consciousness during the implementation of the normative ethnic policies in countries such as China and the Soviet Union. As Fedorov [FEDOROV 1983: 40] notes, the language policies for the Northern minorities and their accomplishments in the Soviet Union "prompted an intellectual advance by speakers of these languages, gave them the awareness of belonging to this ethnos, awakened and affirmed their national consciousness". Other populations have learnt the elements of nationalism from their oppressors in reaction to various assimilative or other offensive measures. The native North Americans, the Ainus, and even the Samis perhaps owe the formation of their national consciousness partly, at least, to the policies of the political states expanding to their territories.

The earliest case of ideologically-inspired national and ethnopolitical consciousness in the North was observed among the Samis towards the end of the last century, seeking after a general improvement in the conditions of living. The Samis first formed some regional protest organizations in Sweden and Norway. Soon afterwards, these merged into cultural organizations with the express aim of promoting cultural and literary activities in the Sami language. Even so, lacking an official status and all other necessary institutions (native-language school education, materials for teaching, mass media, norms for linguistic standardization, resources for lexicological and stylistic enrichment), the Sami language continued to decline until a positive turn finally took place, just a decade or so ago.

Since the sixties and seventies there have been numerous remarkable changes in the language policies regulating the fates of the Northern minorities. Concessions from the dominant states have now finally been obtained in the form of native-language education, institutions for language planning, as well as radio and TV broadcasting. At the same time, the legal functions of at least some of the indigenous languages in the North have been increased, allowing official services

and documents to be produced and circulated in them. To a considerable extent, such achievements are certainly the result of a worldwide improvement of the public attitude towards indigenous and minority peoples. It is now increasingly widely recognized that minority populations should have the right of ethnic self-determination, the right of controlling over their own territories, and the right of receiving education in their own languages.

However, even with such positive changes in the external atmosphere taking place, we should not underestimate the internal role of language movements among the minorities themselves⁸⁾. Since the sixties and seventies there have been radical changes in the attitude of minorities towards language movements, and these changes are partly responsible for the recent upsurge of national consciousness all over the world. Language movements, on the other hand, have influenced language policies. In this context, we may note some important factors peculiar to the national and language movements of minorities:

(1) All such movements are organized under the collective will of an ethnic group or nation, thus mobilizing and stimulating all the people belonging to the group.

(2) The movements follow the same basic patterns of organization as are also observed in the language planning activities of the mainstream populations.

(3) The movements demand the international recognition of certain universal principles, such as human rights, in general, and the mother tongue right. Civil rights and environmental questions are often discussed in the same overall framework as language.

(4) The concept of "Northernness" has been introduced and established as a symbol consolidating the collective identity of the Northern minorities.

The last factor may need some further explanation. It has already become clear that it is actually extremely difficult to find generally valid objective criteria for the definition of the Northern peoples. To me, at least, it seems that the concept of "Northern minorities", even when used by the Northern minorities themselves, has primarily a political meaning, in that it allows the populations concerned to be grouped under a single label for the sake of political unity against a common threat. The recent movements of the Northern peoples, which have resulted in their reorganization into political coalitions such as the *Association of the Northern Minorities* in Russia (founded in 1990), are also clear evidence of this. It seems that "Northernness", as propagated by the Northern minorities, is meant to be associated with such positively exotic phenomena as natural economy and shamanist religion [PENTIKÄINEN 1993: 25-29]. The attractiveness of the term is also reflected by the fact that certain populations, notably the Ainus, who can hardly be characterized as Northern peoples in the strict sense of the word, are seeking membership in the category.

Side by side with the active language movements, several minorities have started to take part in direct language planning themselves. There are even cases of minorities influencing language policies, as happened in certain parts of northern

Norway, where the Sami language was introduced as the official language by a communal decision of the Samis. The Samis have also been taking over an increasing responsibility for the linguistic research of their language (languages), once a monopoly of scholars representing the mainstream populations. Elsewhere in the world, the most prominent case is probably offered by the Maya movement in Guatemala, as reported by England [ENGLAND 1992: 29–35]. The Mayas claim to have the right to be concerned not only with what is written about them and their language, but also with whatever profits may arise from such writing.

In the original and ideal case, when a *mother tongue* is really the *language of the mother* and thus the first language for a child to learn, it is the best medium for conveying even the most delicate emotions between individuals and generations. This kind of mother tongue can be protected simply in a framework which recognizes the universal right of all human beings to express themselves. In such a framework it is justified and natural to defend minority languages in all spheres of their use against the introduction of dominant languages. There are still many minorities in the world which require protection at this very concrete level.

However, among some other ethnic minorities the status of “mother tongue” has undergone a substantial change, in that they have already adopted a dominant language for one or more spheres of communication. Since the dominant language in such cases has often already become the first language of at least the younger generation, it is no longer possible to define “mother tongue” on the basis of expressive competence. However, this does not necessarily mean that the significance of the original ethnic language as the true mother tongue has been seriously reduced. To cope with this terminological problem, Skutnabb-Kangas [SKUTNABB-KANGAS 1989] has suggested that “mother tongue” should be defined on the basis of what she calls *origin* and *identification*. She declares:

Use of a combination of definitions by ORIGIN and IDENTIFICATION shows the highest degree of linguistic right awareness. ORIGIN is something basic that the person herself/himself cannot change, and therefore it should be respected. IDENTIFICATION has to do with a basic human right to self-definition... It is with reference to the definitions by ORIGIN and internal IDENTIFICATION that the concept “mother tongue” should be understood in any declaration of linguistic rights: The mother tongue(s) is (are) the language(s) one has learned first and identifies with. [SKUTNABB-KANGAS 1989: 79.].

We may remark here that, under conditions of extensive linguistic assimilation, the original native language of a minority tends to take the role of a subjective symbol of nationality, rather than that of an actual medium of communication. We should therefore be prepared to encounter cases where people have two mother tongues: one *actual mother tongue*, for which they may claim all the functions implied by the mother tongue right, and the other a *symbolic mother tongue*, by which they identify themselves ethnically. Below I quote a passage from an essay by a Korean resident in Japan, reproduced by Toyota in his book [TOYOTA 1969].

For Korean children who only know Japanese, there is no other way to express themselves than to resort to Japanese. When they are taught Korean, some decisive change takes place in their thinking. That is, although they have known conceptually that they are Korean, through learning to think in their Korean mother tongue, they start to regard Japanese as a foreign language and realize that they belong to the Korean nationality.

This passage should not to be taken quite literally, for it is improbable that children could acquire the competence of thinking in a new language so easily. Nevertheless, we can see how much an effort to teach (and learn) the ethnically symbolic mother tongue can mean to the identity and pride of children. Even a single phrase or word in their original "mother tongue" may suffice to make them believe that they have acquired the way of thinking peculiar to that particular language. We may conclude that the concept once formalized by the European Romanticists concerning an inseparable link between nation and language seems to have deeply rooted among minorities in various parts of the world.

Finally, I must turn our attention to some negative aspects of the recent political changes that have affected the territories of the Northern minorities especially in Russia, possibly also elsewhere. It is well known that the sudden wave of democratization and liberalization following the disintegration of the Soviet Union gave a stimulus for the Northern minorities of Russia to raise their national consciousness and to activate their ethnic movements. As mentioned above, these movements have taken various forms, including that of linguistic movements. However, the period of democratization has also meant a drastic reduction of the actual legal rights of the Northern minorities.

The major negative change involves the virtual nullification of the previous theoretical framework which, in spite of its many defects, nevertheless did guarantee a certain minimal level of formal rights protecting the indigenous populations and their languages. By contrast, the current ethnic movements of the minorities, including language movements, are increasingly being confronted by an aggressive nationalism as well as pragmatic profit-searching on the Russian side. In such a framework, any concessions to the demands of the minorities are regarded as nothing more than waste of time and money.

5. CONCLUSION: AFTERTHOUGHTS ON LANGUAGE PRESERVATION

We can, of course, ask what is the reason why every language in the world should be protected from becoming extinct. Is it because all languages are equally valuable and indispensable for the human race? What is, then, the criterion of value in this context? Is it sufficient to prepare an exhaustive documentation of a language and then let it die? To me such an approach is mere pretension of professional linguists.

In reality, the universal principles propagating the preservation of languages and cultures for the sake of mankind are of little interest to those individuals and

communities whose own language is endangered. Their attitude for or against the preservation of their language depends on much more concrete considerations connected with individual and communal welfare. Fasold [FASOLD 1984: 305-313] lists up five factors that should be considered when evaluating whether a language is worth being supported as a medium for bilingual education. They are: (1) the extent to which the language is used for purposes of wider communication; (2) the number of speakers using the language; (3) the state of language development within the community; (4) the so-called group preference factor; (5) the so-called drop-out factor. In my opinion, all of these factors are based on utilitarianism and serve to evaluate only the probability of success, not necessarily the need of the speakers. However, what other criteria could we use in order to help languages in danger?

I think that we should, indeed, give priority to the actual needs and feelings of people. The idea that all people should be made conscious of the importance of universal language salvation is simply wrongly deduced from the principles of Western humanism. It is unrealistic to force people to be activists in a language movement, if they do not want to preserve their language. Some minorities, however, are really concerned with the fate of their language, and they should be helped even when their language has no chance of becoming a full-fledged medium of communication, capable of filling all the functions characteristic of major languages.

I have already dealt with the symbolic and consolidating aspect of native languages for minorities. This aspect is very important for the Northern minorities, many of whom have formed their national consciousness on the basis on their languages, as opposed to the languages of the dominant majority populations. Language movements have, indeed, greatly contributed to the evolution of ethnic awareness among the Northern minorities. Obviously, the most important function of the native languages in this context is the symbolic one. This is not to say, however, that the communicative function of languages could be neglected. To the contrary, it should always be the ultimate goal of any language planning activity to secure the preservation of the communicative spheres of the language or languages concerned. It is only through its communicative functions that a language can receive and retain a symbolic content. A language lacking any practical functions can hardly be accepted as an ethnic symbol.

The current problem of language endangerment is so severe that we have to look for realistic solutions. We have to accept the situation that the functional spheres of minority languages, such as the languages of the Northern minorities, cannot be equal to those of the mainstream languages. This is simply a consequence of the extant circumstances: the small size of many minority populations, the incompatibility of minority cultures with the structures of the dominant industrialized societies, and the apparently inevitable coexistence of minority languages with the mainstream languages even within the native communities.

Although we should seek ways of language preservation and language planning for each Northern minority, we have to admit that the communicative functions of some languages are becoming increasingly nominal.

We can easily understand that it would be impossible and futile, for example, to start publishing a newspaper or establishing a bilingual system of education for the last couple of enthusiastic speakers of a dying language. However, such an extreme case is not likely to happen, for the speakers normally know and feel themselves what the situation of their language is. It is not our task to prescribe the future of a language. If the last speakers wish to make every effort to revitalize their language, we should probably support them fully, even if we may see the uselessness of their efforts. It must be the people who decide the future of their language. If there is no will, there is no future, either. If there is a will, there is a hope, at least.

NOTES

- 1) Articles praising the linguistic situation among the Northern minorities under socialism appeared until the very eve of the disruption of the Soviet state.
- 2) By the term language policy we may understand here simply any theoretical or practical framework adopted by political authorities, especially by a political state, to bring about certain effects, positive or negative, with regard to the role of language(s) in a given society. This definition makes a distinction between center-controlled official measures and principles of language planning and unofficial endeavors by ethnically oriented groups or individuals, which I would rather call language movements.
- 3) In order to maintain the state's monopoly in the Ainu trade, the Edo government occasionally prohibited private merchants to make a direct contact with the Ainus. At the same time, the Ainus were kept ignorant and backward by preventing them from learning Japanese.
- 4) It is said that the methods used by the Russian Orthodox Church in the field of mother tongue education were later reflected by Lenin's nationality policy. Kreindler [KREINDLER 1984: 348] even speculates that Lenin's progressive ideas about language policy did not owe much to Marx, but, rather, to his personal experience from his native multilingual Volga region, where his father had worked hard to introduce native languages as media of instruction at schools.
- 5) The system of education based on the use of native languages was adopted after a long debate. During the discussions, the right to teach Russian to non-Russian ethnic groups was questioned on the basis of the general principle recognizing the equality of all peoples.
- 6) The adverse effects of education systems based on the use of alien languages are already noted in, for instance, UNESCO's claim for mother tongue instruction (1953).
- 7) Of course, all over the North, there had been numerous cases of armed resistance against the direct invasion of native territories by conquerors and colonizers.
- 8) By language movements I understand here both corpus planning movements and status planning movements.

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