LINGUISTIC MINORITIES: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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I. Introduction

Since the emergence of modern nationalist movements and the formation of nation-states, the reorganization of the world map after the World War I, the centralization of power and linguistic homogenization of nations, minority languages have been under a strong pressure which has forced them to retreat from modern life, thus reducing their functions and areas of use. Linguistic minorities have been and continue being an object of "voluntary" assimilation in the countries that call themselves democratic. While in those countries, where there is still a pecking order, they are subjected to marginalization and annihilation.

The situation and the status of minority languages are so different from one case to another that it makes difficult to establish a definition that would cover all cases. In fact, a minority language may have the status of an official language, as Romansh in Switzerland, may be a national language, as the Irish language, may be a majority language in one country but a minority one in another, as German, may be the language of a few Indians lost in the jungle of the Amazon, can be a language of a long literary tradition, but the number of its speakers has fallen because of natural causes, wars, etc.

The absence of a universal definition of minority languages or linguistic minorities makes it difficult to initiate the analysis of their situation. There are so many definitions that we don't know which of them we should stick to or which is the most accurate and appropriate. For this reason, we've decided that our main aim in this paper is to establish a basic conceptual framework for defining linguistic minorities.

II. Linguistic minorities: definitions

The multiplicity and complexity are the primary difficulties in defining the linguistic minorities as a whole. M. Reuter tried to overcome this obstacle by defining the minority languages as common denominators (Reuter: 1990, 235-236). The result was one definition which, rather than dissipate our doubts, raised even more. According to him a minority language is the one that meets the following characteristics: (a). it is not the language of all areas of activities, could be excluded from the administration or education, be confined to the home area, religious or literary field, (b). it can be living in the shadow of a culturally dominant language, (c). it may be at risk because of opponents, including its own speakers dedicated to its extermination, (d). it may lack vocabulary belonging to specific semantic fields, (e). bilingualism is a property of its speakers, (f) it could be a non-standard language [...] among other uses that we have excluded. In our opinion, the definition of Reuter is quite extensive and full of conditionals; some of the circumstances described therein are not applicable to all minority languages. Of course, this does not invalidate this definition. Reuter has tried to compact the situations in which a minority language can be found in a single definition, but there are other situations which are not described there.

In the 80s Anthony Layng conducted an extensive study of Dominican Caribbean minorities. In one of his articles published in the journal *Ethnic Groups*, Layng defined the term "minority group" as a group that shows some of these attributes: 1. individuals subjected to a different power to restrict or control their access to resources, 2. they are subjected to discriminatory treatment and are victims of stereotyping, 3. they share a common identity (Layng: 1996, 115-116).

For now, all we can advance in reference to minorities: it is applicable to all linguistic minorities, they are deprived of one of the basic human rights: the linguistic one and they are in a situation of inequality. Charles Wagley, a renowned American anthropologist, stated in

his own definition that the subordinate status of minorities should receive special treatment, such treatment could occur in two forms: physical or cultural (Wagley, Harris: 1958, 10).

Since the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, linguistic minorities have been a political challenge for most European nations, and especially for International Organizations. Many language groups were displaced outside their national borders and forced to coexist as a minority under the oppression of a majority of others, for example, minorities absorbed by Poland reached 40% of the total population (Von Muralt: 1948, 47), three million Germans suddenly found themselves in the new formed Czechoslovakia, a Hungarian minority was trapped in Romania, Albanians and Macedonians imprisoned in Greece, not to mention minorities in Turkey, Austria, Bulgaria, Hungary and elsewhere in Europe.

The League of Nations was the first international organization entrusted with the task of protecting minorities, result of the Treaty of Versailles. The definition of "minorities" had already been defined by the Treaty of Versailles as a group of citizens of a State whose nationality is different from the rest of the majority. This definition, of course, was rather ambiguous, forcing the league to reconsider it and seek other criteria of definition. At first, the League found that language differences could be a decisive criterion for defining minorities, since they are often accompanied by cultural differences (Azcárate: 1945, 3-4). However, cases as the Macedonian language, where it was not clear whether it should be considered as a separate language or a dialect of Serbian or Bulgarian, made the League withdraw from the linguistic definition of minorities. The commitment to a formal definition of "minority" was pursued by the League throughout its existence, in 1925 one of the reports submitted to the Council relates to minorities in racial terms, stating that "a minority ... is not just a racial group incorporated in the body of a nation in which the majority forms a different racial unity. There are also psychological, social and historical attributes that represent, perhaps, for the purpose of

the definition we are looking for, their main distinguishing characteristic" (League of Nations: 1926, 141). This definition was also not valid for the inconsistency of the term "racial" and in 1930 the League chose a different definition. Under the new meaning, minorities were a group of people living in a given country or locality, they had their own race, religion, language and tradition, and were united by this identity of race, religion, language and tradition (Thornberry: 1991, 164-165).

After the Second World War, the Organization of the United Nations took up the issue of minorities. Unlike the League, the definitions provided by the United Nations had a more universal application. The most prominent was developed by Francesco Capotorti, which helped clarify certain aspects of the concept. Capotorti defined -1949 - minorities as "numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a State, in a non-dominant position, whose members – being nationals of the State – possess ethnic, religious or *linguistic characteristics* differing from those of the rest of the population and show if only implicitly a sense of solidarity, directed towards preserving their culture, traditions, religion or *language*" (Capotorti: 1977, 1-7). This definition was well acclaimed by everybody, but in our humble opinion, the status of minority groups does not imply always outnumbered, for example in South Africa there is no majority group, but still Afrikaans and English are the dominant languages, in Bolivia the oppressed minority is made up of an Amerindian majority (Quechua, Aymara, Guaraní and Mojenos), in Indonesia there is no linguistic majority and still 737 languages are in a precarious situation. To J. Ogbu the question of minorities is a matter of "Power"; therefore, a group is defined as a minority if it is in a subordinate position in relation to the rest of the population in the same society (Ogbu: 1983, 169).

Apart from the definition of Capotorti, the United Nations developed another definition suggested by Jules Deschênes in its "*Proposals concerning* a *definition* of the *term minority*". The only difference that this new definition brought in reference to the first one was that

minority groups struggled to survive and achieve the same rights both in practice and in law as the rest of the majority.

Regarding Regional Organizations, the Council of Europe established a conceptual framework for minority languages in accordance with its mission to protect and promote linguistic minorities. This framework was adopted in 1992 under the title of *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages*. The article 1 of *Charter* defines minority languages as follows:

a. "regional or minority languages" means languages that are:
   i. traditionally used within a given territory of a State by nationals of that State who form a group numerically smaller than the rest of the State's population; and
   ii. different from the official language(s) of that State;

   it does not include either dialects of the official language(s) of the State or the languages of migrants;
b. "territory in which the regional or minority language is used" means the geographical area in which the said language is the mode of expression of a number of people justifying the adoption of the various protective and promotional measures provided for in this Charter;
c. "non-territorial languages" means languages used by nationals of the State which differ from the language or languages used by the rest of the State's population but which, although traditionally used within the territory of the State, cannot be identified with a particular area thereof.

III. Conceptual framework for linguistic minorities

From the above, we can establish our own definition of the term "linguistic minorities". For our purposes, a linguistic minority is the one that meets one or more of the following characteristics, *regardless of how they combine*:

a. Language whose speakers are in non-dominant position within a State.
b. Language other than the dominant language in a State.
c. Partially or completely excluded from the active area: economy, politics, education, culture, society.
d. Located in certain geographic areas or urban area.
e. Non-standardized or standardized language of limited use.

Sixty two years after the adoption of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* by the United Nations in 1948, most of the countries that ratified this agreement are still not respecting one of the basic rights enumerated in Article II: linguistic discrimination. At present, most countries around the world cast their external image as linguistically and culturally homogenous nations. Linguistic diversity is perceived as deterioration to the national unity and an element that threatens the nation. This idea has its origin in the principle "*une nation, une langue*" born during the French Revolution and spread throughout the world as an equation in which each of its elements is formed by a single constant. The adoption of this principle in countries hosting linguistic minorities has serious political and cultural consequences. Linguistic oppression is often the answer to end the linguistic heterogeneity.

In 1918 Ernest Barker, author of such works as *submerged nationalities of the German Empire, Ireland over the past fifty years*, published a book entitled *The Linguistic Oppression in the German Empire*. In the first part of the book, the author explains what the linguistic oppression is and how it manifests itself. According to Barker linguistic oppression is manifested in four ways: the first concerns education, the second affects government bodies and the third concerns the public assembly and demonstration, and the last -the most striking of all- affects home usage itself, as the April 1899 decree, which required the teachers of the Poznan region to eradicate the Polish language from family use or to carry out house searches to confiscate Polish literature.

Barker points out that most of the acts of linguistic oppression are based on administrative orders or police actions, but the latter are supported directly by the legislation (Barker: 1918, 9-10).

State policies toward their linguistic minorities depend on several factors, starting from the political, economic, demographic, social status of languages to the geographical situation of the minorities. Juan Cobarrubias established taxonomy of official attitudes toward minority languages, distinguishing the following (Cobarrubias: 1983, 71):

a. Attempt to kill a language
b. Letting a language die;
c. Coexistence without support;
d. Partial support for specific functions of a language;
e. Adoption as an official language.

Although the taxonomy of J. Cobarrubias is a good starting point, it does not cover the most widespread cases and his statements lack a scientific language. Therefore we propose a new classification of the policies that a State may apply to its minorities. From our point of view, a State may implement one or more of the following policies to eliminate linguistic heterogeneity:

a. Physical genocide.
b. Linguistic genocide.
c. Linguistic assimilation.
d. Linguistic marginalization or exclusion.
e. Linguistic restriction.
f. Linguistic imposition.

a. Physical genocide

The extermination of peoples is a very ancient practice, yet the term "genocide" did not appear until December 9, 1948 with the *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*, in response to atrocities committed by the Nazi regime against Jews and other peoples.

The United Nations defines genocide as any act committed with intent to destroy, as a whole or partially, a national, racial or religious group. This act may be done by killing the members of the group, preventing the birth of future members of the group, transferring children of the group to another group by force, among other actions. According to Lemkin, the creator of the term *genocide*, the aim of this act is the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, through the disintegration of their political, social, cultural and linguistic institutions (Schabas: 2000, 25).

From a linguistic perspective, the physical genocide, euphemistically called *ethnic cleansing*, means the reduction or extermination of the speakers of a language. So if they disappear their language will disappear with them. Beside this, the chances that a linguistic group requires self-determination basing on the linguistic element will be reduced to a minimum. In 1947 Pakistan separated from India because of a religious conflict. Pakistan was established as a Muslim nation, inviting Bengalis of Muslim religion to form a single nation with them. The dominant leadership of the new state was formed by the Urdu minority, and though the Bengalis were the majority, their language rights were constantly violated. The persistence of discrimination gave birth to a Bengali national movement that initially fought for their language rights, especially since the announcement of the proclamation of Urdu as the only national language. Demonstrations against this decision were immediate and continued until the declaration of independence of Bangladesh in 1971. The reprisals of the State of Pakistan to the threat of secession based on language differences ended in the genocide of approx. 3 million Bengalis and 13 million were displaced (Jahan: 2004, 295-296).

J. Diamond identifies the desire to accelerate the linguistic and cultural homogenization as one of the main reasons behind the genocide. According to the collected data, the number of exterminated ethnic groups grew after the Second World War. J. Diamond cites as an example the genocide that took place between the sixties

and seventies in Bangladesh, Brazil, Burundi, Cambodia, East Timor, Equatorial Guinea, Indonesia, Lebanon, Paraguay, Rwanda, Sudan, Uganda and Zanzibar. In 1972, it is estimated that 80,000 to 200,000 Hutus were killed by Tutsis in Burundi (Diamond: 1991, 273). In 1830 the native population of northern Tasmania was reduced to seventy-two adult men, three women and no children (Diamond, 252).

b. Linguistic genocide.

Another way to break a linguistic minority language is through linguistic genocide, it is to say, to kill a language without killing its speakers (Skutnabb-Kangas: 2000, 312) or just remain passive before the agony of a language. The term "linguistic genocide" was defined in 1948 by the United Nations in Article III of the final draft of the *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*. But the article met the opposition of 16 members, most of them belonging to the NATO, and therefore was eliminated (Löwstedt: 2007, 2).

Linguistic genocide is the result of cultural contact between two unequal societies in terms of economic, military and international prestige (Day: 1985, 163). This process includes two phases, the death of the minority language and the transition to the dominant language. As a result, native speakers of the language of genocide stop speaking it and start using the dominant language. The agony of a language can take several centuries, such as Irish, or just one or several generations. In short, the dominant language becomes the first language of the minority group, and their native language becomes the object of linguistic archaeology. According to R. Day the introduction of the dominant language is usually presented as an option to improve the quality of life of the minority group, arguments like "it will help children receive a better education", "learn the new language is important for life in the twentieth century", "you will get a better job speaking the new language" are part of the strategies to detract from minority languages and encourage the adoption of the dominant languages

(Day: 1985, 165). Other authors resort to conspiratorial theories, for example Kachru is questioning whether the group of American teachers for teaching English as a second language in the Pacific islands was composed of mere teachers of English or they were agents of cultural and linguistic imperialism, "imperialism that will possibly end up in the linguistic and cultural genocide" (Phillipson: 1992, 13).

c. Linguistic assimilation.

Linguistic assimilation means the adoption of the language of a dominant group, and the abandonment of the native language. It is an intergenerational process that could culminate (or be interrupted) in one or more generations. To understand the mechanisms and forces that hide behind the language change, we must distinguish between voluntary assimilation and forced assimilation. Voluntary assimilation is the result of taking a conscious decision of an individual or a group to adopt the language of another group. The reasons for this linguistic transition are the economic incentive, social prestige, the desire to be accepted by another group, among other causes. On the opposite side, we find the involuntary assimilation; in this case, the native language of the group is pushed into a situation where its costs outweigh its benefits so that the quality of life of the group is affected. At first glance, the connection of certain languages with economic prosperity is so obvious that there is no other available option for minority groups to improve their[o] situation, rather than a linguistic change. However, this is not entirely correct. Shermerhorn distinguished between two different processes, the first is assimilation, which is a cultural process, and the second is the incorporation which is a social-structural process allowing minorities to access the assets and the services of a nation (Paulston: 1998, 5).

d. Linguistic marginalization or exclusion.

One of the main processes by which languages traditionally lose their power is through the loss of their functions and domains. But what is power in linguistic terms or rather what determines the power of a language?

The power of a language is not in the language itself but in its demographic, economic and political correlates (Laponce: 2003, 59). A language, whose functions and areas of use are null or minimized, becomes a socially, economically and politically irrelevant language. This process is called linguistic marginalization or exclusion. For centuries many linguistic groups of the new continent, Australia, New Zealand, Asia and Africa have been excluded by the settlers and their tongues were stigmatized. After the declarations of independence of many colonies during the 50s, 60s and 70s of the twentieth century, the vast majority of these languages are still in the same or worse situation as a result of linguistic homogenization policies that were implemented *a posteriori*. In the early nineteenth century, the use of Maori was in decline for two main reasons, because the number of settlers exceeded that of the natives and because of their exclusion from education and other sectors. In 1867, the *Act of Native Schools* instituted English as the only language of instruction. As a result, the use of Maori was confined to the family environment, and except that there were few opportunities to speak it outside home (Alves: 1999, 86). Linguistic marginalization does not necessarily mean social, economic or political marginalization of a minority group, provided that the minority denies its language and adopts the dominant language. In the countries of North Africa, linguistic marginalization of the Berber minority did not lead to their exclusion from the social, economic and political system.

e. Linguistic restriction.

Linguistic restriction has two facets, the first – which is usually omitted – is to prohibit the language from certain key functions for its own development and evolution of its speakers, and the second is defined by Cobarrubias as partial support for specific language functions. Linguistic restrictions are part of a concrete plan to keep

minority languages in a precarious situation which prevents them from evolving and as a result its speakers end up surrendering to the idea that their languages are not valid for the era of technology. Within democratic social systems, the issue of support and maintenance of national minority languages is usually presented as a challenge. The answer is usually bilingual education framed within the rights of minorities to a fair education; however, it is well known that most bilingual programs are only a transition to the dominant language. In many countries linguistic restrictions have a direct impact on the political system. In fact, there are many linguistic minorities who can not exercise their right to vote, because the State does not provide information in their language, what results in a hindrance to the partition in the democratic process of voting. In the U.S. the section 203 of *the Act of Voting Rights* to the Federal Law protects the linguistic minority voting. According to this section (Department of Justice):

> Whenever any State or political subdivision [covered by the section] provides registration or voting notices, forms, instructions, assistance, or other materials or information relating to the electoral process, including ballots, it shall provide them in the language of the applicable minority group as well as in the English language.

In 1992 the U.S. passed a law requiring States to provide material and information in minority languages. Despite being protected by law, many American linguistic minorities are deprived from the possibility to exercise their vote in favourable conditions. In 2005, the city of Boston was taken to court for not satisfying their minority voters (University of Richmond: 2006, 14), of course this is not, nor has been, the only case.

f. Linguistic imposition.

Finally, the linguistic imposition means to force a minority language group to adopt the dominant language. Often it is necessary to resort to legal means and

official institutions to achieve this goal. And in other cases, although the minority language is protected by law, this does not prevent that the imposition of the dominant language is not going to take place. The status of languages in Israel is still ruled by the British mandate of 1922, according to which the Arabic language was declared the official language of Israel and protected as a minority language. Since the constitution of the State of Israel in 1948, the clashes between both sides, Jewish and Arab, have not known truces. The hatred and killings between the two peoples have been front page news for over half a century. For the Israelites the Arabic language has become an element non grata within their borders. However, Israel does not deny the fact that 19% of its population comprises the Arab minority (2 million) (Central bureau for statistics: 2002, 2). But recognizing a minority does not mean recognizing their rights. In 1988, the draft of the Basic Law nº 9 was presented for a vote. According to Article 3 Section 1 of this Law, the Hebrew would be the only language of the State, while section 2 states that "official publications will also appear in Arabic. The Arabic language would have a special status in regard to the state authorities, public authorities and issues of education and culture". This bill sought the dismissal of Arabic as an official language and the imposition of Hebrew. Although never adopted, it has not been necessary for Israel to carry out the imposition of Hebrew on the Arab minority. Currently, the Hebrew is the dominant language of Israel and Arabic is a minority language. According to Spolsky and Shohamy, without knowledge of Hebrew, it is difficult for an Arab Israeli to get access to the government, work and education (Spolsky, Goldberg: 1999, 107).

IV. Conclusion

In short, genocide, assimilation, exclusion, restriction and imposition are policies and actions which directly or indirectly infringe against the existence of minorities as linguistic entities. Given the complexity of this issue, it

is difficult to have a clear picture of how the deprivation of a right can disrupt the development of a minority language or how the imposition of a dominant language, either by a policy of non-intervention, assimilation or by force can lead to the extinction of a language. In this context, Varennes has made a great contribution with his *Guide to Rights of Minorities and Language*, classifying the rights pertaining to the use of minority languages in both private and public life.

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APUNTES SOCIOHISTÓRICOS SOBRE LA ESCLAVITUD NEGRA EN BOLIVIA Y SUS IMPLICACIONES LINGÜÍSTICAS: LA LENGUA AFROYUNGUEÑA

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1. Introducción

Este trabajo quiere proveer un informe sociohistórico de la esclavitud negra en Bolivia y al mismo tiempo analizar sus potenciales implicaciones para la estructura gramatical del idioma afroyungueño, una lengua afrohispana hablada en los valles tropicales de los Yungas, Departamento de La Paz. Lipski (2006a:37) ha sugerido que "la simplificación morfológica radical de los sintagmas nominal y verbal del dialecto afroyungueño" podría ser debida al origen criollo de dicha lengua; por eso, Lipski indica que el afroboliviano podría ser el resultado de la nativización de una lengua pidgin, en particular el autor afirma que "en ausencia de otro escenario viable, el español afroyungueño ha de verse como el descendiente de un pidgin colonial afrohispano (2008b:186)".

Este artículo quiere explorar un escenario diferente del indicado por Lipski. El presente estudio intentará ofrecer una visión del origen de la lengua afroyungueña basada sobre varios datos sociohistóricos que parecen indicar con mucha probabilidad que el idioma afroboliviano no deriva de una lengua criolla. De todas formas, antes de explorar el posible origen del español afroboliviano, me parece oportuno citar una frase directamente tomada de Crespo (1977:11), en su libro *Esclavos negros en Bolivia*: "La historia es siempre una aproximación". Esta afirmación es particularmente verdadera cuando hay que tratar un tema tan delicado como el comercio atlántico de los esclavos negros, sobre todo cuando la región analizada es Bolivia, y hay que basarse en datos que, siendo optimistas, habría que clasifi-