Kurdish as a mother tongue: no linguistic human rights, and linguistic genocide in education:

Die kurdische Sprache und die türkische Assimilationspolitik

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1. Sévres 1920

versus

Lausanne 1923
France, Italy and Britain had secretly begun the partitioning of the Ottoman Empire in 1915. The Treaty of Sèvres, 10 August 1920 was a partial outcome of this. The Treaty was annulled and the parties signed and ratified the superseding Treaty of Lausanne in 1923.
Part III. Political clauses, Section III. Kurdistan

Article 64

If within one year from the coming into force of the present Treaty the Kurdish peoples within the areas defined in Article 62 shall address themselves to the Council of the League of Nations in such a manner as to show that a majority of the population of these areas desires independence from Turkey, and if the Council then considers that these peoples are capable of such independence and recommends that it should be granted to them, Turkey hereby agrees to execute such a recommendation, and to renounce all rights and title over these areas.

The detailed provisions for such renunciation will form the subject of a separate agreement between the Principal Allied Powers and Turkey.
ARTICLE 147.

Turkish nationals who belong to racial, religious or linguistic minorities shall enjoy the same treatment and security in law and in fact as other Turkish nationals. In particular they shall have an equal right to establish, manage and control at their own expense, and independently of and without interference by the Turkish authorities, any charitable, religious and social institutions, schools for primary, secondary and higher instruction and other educational establishments, with the right to use their own language and to exercise their own religion freely therein.
ARTICLE 148.

In towns and districts where there is a considerable proportion of Turkish nationals belonging to racial, linguistic or religious minorities, these minorities shall be assured an equitable share in the enjoyment and application of the sums which may be provided out of public funds under the State, municipal or other budgets for educational or charitable purposes. The sums in question shall be paid to the qualified representatives of the communities concerned.
In the Treaty of Lausanne 24 July 1923 there is no Kurdistan or Kurds

The Treaty of Lausanne was signed by United Kingdom, France, Italy, Japan, Greece, Romania, Yugoslavia, and Turkey.

Kurds and Kurdistan (Articles 62-64 in Sèvres) and the rights of linguistic minorities (Articles 147-148 in Part IV, Protection of minorities) had disappeared.
MY CLAIM 1

CLAIM 1: If Turkey did today what the Ottoman Empire promised in 1920, even excluding the independence Article 64, most problems that the Kurds face today would be solved.
2. In whose interests is the continuation of the economic, educational and human rights underdevelopment in Kurdistan today?
In whose interests was Lausanne 1923? In whose interests is the situation today? Shared responsibility for the continuation of the economic, educational and human rights underdevelopment in Kurdistan today?
CLAIM 2: The countries that were responsible for removing Kurdistan and linguistic minority protection from the Treaty of Lausanne have been and are still contributing to the oppression of Kurds, here especially a good mother-tongue-based multilingual education (MLE) for the children. USA has added itself to the list, e.g. through politics of arms sales (and NATO arms & training gifts), and their other Middle East considerations.
3. Without Turkey’s war on Kurds, over 10 billion $ could have been used 2000-2007 for education, health and economic development in Kurdish areas in Turkey.
A recent SIPRI study for Turkey, estimated that arms imports between 2000-2007 limited the ability to spend on health and education and other important areas.

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Turkey’s military expenditure in millions of US dollars in selected years; source: http://milexdata.sipri.org/result.php4

- 1988: 9,925
- 1992: 15,008
- 1995: 16,660
- 2001: 19,946
- 2006: 17,768
- 2009: [19,009]
CLAIM 3: It is the econo-military systems of UK, USA, and Turkey that benefit when contributing to conditions which reproduce the continuation of the economic, educational and human rights underdevelopment in Kurdistan today. It is not in the interest of Kurds, or ordinary Turks, or the Turkish state as a whole.
For data, analysis and discussion - see

4. The Turkish Constitution denies Kurds basic human rights, including linguistic human rights, and more specifically educational human rights.
Article 3 of the Turkish Constitution states: “The Turkish state, with its territory and nation, is an indivisible entity. Its language is Turkish.” Article 4 states that the provision of Article 3 may not be amended, nor may their amendment be proposed.
In theory, courses in the Kurdish language can be taught to teenagers and adults, but in practice the obstacles and conditions have been so many and so bureaucratically and legally demanding that there are next to no courses. **Kurdish is not allowed to be used as the medium of education (the language of teaching, Unterrichtssprache) in any school in Turkey.**

*Article 42 of the Constitution*, which renders primary education compulsory for all citizens, specifies that **no language other than Turkish may be taught as a mother tongue to Turkish citizens in any training or education institution.**
ALL KURDISH CHILDREN IN TURKEY ARE BEING TAUGHT SUBTRACTIVELY, IN SUBMERSION (SINK OR SWIM) PROGRAMMES. Turkish is the teaching language. They do not get any teaching using Kurdish as the teaching language. Kurdish is not even taught as a subject. The teaching is not contrastive (comparing Kurdish and Turkish).
When comparing the educational levels of girls from the poorest households in Turkey, the *EFA (Education for All) Global Monitoring Report 2010* states (UNESCO 2010: 9): “In Turkey, 43% of Kurdish-speaking girls from the poorest households have fewer than two years of education, while the national average is 6%.”
These figures reflect the subtractive submersion education through the medium of Turkish to which Kurdish children are subjected.

This subtractive education, with enforced assimilation, is meant to replace the Kurdish mother tongue with Turkish.
SUBTRACTIVE teaching through the medium of a dominant language (= using the dominant language as the teaching language) replaces minority children’s mother tongue. It subtracts from the children’s linguistic repertoire.
Subtractive dominant-language medium education for Kurdish children

- prevents access to education, because of the linguistic, pedagogical and psychological barriers it creates. Thus it violates the right to education.
Subtractive dominant-language medium education for Kurdish children often curtails the development of the children’s capabilities, and perpetuates thus poverty (see economics Nobel laureate Amartya Sen).
Subtractive dominant-language medium education for Kurdish children is organized against solid research evidence about how best to reach high levels of bilingualism or multilingualism and how to enable these children to achieve academically in school.
Dominant-language medium education for minority children can cause serious physical and mental harm.
Subtractive dominant-language medium education for minority children can have harmful consequences socially, psychologically, economically, politically:

- very serious **mental** harm: social dislocation, psychological, cognitive, linguistic and educational harm, and, partially through this, also economic, social and political marginalization

- often also serious **physical** harm, e.g. in residential schools, and as a long-term result of marginalization - e.g. alcoholism, suicides, incest, violence.
What is needed is additive teaching, which ADDS to Kurdish children’s linguistic repertoire, instead of subtracting from it. This means using mainly Kurdish as the teaching language for the first minimally 6 but preferably 8 years, with good teaching of Turkish as a second language, given by bilingual Kurdish/Turkish teachers, plus, of course, learning other foreign languages, e.g. English.
ADDITIVE teaching mainly through the medium of the minority mother tongue, with good teaching of the dominant language as a second language, given by bilingual teachers, adds to children’s linguistic repertoire and makes them high level bilingual or multilingual. They can learn both their own language and other languages well.
All serious research shows that this kind of mother-tongue based multilingual teaching would result in good competence in both main languages plus the third language, and good school achievement.
CLAIM 4: Subtractive submersion education with Turkish as the teaching language for Kurds (and other minorities) is the main educational problem. It leads to “illiteracy” or low levels of literacy, lack of school achievement, identity deprivation, dispossession of children’s linguistic and cultural capital. It is organised against solid research evidence.
Mother-tongue-based multilingual education, MLE is not part of the problem but one absolutely necessary (but not sufficient) part of the solution in Turkey’s conflicts and today’s democratic deficit in Turkey. It enables and strengthens children’s cognitive development, the learning of BOTH the mother tongues AND the dominant language, school achievement, and positive bilingual bicultural identities.
5. Linguistic and cultural genocide in education, and crimes against humanity
The right to education is encoded in many international human rights documents, also in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Art. 29). The Convention has been ratified by ALL other UN member states except two: Somalia and the USA...
Robert Dunbar (human rights lawyer) and I have shown in several publications that this kind of subtractive education violates the human right to education (which is proclaimed in several binding human rights documents). It can from an educational, linguistic, cultural, sociological and psychological point of view be seen as genocide, as this is defined in the United Nations 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.
In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

• (a) Killing members of the group;
• (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
• (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
• (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
• (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.
Turkey is guilty of genocide

- Turkey is guilty of systematically treating Kurds in ways which fall under each of the five definitions.
Education offered to Kurdish children in Turkey is specifically guilty of genocide according to the following two definitions:

- Article II(e): 'forcibly transferring children of the group to another group'; and
- Article II(b): 'causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group'; (emphasis added).
Our conclusion is also that subtractive education fulfills **legally** the criteria for a **crime against humanity**.

This should be tried in courts.
Our new book Skutnabb-Kangas, Tove & Dunbar, Robert (2010) *Indigenous Children’s Education as Linguistic Genocide and a Crime Against Humanity? A Global View* has many examples of education that violates children’s right to education. It examines whether subtractive education can be seen as genocide or crime against humanity educationally and sociologically (YES) and legally (perhaps not yet - court cases needed!).
What the Kurds want in relation to language and culture is just the same basic rights that any dominant groups have: cultural autonomy, including the right to learn their language(s), and use it/them freely in society, including schools.

The right to mother-tongue based multilingual education can not in any way be seen as a “special” right; it is a necessary linguistic and educational human right.
Subtractive submersion education violates the right to education. It attempts to transfer children forcibly to the Turkish group, and may cause serious physical and mental harm; thus it may be genocidal and can also be labelled a crime against humanity.
6. Peace and conflict theories
Denial of linguistic human rights (LHRs) and the continued linguistic genocide (linguicide), also in education, creates and feeds conflict; granting LHRs is necessary for solving conflicts. Without more political and economic self-determination, cultural autonomy is not possible for Kurds in Turkish (or other) part/s of Kurdistan; likewise, investments in infrastructure, including health and education are necessary and require more instrumental political and economic rights as a precondition.
“Promoting and protecting the rights of persons belonging to minorities have been demonstrated to be effective means of conflict prevention and resolution, and of building stable, inclusive societies in post-conflict situations” (p. 40).

“Often long-term and well-entrenched inequality, discrimination and exclusion are the root cause of many conflicts, particularly where the State is considered to be failing to act to remedy the situation or is deliberately excluding minorities”

(pp.40-41; emphases added).
“The promotion of rights, identity and culture can be strengthened through the introduction and promotion of certain forms of self-governance, including territorial or cultural autonomy” (p. 41).
This was what Turkey promised in 1920... soon 100 years ago... also in relation to education...
Even if many legal changes have been accepted (at least on paper), Turkey is not even approaching the international human rights standards yet, neither in education nor in other aspects of linguistic rights.

The situation has again become MUCH worse since late June 2011.
CLAIM 6: Mother-tongue-based multilingual education, MLE would work for eradicating poverty in Kurdish areas and elsewhere, and for general conflict resolution. It would enable and strengthens democratic participation.

Multilingual education is also necessary and beneficial for Turkey’s dominant linguistic group.
MY CLAIM 6 continued

If a state is systematically creating and perpetuating poverty, and cultural and political disempowerment along ethnic and linguistic lines (among other things through subtractive monolingual majority language medium education), THIS is what may lead to conflicts.
The state can then label them “ethnic” or “linguistic” conflicts. If the conflicts are allowed to continue long enough, without sincere negotiations, including self-governance and territorial autonomy, this forced assimilation and lack of democracy may in the end lead to the disintegration of a state.
4 July 2011 the Democratic Society Congress (DTK), a platform that brings together Kurdish non-government organizations, declared “democratic autonomy” within Turkey's territorial integrity. DTK’s chairwoman, Aysel Tuğluk, MP, stated that the Kurdish problem could only be solved if Kurds are recognized as a distinct group.
It is about time that Turkey started to act rationally...
“Every child in the world has the right to education through the medium of their mother tongue”
Many of the experiments and programmes mentioned are described in this book, published in India by Orient BlackSwan for Southeast Asia; see http://uri.fi/EO/;
Almost the same book was published in 2009 by Multilingual Matters in UK in my series Linguistic Diversity and Language Rights; see http://tiny.cc/6eRkp

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All references can be found in the Big Bibliography on my home page