Chapter 11


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ABSTRACT

Language Human Rights as a newly-grown type of human rights has been raised in the field of linguistics in recent two decades. Due to its increasing importance, this chapter attempts to firstly define this concept, its nature and scope. Secondly, it tries to introduce the trace of this type of human rights in the available documents. Then, the chapter deals with and discusses the reasons for growing importance of language human rights from at least three aspects, namely a) the exponential decline and loss of world’s languages; b) the growing presence of English as the language of globalization; c) nationalism and the violation of language rights of the minority in the field of education. Finally, some suggestions and practical recommendations are provided.

I. INTRODUCTION

Much has been written and said on globalization. Globalization, without doubt, as one of the major defining characteristics of modern society arouses different and even opposite reactions in different observers depending on their predispositions. On the one hand, regarding it as an insidious way of penetration into cultures, traditions and societies leads to adopting a hostile attitude and, on the other hand, viewing it as an inescapable reality of the modern times mostly results in taking favorable stances.


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While it is still in its infancy, because of its position, importance and great amount of influence, much has been expressed on globalization itself, its causes, its results and the domains affected by it, including social, cultural, economic and educational ones. Obviously, language as the primary medium of human social interaction is not an exception to the rule and not only it affects globalization, but it is considerably influenced by globalization, too.

At the moment, there is no doubt that because of the growing complexities of the globalizing world, the issue of human rights has been of main importance. Borrowing the definition provided by UN (2000, p. 2), human rights are commonly understood as being those rights which are inherent to the human being. The concept of human rights acknowledges that every single human being is entitled to enjoy his or her human rights without distinction as to race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

Thus, it is not surprising that due to the influence of globalization, a newly-grown kind of human right known as language human rights or linguistic human rights (LHRs), i.e. all rights related to the learning and use of languages, has been raised in the field of linguistics. According to Skutnabb-Kangas (2008, p. 109), linguistic human rights can be defined as “only those language rights ... which are so basic for a dignified life that everybody has then because of being human; therefore in principle no state or individual is allowed to violate them”. In her words, linguistic human rights include individual and collective language rights that every individual has because of being human, to be able to fulfill her/his basic needs and live a dignified life (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). In theory, LHRs are so inalienable that no state or person may violate them (Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson, 1994).

During the recent years, as May (2013) notes, the issue of language rights has grown in the disciplines of applied linguistics and sociolinguistics. Skutnabb-Kangas (2013) writes that this new kind of human rights resounds with many scholars. In her terms, the advent of some issues including language endangerment, maintenance, revitalization as well as general protection of both users of various languages and the languages themselves, with both indigenous peoples and various minorities (urban, rural, national, immigrant, refugee, asylum-seekers, etc.) has heated the debate. In addition, the issue of linguistic human rights in education and also especially the growing presence of English language as the language of globalization, have led to forming many concerns and debates around the topic. Thus, As Tollefson (2008) notes, research on language rights in education has expanded in recent years, fueled in part by the attention to human rights in international organizations such as the United Nations and European Union. In the meantime, the appearance of some theoretical and practical issues in language policy and planning has added weight to the topic. In this regard, McGroarty and Fitzsimmons-Doolan note (2013) that
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