

LINGUISTIC RIGHTS APPLIED TO LUSO-BRAZILIAN STUDIES: A 21st CENTURY AGENDA

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INTRODUCTION

First of all, I'd like to thank the Department of Spanish and Portuguese and the Program in Latin American Studies, for so very kindly having invited me to take part in this conference. When Professor Thomas Stephens sent me a letter of invitation I had four reasons to rejoice: 1) I'd have the privilege of greatly enriching my U.S. academic experience by coming to this forward-looking, forward-thinking, innovative, and international university; 2) I'd have the pleasure and intellectual benefit of sharing in a unique, transdisciplinary initiative -- significantly, a 10-year-old tradition; 3) I'd be presenting my views on linguistic rights, a dimension or category of human rights which is still in its infancy, as far as the universalization of such a concept is concerned; and 4) last but not least, I was delighted that I could explore applications of linguistic rights to Luso-Brazilian Studies: Portugal and Brazil, besides sharing a language and a solidly-grounded, sustained spirit of friendship and solidarity, have both ratified 33 Universal Human Rights Instruments as of May 31, 1998. (See Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, Linguistic Genocide in Education or Worldwide Diversity and Human Rights? Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2000. 494.)

Although the term 'human rights' seems to have entered written modern languages between 1785 and 1795, that concept has multiple origins, in traditions both from the East and the West, a fact which is well documented in a UNESCO-sponsored book of readings, edited by Jeanne Hersch, and translated into Spanish as El derecho de ser hombre (Paris: UNESCO; Madrid: Tecnos Editorial, 1973). One of the precursory statements on linguistic rights is found in a letter written in 1730 by Harley St. John, Earl of Bolinbroke, to Alexander Pope. In that text, freedom of expression and the right to questioning are dealt with in a realistic fashion, since freedom of speech is described as interrelated with linguistic or communicative responsibility, to use two currently used variant terms.

The international legal protection of individuals as 'human beings' may be said to have its formal origin in 1948 through the Universal

Declaration of Human Rights, but human rights education started in Europe in the late 60s and a little later in the United States (Readon:1988). In Brazil, human rights education is a development of the late 70s, while a movement aimed at integrating human rights and language education is very recent, having been launched by myself in 1996, with the publication of Pedagogia da Positividade. Comunicação Construtiva em Português (Recife: Editora da UFPE).

If human rights are a contemporary form of the doctrine of natural rights - those which human beings share because of their humanity - 'linguistic rights' are a late 20th century development. In order to provide a historical overview on this new member of the family of human rights, some facts and landmarks will be mentioned.

(1) The core-concept of 'language' has been dealt with in religious and political traditions in many parts of the world. Especially useful, revealing sources for a study of the kinds of linguistic rights presumably guaranteed by many nations are national constitutions. See the informative compilation Constitutions Resolving Language Conflicts: A Study of the World's Constitutions by Albert B. Blaustein and Dana Blaustein. (Washington: U.S. English, 1992).

(2) My article 'Por Uma Declaração Dos Direitos Lingüísticos Individuais', published in 'Revista de Cultura Vozes' (March 1984), introduces 20 types of individual linguistic rights, from the more general to the specific. In that listing I also included a series of process-oriented rights: the right to acquire/learn and use one's native language(s), the right to make linguistic choices/options (or "the right to an individual linguistic variety", as sociolinguists tend to put it these days), and the right to specialized treatment (for persons with language/speech problems). Also included in this first exploration of linguistic rights is a listing of person-centered rights. Accordingly, we could speak of the linguistic rights of children, of women, of language learners and teachers, the linguistic rights of writers, patients, of bilinguals/multilinguals and of participants in international conferences (such as this one). It is well to add that, recently, I have been probing the linguistic/communicative rights of older persons as well as the linguistic and intercultural rights/responsibilities of peace negotiators. (See Peace Negotiators' Intercultural Rights and Responsibilities: A Checklist by F.Gomes de Matos. Unpublished manuscript).

(3) About my **A Plea for a Language Rights Declaration** 'A Plea For A Language Rights Declaration', published by the UNESCO-FIPLV World News (letter), April 1984. In that 4-paragraph text, a case is made for a "'Declaration of Individual Language Rights' which might prove useful in the struggle against linguistic prejudice, discrimination,

rejection, and other forms of language-based or language-related injustice and oppression." That plea, addressed to UNESCO and other international organizations concerned with the promotion and assurance of linguistic dignity and equite, proved foundational for an event that took place at my Alma Mater, the Federal University of Pernambuco, in 1987.

(4) The drafting and proclamation of the 'Declaration of Recife', the outcome of the International Seminar on Human Rights and Cultural Rights, was held at the Law School of the Federal University of Pernambuco (October 1987) under the auspices of UNESCO and AIMA, the International Association for Development in Intercultural Communication. That 10-paragraph document -increasingly quoted in books and articles on human linguistic rights ends with the recommendation that "steps be taken by the United Nations to adopt and implement a Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights which would require a reformulation of national, regional, and international language policies." (See Skutnabb-Kangas, op.cit., pp. 542-43).

(5) About the papers in Proceedings of the First Conference of the International Institute of Comparative Language Law, which was held in Montreal in April 1988. The volume, edited by Paul Pupier and José Woehrling (Montréal: Wilson and Lafleur), features insightful contributions in its Introduction to Language Law, Fundamental rights and the protection of linguistic diversity, and Foundations of language policy.[Are these headings found in the volume or subject headings?]

(6) About the pioneering volume by Antoni Miliani I Massana Derechos lingüísticos y Derecho fundamental a la educación. Un estudio comparado: Italia, Belgica, Suiza, Canada y España Madrid: Editorial Civitas, 1994 . Chapters deal with children's rights to learn their mother tongue and their rights to learn their language at school.

(7) The insightful, thought-provoking volume by Tove Skutnabb-Kangas and Robert Phillipson (eds) Linguistic Human Rights. Overcoming Linguistic Discrimination (Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1995) is also worth consulting.

(8) In the important document The 'Linguistic Society of America Statement on Language Rights' (1996) drafted by the LSA's Committee on Social and Political Concerns, U.S. linguists urge for the protection of basic linguistic rights and state 8 linguistic rights which all United States residents should be guaranteed of, including the right to express themselves, publicly or privately, in the language

of their choice, the right to maintain their native language and, should they so desire, the right to pass it on to their children.

(9) Also, regarding the June 6, 1996 Barcelona proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights, produced under the auspices of UNESCO, Pen-Club International, and CIEMEN and with the support of other international organizations, including the International Federation of Modern Language Teachers (FIPLV). The full text of the UDLR is available on the Internet in Catalan, Spanish, English or French at www.linguistic-declaration.org [Wayback Machine]. Researchers interested in the interface of cultural and linguistic rights will welcome the attention given to the right of access to cultural services and to an equitable presence of a community's language and culture in communications media. For an excellent one-paragraph synthesis of the Declaration text, see the entry on the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights in David Crystal's The Penguin Dictionary of Language (London: Penguin, 1999. Second edition. p.353). The great British linguist-encyclopedist-terminologist and now playwright mentions my 1984 Plea in the preface to his The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language (CUP, 1987. Second edition, 1997).

(10) The very recent publication of the encyclopaedic volume by Tove Skutnabb-Kangas titled Linguistic Genocide in Education or Worldwide Diversity and Human Rights and published by Lawrence Erlbaum (Mahwah: New Jersey, 2000) is a comprehensive treatment of linguistic diversity, linguistic genocide, and linguistic globalization as well as of linguistic human rights and the need for more overt political action. A must for all those interested in or concerned with a truly multilingual and multicultural world.

SOME EXAMPLES OF LINGUISTIC RIGHTS APPLIED TO LUSO-BRAZILIAN STUDIES

(1) **Por uma Democracia lingüística: o português no rádio e na televisão** (SP: Intercom, Revista Brasileira de Comunicação, July-December 1987, 104-106).

What would be the linguistic rights of media professionals, particularly of radio and television? How do Portuguese and Brazilian television professionals perceive their own linguistic/communicative rights and responsibilities? How does the media industry in our two countries view such rights? How are TV the rights of performer dealt with when national varieties of the Portuguese language are involved? Are TV/movie stars' rights to their national accents respected? This is an issue worthy of Luso-Brazilian investigation. Brazilian and Portuguese

media organizations concerned with their members' linguistic/cultural rights could probe the issue and help promote a linguistic democracy in their professional contexts. Brazilian-Portuguese cooperation could be initiated, especially at universities offering Graduate Programs in Social Communication (to use the Brazilian curriculum label). How much awareness of linguistic rights/responsibilities is there among media professionals in Portugal and Brazil? Why? Let's research that, shall we?

(2) O cientista de língua portuguesa e os seus direitos lingüísticos. Revista Internacional de Língua Portuguesa, Lisbon, n.7, July 1992, 79-82.

A case study: The Brazilian journal 'Ciência e Cultura', published by SBPC (Brazilian Society for the Advancement of Science). As of January 1991, 'Ciência e Cultura' decided to enhance the use of English as its main language of publication, thereby diminishing the use of Portuguese. This propelled me to discuss in my protest-article the need for scientists in the Portuguese-speaking community to be aware of, discuss, and claim their linguistic rights. These would include the right to submit texts in Portuguese to all specialized journals published in their countries; the right to learn how to write scientific texts in Portuguese (very few universities in our Lusophone countries seem to assure university students of such a right/responsibility), the right to terminological orientation/preparation in Portuguese (a still very neglected aspect of researchers' education, despite noteworthy attempts at filling such a gap: (i.e. The State University of São Paulo's CITRAT, the Centro Interdepartamental de Tradução e Terminologia and the University of Brasília's Graduate Program in Lexicography and Terminology). So what is being done to make scientists in the Luso-Brazilian community aware of their terminological rights and responsibilities? How aware of linguistic rights are Brazilian and Portuguese translators of scientific texts as well as publishers of scientific works? The linguistic rights of translators/interpreters is another area open to investigation and action.

(3) Os direitos lingüísticos de aprendizes de português como língua estrangeira., in Maria Jandyrá Cunha & Percília Santos (orgs.). Ensino e Pesquisa em Português para Estrangeiros (Brasília: Editora da UnB, 1999, 89-95).

Two of the rights of learners of Portuguese as a foreign language would include; the right to a systematic, sustained and consistent exposure to a natural variety of Portuguese; the right to orientation on important distinctions between spoken and written variants and the

right to learn to use Portuguese constructively (for human-dignifying and edifying purposes, as advocated in my Pedagogy of Positiveness).

(4) 'Os direitos de alunos de Letras como leitores de obras literárias', in Encontro. Revista do Gabinete Português de Leitura., Recife, No.15, 1999, Recife, 37-39.

In the above a listing is given of 10 rights of Liberal Arts students as readers of literary works. Two [Three] of such rights are: Access to knowledge about the socio-historical-political context in which the text's author(s) live(d); the right to relevant, illuminating, biographical information; and the right to learn to question the author's fallibility (especially concerning worldviews and perceptions of Portugal, Brazil and other countries in our Portuguese-using family of nations).

(5) The rights of teachers of Portuguese as a second/foreign language.

Although separate lists could be drafted, each focusing on the particular teaching-learning context, there is a common core of rights, which teachers of Portuguese (in the U.S., for example), should have the right to access. These include current descriptions of national varieties of Portuguese - both spoken and written - enabling them to more effectively carry out their challenging jobs as explainers. Similarly, such teachers should have the right to access live and recorded samples of Portuguese used in Portugal, Brazil, and Angola, to mention but three of the countries in our Portuguese-speaking-world. Another right would involve information on lexical differences among national varieties. The book 7 Vozes by Clenir Louceiro, Emília Ferreira, and Elizabeth CeitaVera Cruz (Lidel: Lisboa, 1997) is a fine, pioneering attempt at documenting and comparing the informal vocabulary of Luso-Afro-Brazilian Portuguese. How minimally knowledgeable are we teachers of Portuguese about lexical differences/similarities across our cultures? This gap in teacher education should be filled, especially if we think of such an action as guaranteeing teachers of Portuguese their right of access to such crossculturally and crosslinguistically strategic information. Last but not least, teachers should have the right to intercultural orientation/preparation in order to dispell myths about our language varieties and our own cultures. The time is ripe for both linguistic and intercultural rights to be applied to Luso-Brazilian studies, in all countries where our language is being learned.

May I end with a plea, then, that this important forum sponsor a sustained effort aiming at promoting linguistic rights and intercultural

rights in our academic contexts, but also beyond the walls of academia. All of us engaged in Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian studies have the responsibility of creating conditions for a human rights awareness to be nurtured and cultivated. If we are to fulfill our roles not only as humanists but as humanizers as well, herein lies a very exciting challenge. In a spirit of LATIN UNION and also of HUMANIZING PLANETARY CITIZENSHIP, let's all do our share to make ours a more constructive world.