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Kroon, S.

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Mother Tongue and Mother Tongue Education

Sjaak Kroon

1 Introduction

In their introductory chapter to *Teaching the Mother Tongue in a Multilingual Europe*, Tulasiewicz & Adams (1998:3) sigh that they have been “bedeviled” by the use of the term ‘mother tongue’. They, however, decided to retain the term “because it is a familiar one and one that most readers will intuitively understand”. They admit, though, that “what is intuitive is often misleading”, without, however, further trying to unravel the concept. A totally different position in this respect is taken by Ahlzweig (1994). Starting from a German historical perspective, referring to written sources dating back to the 10th century, he not only deals with the emergence and history of the word ‘*Muttersprache*’ (mother tongue), but also goes into language ideologies that are connected with its use. Kaplan & Baldauf (1997:19), on their part, consider the notion ‘mother tongue’ “extremely difficult to define”, and also Baker & Prys Jones (1998:47) stipulate the importance to “dissect” the different meanings and implications in the usage of the term.

Without going very far into any historical detail, in this contribution I will try to shed some light on the intricacies connected with the concepts of ‘mother tongue’ and ‘mother tongue education’. In this task I take the contemporary mosaic multilingual society as a main frame of reference, since it is especially in this context that the concepts of ‘mother tongue’ and ‘mother tongue education’ are gaining importance. This contribution starts with analytically distinguishing between different meanings of ‘mother tongue’ and ‘mother tongue education’ (section 2). Then it gives an account of two different versions of mother tongue education: mother tongue education from a majority perspective (section 3), and mother tongue education from a minority perspective (section 4). Section 5 gives an impression of the difficulties that the inclusion of ‘mother tongues’ in multilinguals classrooms in one way or another has to face. Section 6, finally, deals with mother tongue education and linguistic human rights.

It has to be admitted that in its examples and may be its reasoning as well, this contribution might reflect a Western European, not to say Dutch bias. It is expected, however, that the concepts and practices dealt with, are to a certain extent recognizable in other contexts as well.

2 Possible meanings of mother tongue and mother tongue education

Historical and contemporary meanings of ‘mother tongue’ and ‘mother tongue education’ are explored by Gagné *et al.* (1987). They distinguish at least three different meanings, that, as a matter of fact, turn out to be intricately intertwined. These meanings are indicated as stemming from a primary-socialisational, a politico-cultural, and an educational viewpoint. Below I will elaborate on this distinction.

First of all I distinguish a linguistic perspective. This includes the historical-linguistic definition of ‘mother tongue’ as a “language from which others spring” (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, 1976:711), as well as the primary-socialisational perspective as distinguished by Gagné *et al.* (1987). In the socialisational or language acquisition concept, a major role is played by first language acquisition, which runs parallel to the process of primary socialisation. ‘Mother tongue’ then refers to one’s native language, i.e., the language of one’s mother or the language one speaks with one’s mother - more generally, the language that is provided by a child’s direct attendants in the home, without any participation of educational institutions. Since it is actually the total home environment of the child and not only the mother, that is decisive for its language acquisition, this meaning of ‘mother tongue’ is often referred to as ‘home language’. Given the fact, that in a growing number of families different languages are in active use, it is imaginable, that the home language of a child differs from its mother’s mother tongue. One may, as Kaplan & Baldauf (1997:19) put it, referring to the example of a child born to a Tamil-speaking mother in Malaysia possibly acquiring Tamil, Straits Malay and/or Straits Chinese, and/or Bahasa Melayu, and/or English, “be a native speaker of a language even though one’s mother was not. (...) It is impossible to designate that individual’s ‘mother tongue’ except in the

literal sense, and it is not so useful to do so (...). It is not a useful term, but it is, nonetheless, one that is widely used". It goes without saying that the socialisational notion of 'mother tongue' does not distinguish between minority and majority, regional and national, indigenous and non indigenous languages. It therefore refers to the only real mother tongue of a speaker.

Secondly comes a language policy perspective, leading to a politico-cultural concept of 'mother tongue'. This concept is closely related to national or regional identity formation or state formation. The awareness or invention of a common mother tongue plays a central role in the endeavour to establish and continue the awareness of a common fatherland, i.e., a nation-state. A fatherland needs a mother tongue and education has to supply it. Generally speaking, this is done by selecting, standardizing and teaching a so-called 'national' or 'official' language. In the process of state formation in 19th century Western Europe, this language in most cases was a standardised variety of the 'mother tongue' of the nation's dominant group. A very instructive example here is the development of the German state and the role of the German language in this respect. A well known exception to this general rule are former colonies where the non-indigenous colonial language was selected as an official language of the independent state. An example here is Angola, where after the colonial period Portuguese was selected as the national language. Another exception are contemporary multilingual states where a language policy decision lead to having more than one official language or no official language at all. Examples here are post-apartheid South Africa that in its 1996 constitution designated eleven official languages, and Eritrea where in the 1997 constitution no single language was designated as an official or national language, and all nine languages of the country are used as media of instruction. It will be clear that in the politico-cultural notion of 'mother tongue', mainly integrating tendencies are at the foreground – be it or not under the slogan of 'unity through diversity' as in Eritrea. These integrating forces, however, very often all too easily can turn into separating ones, leading to potential marginalisation and (sometimes self-chosen) exclusion of (not only) the 'mother tongues' of indigenous and non-indigenous minorities.

Seen from an educational perspective, finally, the concept of 'mother tongue' has to do with the intertwining of knowledge of the world in terms of its social construction, and the way in which this knowledge is made accessible and has to be mastered through language in education. 'Mother tongue' then refers to the official standardised language variety that is used as a school language, i.e., that serves as the medium of teaching and learning in educational contexts. In this 'language across the curriculum' perspective, also teachers of maths and history can be considered mother tongue teachers. As a consequence mainly of external democratization processes in education, social mobility, and immigration movements, more and more children come to school who experience a gap between their 'mother tongue', which in a socialisational sense can be a regional or social dialect of the standard language, a totally different indigenous or non-indigenous language or language variety, a language variety that resulted from a process of second language acquisition, or a combination of some of these, the official language that they have to learn as a school subject, and the language in which they are supposed to acquire and develop knowledge, without the school as an institution really being aware of that fact, let alone taking explicit notice of it.

The analytical differences in meaning in the three notions of 'mother tongue' generally speaking do not exactly comply with the use of this notion in ordinary speech. It is likely that every day understanding of 'mother tongue', apart from connotations such as a the language known best, used most, liked best etc., contains all three aspects of meaning dealt with above at the same time, which of course does not exclude the possibility of one being (considered) dominant in specific cases. Especially with respect to the use of the term 'mother tongue' in a multilingual context, it is important to be aware of its possible negative connotations and political loadings. Baker and Prys Jones (1998:50) state "that the term 'mother tongue' when applied to different ethnic groups often reveals a bias and a prejudice. When Maori peoples in New Zealand, or Finns in Sweden, or Kurds from Turkey in Denmark, or Mexican Spanish speakers in the United States, or the different Asian language speakers in Canada and England are referred to in terms of their 'mother tongue' the expression may refer to minorities who are oppressed. The term has then taken an evaluative meaning - symbolizing migrant workers, guest workers, oppressed indigenous peoples and language minorities. 'Mother tongue' tends to be used for language minorities and much less so for language majorities. The term therefore tends to be a symbol

of separation of minority and majority, or those with less, as opposed to those with more, power and status”.

3 Mother tongue education from a majority perspective

Although the notion of ‘mother tongue’ nowadays mainly seems to be connected with a minority language position, historically speaking it is first of all closely connected to a majority context, one of its main characteristics being its relationship, in one way or another, to emancipatory movements.

Ahlzweig (1994) shows that the concept *lingua materna* in its earliest appearances refers to the language of the uneducated people as opposed to *lingua latina*, the language of the educated scholarly elite. This democratic and emancipatory concept of ‘mother tongue’ spread over Europe from the 12th century onwards. After centuries of schooling in Latin, the European *lingua franca* since the Middle Ages, in 16th century Europe, the ‘mother tongue’ became the language of instruction for the people - not the masses, of course, since compulsory education only started to gain ground at the end of the 18th century (Tulasiewicz & Adams, 1998). As an example of the role of the ‘mother tongue’ in this respect reference can be made here to the first Dutch school grammar, *Twe-spraack vande Nederduitsche letterkunst*, that was published in Leyden in 1584 and is believed to be written or edited by Hendrik Laurensz. Spiegel. Spiegel *cum suis* not only wanted to formulate some linguistic rules for the Dutch language, they also had the intention through these rules, to cultivate this *moedertaal* (mother tongue), to show that it had at least the same qualities as the ‘sacred languages’ Hebrew, Greek and Latin, and to make it available in the end as a language of instruction for the sciences (*artes*) which would save the pupils from the time consuming task of first having to learn Latin (Bakker & Dibbets, 1977).

Especially in 18th and 19th century Europe, the mother tongue played an important role in nation building, yet another emancipatory process. According to Heller (1999), having a shared language is central in this process in two ways. First of all sharing a language facilitates the construction of shared values and practices leading to unity. Secondly, a shared language contributes to legitimizing the nation in such a way that it is possible to argue that a group legitimately constitutes a nation because it shares a language. An important role in the status planning process of providing a nation with a national language is played by education. In order to function as an instrument of national unification and to be used in education, the mother tongue itself has to be unified to a certain extent. This process of standardization, or corpus planning, is well known and has been documented for many languages (see e.g. Clark, 2001). As a consequence mainly of its unifying and educational function, the once mainly oral mother tongue became a written standardised language following very strong prescriptive rules of grammar and style, that were derived from classical Latin and in the end lead to a rather unnatural invented type of language. As a reaction to this written language, at the end of the 19th century a new, and again emancipatory mother tongue movement emerged. In the Netherlands this was marked by the publication in 1893 of a pamphlet entitled *Pleidooi voor de moedertaal, de jeugd en de onderwijzers* (Plea for the mother tongue, the youth and the teachers) in which the author, J. H. van den Bosch, argued against the classist unnaturalness of the written school language and proposed his ‘language is sound’ philosophy, allowing for a great deal of mainly phonetical language variation.

It was under Van den Bosch’ seminal banner of ‘mother tongue education’ that many theorists and practitioners in the educational field up to now have argued for implementing changes in the teaching of Dutch as a mother tongue that would lead to emancipation, communication, and the acceptance of linguistic and cultural variation. Especially in the 1970s publications in the field of Dutch didactics proclaimed that the teaching of Dutch became ‘mother tongue education’. In hindsight ‘mother tongue education’ here mainly seems to have a proclamatory function: speaking about ‘mother tongue education’ meant to be in favour of the didactic principle to link up language teaching with the child’s ‘mother tongue’ or ‘home language’. That language often differs from the school language and the language that predominates in textbooks. Research had then already made abundantly clear that an approach of ‘neglecting the pupils’ home language’ could lead to considerable problems. The aim of ‘linking up with the pupils’ home language’, i.e., preventing or diminishing the problems of speakers of languages and language varieties other than the standard language, has to be valued positively. The proclamatory suitability of the term ‘mother tongue education’ when referring to this aim, however, does not alter the fact that this very term in no way covers what then actually happened and still happens in the so-called ‘mother tongue classroom’. What is referred to as ‘mother tongue education’

in most cases turns out to be standard language teaching, i.e., teaching in the standard language and aiming at a better proficiency in that language. The more pupils take part in the educational process that have other indigenous or non-indigenous languages or language varieties as their home language, the more the term 'mother tongue education', although its use got an impetus by the presence of these very children, becomes a *contradictio in terminis*. For dialect speaking children, mother tongue education would be education in a regional or social dialect, for immigrant pupils from Turkey it would be education in Turkish or Kurdish, and for Moroccan pupils it would be education in Berber or Moroccan Arabic. Neglecting for a moment the specific characteristics of language across the curriculum, only for pupils who at home speak the national standard language 'mother tongue education' would really be mother tongue education (Kroon, 1985).

4 Mother tongue education from a minority perspective

Nineteenth and 20th century nationalism not only resulted in nation-states and national languages. According to Heller (1999:15), one of its side-products is the existence of national minorities. It is after all the nation-state with its dominant national identity and language that gave indigenous minorities and their languages their minority status. The interesting paradox here is, that indigenous minorities, faced with the problem of their own legitimacy, basing their claims "on the logic of linguistic identity, on the right of a people, identified by its common language, to self-determination," use exactly the arguments that lead to their existence in the first place. From this perspective it comes as no surprise that they have always strongly focussed on institutionally securing their position within the nation-state. In this respect the establishment of institutional provisions for indigenous minority language teaching, or lesser used language teaching, has been a central, and generally speaking successfully followed, concern. The relatively strong position of languages such as Frisian, Welsh and Breton in Western Europe, but also the still improving position of languages such as Altai and Bashkir in the Russian Federation Republics of Altai and Bashkortostan (Khruslov, this volume) have predominantly been defined through historical hard-won forms of language political recognition on a territorial basis. This recognition is generally speaking codified in national language laws or international documents such as the Council of Europe's 1992 *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages* and 1994 *Framework Convention on National Minorities* (Extra & Gorter, 2001). This is not to say, of course, that indigenous minority languages and indigenous minority language teaching, are not under constant pressure. Especially within contemporary large scale modernisation and globalization processes, they run the risk of becoming considered obsolete and therefore no longer eligible for state support by the dominant society. In a Europe of regions, as opposed to a Europe of nations or fatherlands, indigenous minority languages and dialects, on the other hand, might encounter a revival (De Bot *et al.*, 2001).

A main difference between indigenous national minorities and non-indigenous immigrant minorities and the position they are able to acquire for their respective languages has to do with political power. Generally speaking, indigenous minorities are nationals of their country of residence, and non-indigenous minorities are not. The latter implies a considerable limitation in political participation and, consequently, a considerably weaker institutional position of their languages. This is among other things shown by the abundance of terms referring to these (and other) languages in a minority perspective. Anthologies, such as the one provided by e.g. Extra & Gorter (2001), might contain terms like 'native language', 'mother tongue', 'own language', 'home language', 'vernacular language', 'community language', 'ancestral language', 'heritage language', 'language of origin', 'non-indigenous minority language', 'allochthonous (minority) language', 'immigrant (minority) language', 'ethnic minority/group language', 'lesser used language' and 'language other than English' – "all euphemism intended to recognise that they are not the majority language" (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997:21).

It would go too far to extensively discuss here the merits and problems of all these terms. In the following, I will use the notion of 'community language', thereby avoiding an unnecessary minoritizing or stigmatizing perspective and indicating that the language in question is not necessarily acquired by each individual, nor necessarily used in every home but is related in one way or another to a certain - originally immigrant - community. This terminological debate, however, pales if compared to the political, educational and societal struggle regarding the curricular position of these languages, that

as a consequence of socio-economically or politically motivated migration processes have considerably enriched and changed traditional language variation patterns in most Western European societies.

Making decisions about the position of community languages in the curriculum has to deal with the twofold issue of using these languages as media of instruction and offering them as subjects in their own right. The former can be done through varying forms of transitional or two-way bilingual education, affecting the whole curricular building. The latter only involves allocating an additional language subject within or outside the curriculum, depending on the languages' officially conceded status (Kroon & Vallen, 1997). The conceptual and practical discussion on these approaches is often blurred by unclarity about their stated objectives. Main perspectives in this respect are multilingualism as a problem, as a resource and as a right (Baker, 2001). They may lead to giving community languages a place in the curriculum (as a medium of instruction and/or as a subject) in order to improve, through the community language, the pupils' proficiency in the dominant school language and their school achievement in general, or (as a subject only) to improve the pupils' proficiency in their community language as an intrinsic goal.

In the following these options are illustrated by the example of the Netherlands. The current Dutch community language teaching act, enshrined in the *Primary Education Act*, Sections 171-176, combines the instrumental and autonomous perspective by offering so-called 'language support' and community language teaching as a subject at the same time. During 'language support' lessons, community languages are used by a community language teacher within school hours in order to support the pupils in mastering regular curriculum subjects. Pupils who are selected for 'language support' leave the mainstream class for a limited number of weekly hours and get extra help of whatever kind, whereby in principle the community language is used as a language of instruction and a resource. Community language teaching as a subject, for which option the pupils' parents explicitly have to apply, takes place outside school hours. Decisions regarding the languages that are on offer, are taken by the municipal authorities on the basis of, for example, a home language survey. Community language teaching in both versions is financed by the Ministry of Education and underlies the Inspectorate of Education.

First evaluations of both versions of community language teaching in the Netherlands have not been very positive. They first of all make clear that Dutch educational authorities and schools seem to prefer the instrumental function of community language teaching. The intrinsic function has thus lost status. At the same time it remains rather unclear what the instrumental function really entails. As of August 2002 the law defines 'language support' as all teaching activities that, with the aid of a community language, contribute to learning Dutch and as such to achieving the attainment targets of primary education. The way in which this is to be accomplished is not specified and explanations of the supposed beneficial relationship between Dutch as a target language and a community language as a language of instruction are rather ambiguous. The history of community language teaching in the Netherlands that started in the ninetenseventies and since then is characterised by unclear goals, means and underlying rationales and ideologies on the one hand, and unsatisfying and unsuccessful practices on the other, seems to be engaged in yet another process of repeating itself.

5 Including the mother tongue in the curriculum

Although theoretical possibilities for including community languages in the curriculum discussed so far, might appear as more or less convincing in a scholarly discourse, educational reality is quite another arena. Data from a growing number of case studies in multilingual classrooms show different ways of dealing with community languages in the curriculum. In order to contribute to at least a little bit demystifying non-committal theorizing on multilingual education, I will give a brief account of some key incidents, taken from multilingual primary school classes in the Netherlands (without unfortunately being able here to go into any methodological detail; see Kroon & Sturm, 2000). Apart from an example taken from a 'language support' lesson, I will also include two examples from mainstream multilingual assimilation classrooms, which, notwithstanding all pleas and proposals for multilingual and multicultural education, after all still reflect the dominant approach in the majority of countries.

Forbidding community languages in the mainstream classroom

Imagine a multilingual classroom where eight year old pupils, are sitting in a circle telling about weekend events. Turkish Ertügrül has almost finished his story and Turkish Canan really wants to tell her story before sharing time is over. In order to achieve this aim she whispers to Ertügrül in Turkish to select her as the next speaker. Unfortunately the Dutch boy Kees hears her do this and informs the teacher: "Miss, Canan was just speaking Turkish to Ertügrül." The teacher is very angry and says to Canan that she is a nasty girl. "We talked about that already many times. Do you remember? Why is this nasty, not nice of you?" "Because the other kids cannot understand me," Canan replies. "Yes," the teacher continues, "because Kees probably thinks that you say very mean things. I have been explaining that to you already for five years and I find it a little bit strange that you still don't know." Canan nods and the teacher asks Ertügrül to pick someone. In this classroom it is clearly forbidden to speak Turkish and the pupils know that. According to the teacher, main reasons for this are didactic (the pupils should speak as much Dutch as possible in order to improve their proficiency) and communicative (when working together one should be able to understand each other and that is not the case when Turkish is used). Keeping this rule, apparently is more important than keeping the rule that snitching and whispering are forbidden in the classroom and the rule that pupils are not allowed to ask for a turn in sharing time (Canan) or speak before they have been given a turn (Kees). By the use of Turkish, the sharing time routine as a monolingual Dutch teaching situation is undermined in its monolinguality and potentially loses its functionality as a teaching-learning situation. By referring to the rule that forbids Turkish in the classroom, the teacher attempts to re-establish the normality of monolingualism in the classroom and as such shows an example of linguistic homogenization (see also Gogolin & Kroon, 2000).

Linking up with community languages in the mainstream classroom

Imagine a lesson of language awareness in a multicultural classroom with eight year old pupils in which the teacher explicitly tries to link up with the pupils' community languages in a lesson on interethnic communication problems. The conversation is on confusing food names. The teacher asks for the name of peanut butter in other languages than Dutch: "How do you say that in, let's say Turkish?" A Turkish pupil responds: "We simply say peanut butter." The teacher again: "You simply say peanut butter in Turkish? Yes? Ilias, do you know a word in Turkish or do you simply say peanut butter? Ayse?" And the answer: "Peanut butter!" The next word, cauliflower, leads to the following dialogue. Teacher: "Who knows how to say it in their own language? Most of you do know what cauliflower is, don't you?" A pupil from former Yugoslavia answers: "A cauliflower." Again the teacher: "In Yugoslavian?" And the pupil: "I don't know, my mother always says cauliflower. She always says cauliflower in Dutch." What this incident shows, is that community languages are not necessarily the mother tongues of the pupils coming from the communities involved. As a consequence of language loss processes and incomplete learning, the pupils' proficiency in their community language may be (rather) limited. Linking up with their assumed 'mother tongue' knowledge then can easily turn out to be a very embarrassing experience for the pupils: they already do not know Dutch very well, and now they turn out to also have only a limited proficiency in their 'mother tongue'. On top of that, this lesson, that was explicitly aiming at fighting lingocentrism, seems to communicate that languages such as Turkish and 'Yugoslavian' even don't have words for such simple things as peanut butter and cauliflower (see also Kroon, 1990 and Leung et al., 1997).

Using community languages as a medium of instruction outside the mainstream classroom

Imagine a 'language support' lesson with seven year old Moroccan pupils. According to the teacher, two of them are speakers of Berber; they understand Moroccan-Arabic but find it difficult to answer questions in it. One child is fluent in Berber and Moroccan Arabic. All parents are fluent in Arabic but their home language is Berber. The teacher does not speak Berber but he says to use Dutch if necessary to explain things to the pupils. The language of instruction is Moroccan Arabic. The class is working on reading strategies. The teacher asks (italics indicate switches to Dutch): "If *miss* or *sir* gives you an assignment, what *do you have to do first*, Jamila?" Jamila answers in Dutch: "*Read the title.*" The teacher first repeats the answer in Dutch, but when Nawar continues in Dutch, saying "*And then..*", he interferes and says in Moroccan Arabic: "Say it in Arabic". Nawar does so: "If you read it and don't

understand it, then you have to read it once again.” The teacher continues in Moroccan Arabic, but at the end switches again to Dutch: “Yes, how many times do we have to *read*?” Nasira answers in Dutch “*Two times*” which is confirmed by the teacher, first in Dutch, but at the end again in Moroccan Arabic: “*Two times or three times, if something, if we cannot understand something.*” Within this teacher-guided classroom conversation the teacher as well as the pupils in nine out of eleven turns switch to Dutch. The above is just to show the complex language use patterns in a ‘language support’ lesson where not the pupils’ ‘mother tongue’ Berber is used, but Moroccan Arabic, a non standardized variety of Arabic. The ultimate question to be answered here is if and how this type of community language teaching can contribute to a better proficiency in Dutch and to achieving attainment targets (see also Bezemer & Kroon, 2001).

7 Mother tongue education and linguistic human rights

Already the famous Unesco (1953) report on *The use of vernacular language in education* stated that “it is axiomatic that the best medium for teaching a child is his mother tongue”. This may well be one of the most frequently quoted and at the same time most frequently contested recommendation in the field of mother tongue education ever. The line of argument proposed by Unesco has been further developed mainly in the work of Skutnabb-Kangas *et al.* (1995:2) who coined the concept of ‘linguistic human rights’ on an individual level, i.e., “that everyone can identify positively with their mother tongue, and have that identification respected by others, irrespective of whether their mother tongue is a minority or majority language” as well as on a collective level, i.e., the right of minority groups “to enjoy and develop their language and (...) to establish and maintain schools and other training and educational institutions, with control of curricula and teaching in their own languages”. Violation of this right can be considered as a violation of human rights.

Recent years witnessed a number of declarations that in one way or another seem to be inspired by a linguistic human rights position. Examples that cover different parts of the world and instrumental and autonomous functions of mother tongue teaching in a broad sense, are the 2000 *Asmara Declaration on African Languages and Literatures*, stipulating in article 5, that “all African children have the unalienable right to attend school and learn in their mother tongues. Every effort should be made to develop African languages at all levels of education” (in Blommaert, 2001:132) and the 2000 *Declaration of Oegstgeest: moving away from a monolinguals habitus*, stipulating in Article 6, that “education in regional, minority and immigrant languages should be offered, supervised and evaluated as part of the regular curriculum in preschool, primary and secondary education” (in Extra & Gorter, 2001:448). The linguistic human rights paradigm has meanwhile been challenged from different directions. Blommaert (2001), for example, although being sympathetic to the basic principle of linguistic rights, contends it where it automatically leads to implementing the right of every citizen to enjoy social opportunities in and through the mother tongue by provision of education in the mother tongue. Using the mother tongue as a medium of instruction, although it may sound very appealing as a principle, without giving due attention to the complexities it presents, can turn out to be counter-productive and not leading to equality of the speakers of these languages in real life situations. Equal societal participation of minorities is a result of emancipation. This emancipation process - of the ‘illiterate masses’ in the 19th century as well as ‘pupils at risk’ in the 20th - is a main task of education. Especially by teaching the dominant language, education facilitates societal participation. The value that is given to linguistic product on the linguistic market depends on what is considered ‘legitimate language’ (Bourdieu, 1982). The introduction of the ‘national’ mother tongue in the curriculum in the 19th century, from this perspective, is as understandable as the exclusion from the mainstream curriculum of the immigrant ‘mother tongue’ in the 20th century. A “non-exclusive acknowledgement of the existence of these (regional, minority and immigrant) languages as sources of linguistic diversity and cultural enrichment” (Extra & Gorter, 2001:447) may be a congenial position, but without a fundamental change of societal power relations, these languages have only a very limited chance to become really part of the dominant curriculum.

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