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BILIGUALISM AND LINGUISTIC IDEOLOGY IN THE UNITED STATES

I.S. Shevchenko, Doctor of Science in Philology (Kharkiv)

Шевченко І.С. Білінгвізм і мовна політика в США. У статті розглядаються питання білінгвізму і мовних прав людини у поліетнічній державі США. Наводиться огляд законодавчої бази США та ООН у царині мовних прав людини. Мовна політика в поліетнічному суспільстві трактується як прояв боротьби еліт за владу. Аналіз історії та сучасного стану мовної політики в США доводить, що білінгвізм не загрожує національній єдності, а навпаки стимулює розвиток суспільства.

Ключові слова: білінгвізм, боротьба еліт, влада, мовна політика, мовні права людини.

Шевченко И.С. Билингвизм и языковая политика в США. В статье рассматриваются вопросы билингвизма и языковых прав человека применительно к полиэтническому государству США. Дается обзор законодательной базы США и ООН в области языковых прав человека. Языковая политика в полиэтническом обществе трактуется как проявление борьбы элит за власть. Анализ истории и современного состояния языковой политики в США доказывает, что билингвизм не угрожает национальному единству, а наоборот, стимулирует развитие общества.

Ключевые слова: билингвизм, борьба элит, власть, языковая политика, языковые права человека.

Shevchenko I.S. Bilingualism and linguistic ideology in the United States. This article discusses issues of bilingualism and linguistic human rights in the USA as a multiethnic country. It provides an overview of the legal framework the U.S. and the UN in the area of linguistic human rights. Linguistic ideology in a multiethnic society is treated as a manifestation of the elites' struggle for power. The analysis of the history and current state of linguistic ideology in the United States shows that bilingualism does not threaten national unity, but rather stimulates development of the society.

Keywords: bilingualism, linguistic ideology, linguistic human rights, struggle of elites, power.

«*Language planning is planning inequality*» (James Tollefson)

1. Introduction

This article will mainly concentrate on the relationships between language, power and privilege chosen as an object of analysis, in situation of bilingualism with a specific emphasis on linguistic ideology in the United States as the subject of the study. *Bilingualism* is the use of two or more languages at work or in education which presupposes the treatment of each language with equal legitimacy but in practice the rights of bilingual speakers depend upon the linguistic ideology. The article has both theoretical and practical aims: I will both specify the nature of linguistic ideology in a multiethnic society and reveal the role of bilingualism in the USA through history.

The term *linguistic ideology* is used here to refer to both governmental and non-governmental activities (we prefer it to the narrower term *language policy*

defined as language planning by governments). Linguistic ideology is embedded in the politics and social structure of the society reflecting its hierarchy, too. It presents «one mechanism for locating language within social structure so that language determines who has access to political power and economic resources» [18, p. 14].

The term multilingual/multinational applies to societies where there are fewer than 90 per cent representatives of one ethnic unity, usually giving its name to the country, in contrast to monolingual states like Germany, France, Japan. It is precisely in the sense of political and economic advantage or subordination that we understand a *dominant linguistic group*. Dominance is generally understood as the capacity to expand one's range of choices. So the dominant group has a broader range of choices available to its members relative to other groups of society. In a multilingual and multinational society, like the United States, constrained linguistic choices predetermine economic and social disadvantage for minority groups of Indians, Hispanos and others.

A *national minority* is not simply a «group» that is given by the facts of ethnic demography and speaking their own (local) language. Roger Brubaker [2, p.60] argues that «it is a dynamic political stance, or, more precisely, a family of related yet mutually competing stances, not a static ethno-demographic condition». The three distinctions of a national minority group are as follows: «(1) the public claim to membership of an ethnocultural nation different from the numerically or politically dominant ethnocultural nation; (2) the demand for state recognition of this distinct ethnocultural nationality; and (3) the assertion, on the basis of this ethnocultural nationality, of certain collective cultural or political rights» [ibid.].

2. Linguistic human rights in multilingual societies

Societies with structured inequality like a highly stratified American society are associated with exploitative language policies, that is «policies which give advantage to groups speaking particular language varieties» [18, p. 17]. Exploitative policies are evident in the range of constitutional and legal sources providing for the linguistic human rights and through these in educational systems that institutionalize disadvantages on minority students and reduplicate the existing hierarchical social systems.

Linguistic human rights belong to basic human rights. According to the principle underlying the concept of universal human rights, individuals and groups, irrespective of where they live, are entitled to an equal status. Observing linguistic human rights implies the right of minority groups to be different. Nationality-based assertion of collective linguistic, cultural or political rights gave rise to bilinguialism and multiculturalism.

In the 20th century, bilingualism has become a universally acknowledged and legally stated norm. The purposes and principles stated in the United Nations Charter (1945) are all based upon «respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion» (Article 1). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations in 1948 specifies: «Everyone is entitled to all rights and freedoms set forth in this declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status» (Article 2).

A respective American norm generally known as *the right to equality before the law*, is found in the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man adopted the same year; cf. «All persons are equal before the law and have the rights and duties established in this Declaration, without distinction as to race, sex, language, creed or any other factor» (Chapter 1, Article 2). It is worthwhile mentioning here that American legislation system recognized this norm earlier than the European one because European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages stating in its preamble that «the right to use a regional or minority language in private and public life is an inalienable right» was adopted by the United Nations only in 1992.

At the same time American practices in the sphere of linguistic human rights of bilingual speakers are most controversial. Though it is generally recognized that all individuals and groups should enjoy universal linguistic

human rights, practically this claim seems highly problematic in the light of political reality of unequal access to power. Robert Phillipson et al. [13, p. 4] argue that the «antagonism towards linguistic minorities is based on false premises, and in particular on two myths, that monolingualism is desirable for economic growth, and that minority rights are a threat to the nation state».

3. Language ideology in the United States

Theoretically, people may immerse into the dominant American culture while maintaining their distinctive languages and traditions. However, as is evident in the continuing resistance to bilingualism, the ideal of cultural diversity is far from being universally accepted in the American society. The heated debate concerning the issue of bilingualism and biculturalism has been under way in the United States for the last few decades. Should American society consider the norms and values of racial and ethnic subcultures to be as legitimate as those of the dominant culture? Should greater emphasis be placed on the respect for cultural diversity or on promotion of unified dominant cultural standards?

American society which is often referred to as a «melting pot» of languages and cultures has become one of economic and political world leaders. Does this really result from from the «melting» process or does this expression remain a metaphor? In other words, does the society owe its progress to cultural and linguistic unification?

«Social solidarity need not be conceptualized in terms of linguistic homogeneity», argues R.Handler [5]. This thesis is well grounded in the fact that in 1980 the number of Americans who spoke a language other than English totalled 23 million, or about 10 per cent of the total population of 226 million. More than half of them (81 per cent) also spoke English, while about 4.3 million were monolingual in a language other than English [9]. According to the estimates of Bouvier and Davis [1, p. 40], in 2080 white European Americans will only constitute 49.8 per cent of the population while the proportion of Afro- American, Asian and Hispanic population will grow.

The recent achievements of American democracy in maintaining linguistic human rights are exhibited in providing government services in non-English languages, providing bilingual and translator legal services based upon the Court Interpreters Act (1978), and providing the instruction in English as a second language. The Voting Rights Act (1965) suspended English-literacy tests as a basis for voting and excluded language-based discrimination thus admitting that English-only elections had been a violation of the fundamental right to vote for speakers of languages other than English.

Lesley Milroy [10] argues that language ideology, which always reflects the social and economic processes of a certain society, is therefore country-specific: the language (and even accent) in the United States is an iconic representation of an ethnic group and race as contrasted to Great Britain where the use of standard or non-standard English splits the society according to its class and power pattern.

4. Historical background of bilingualism in the USA

The issues of Americanization, the «melting pot» and English-based ideology are not new. On the one hand, they are motivated by the purpose of disintegration of language minority cultures in the U.S. society in order to eliminate even the possibility of separatism. On the other hand, ruling elites play upon underlying xenophobia, molding a fear and resentment of foreigners to minorities in the United States because «minorities advancement to positions of responsibility and authority, their increased admission to colleges create more competition and the perception of fewer positions to majority» [6, p. 155].

Historically, language ideologies of the United States varied and official English movement went through the periods of rise and fall which were parallel to changes in the economic and social situation. During the campaign for Anglo-American independence, non-English languages, especially German and French, were readily used by the English colonists provided their use was politically beneficial. After independence, however, the English-Amencans asserted their political superiority through the Continental Congress which consolidated the status of English and stopped using German as the language of U.S. official documents. The Enabling Act (1811) specified the same functions

of English for Louisiana, a former French-dominant colony.

The beginning of the 19th century gave rise to *nativism* – a political movement led by the Native American Association for promoting the interests of European-Americans as a reaction against new immigrations especially from Ireland and Germany. In the Midwest, where German settlers lived, there was a brief period of liberalization of English-only policies. In 1863 their vigorous demands to publish state laws and teach in German were satisfied. But as a result of nativist reaction German was soon abolished as the language of legislation and tuition.

In the course of the so-called «opening of the West» in the 19th century the federal government pursued the goal of cultural as well as physical extermination of Indians. Their languages were not taught at schools, not used in mass media or elsewhere in public life. Only in the 1930's a few bilingual educational programs were launched, but for a short time. The numerical decline in American Indian languages is so obvious that lately some efforts aimed at their preservation and revival were made. The Native American Language Act (1992) deals with the problem of language maintenance but so far the programs recognizing the unique status of Indian languages as *endangered* languages and funding their strengthening are few [15, p. 116].

The World-War-I and -II periods brought a renewed emphasis on the assimilation of minorities. Nativism grew enormously strong: lynchings of Italians and Mexicans were reported [7, p. 45], the use of German in trade, in instruction etc. was forbidden in many states such as Illinois, Ohio and others. French was not allowed in business, politics or education either. The national Immigration Act (1917) imposed quotas on immigrants who could not read English. And it was much later, when some bilingual programs were launched as a result of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's and 1970's.

Linguistic human rights have become a particularly sensitive issue for 11 millions of immigrants from Spanish-speaking nations. Miguel Perez from New York Daily News writes: «They say bilingualism threatens national unity, but their racism is a much bigger threat to a Constitution that stands for liberty. With one amendment they want to wipe out some of the civil rights Latinos have fought for years to obtain, like bilingual assistance in hospital emergence rooms and bilingual 911 operators» [12, p. 47].

The history of the struggle for the linguistic rights of Spanish speaking population of America roughly resembles that of Germans and the French. Ever since the Mexican War (1846–1848) and the annexation of Texas, California and New Mexico, the Anglicization policies prevailed in these territories occupied mostly by Mexicans. In the middle of the 19[41] century the use of Spanish was legally permitted in the counties with large Mexican population in the form of transitional bilingual education, in courtroom, for the publication of laws in Spanish. But in the first decade of the 20th century these states followed the pattern of other states with constitutional provision of English as their official language, with the result that by 1930 Spanish was no longer used for instruction and by 1935 it was no longer an official language in the legislation [7, p. 137].

Today linguistic and cultural rights of Hispanic Americans are often violated. «Where the Americanizers were afraid of Slavic or Mediterranean hordes, supporters of ELA (English Language Amendment) are afraid of Spanish and the people who speak it. It's almost as if we had traveled back in time seventy five years» [8, p. 109–110].

5. Official English movement

While the United States has never declared a national official language, the primacy of English in public affairs has never been questioned. A well-recognized world leader in many fields, America used the language of its former metropolis during its whole history and never tried to shift to any «native» language or seek linguistic independence from its former metropolis. On the contrary, the use of any language other than English was generally regarded as undesirable. Obviously, the reasons for such situation are far from linguistic ones and lie in social and economic situation: «The official language movement is perceived by the elite as aiding in the achievements of its political goals by realigning the population along

cleavage lines different from the cleavage lines that divide the society under the existing political power structure» [16, p. 92].

The history of ethnic and cultural (linguistic including) development of America tentatively suggests that in the long run the issues of cultural independence proved to be of less importance for the United States than those of economic growth and national consolidation. It is not surprising then that the official English movement revival took place in the 1980's along with the appearance of some crisis tendencies in American economy and political life. The current attempts to make English the official language of the United States is primarily motivated by the vision of what the national culture and ethnic structure of the society ought to be. English-language unity is promoted as the basis for political unity.

Another reason for the growth of concern about the English language in the United States is the literacy crisis of the last few decades. Even by the most conservative estimates, America has at least 20 million adults who cannot read well enough or subtract with sufficient competence to tally a checkbook [3, p. 358]. This crisis is often associated with the decay of the leading functions of English which rather provokes antagonism to other languages instead of taking measures to improve the level of general literacy. It explains the background of the official English movement: proclaiming English the only official language will exclude undesirable competition with other languages and prevent English from sharing its status with them.

Formally, the official English today is a public movement since it has no rigid organization or the program characteristic of a political party. Conceptually, a language movement is political since the goals of its leaders are redistribution of power within the society. The English-only movement has been guided by the organization called *U.S. English.* Since the early 1980's it has been the principal mover of numerous amendments to the federal constitution. Though the English Language Amendments (ELA) have not succeeded with the Congress they have been more successful in California (1986), Arizona, Colorado and Florida (1988). Illinois, Nebraska and Hawaii already had official-English laws prior to 1980. There the English language was made the only language of the ballot, the public schools and all government bills with the exceptions of such fields as public health, safety and the protection of the rights of defendants in court. Therefore, the ELA is a threat to bilingual voting rights, bilingual education and the dissemination of information.

The main arguments of ELA supporters are rooted in the English language ideology of the country. The call for language homogeneity is in concert with the calls for the identification and promotion of common values and cultural knowledge of what «all good Americans» are expected to share. Ethnic and cultural unification is treated as the necessary basis for social and economic progress: «In the United States over the past 40 years, we've come to see how integration and assimilation have meant equal justice and better economic opportunity for all Americans. Isolation in America is a suicidal path for any group. We must guard against enticements such as «ethnic purity» or «cultural preservation» – which are often thinly veiled metaphors for isolation» [11, p. 127].

E. Hernandez-Chavez [6, p. 154–155] argues that the English-only movement has already affected certain areas of private as well as public life: the prohibition on the use of minority languages in the workplace, in business and street signs; the demand of English language proficiency for job applicants, etc. Since 1980 the National Commission for Employment Policy has been monitoring the relationship between English language ability and income differentials and in 1982 its Report concluded : «A lack of fluency in English is the major source of the labor market difficulties of all (Hispanic) subgroups. It directly affects their labor market position, their education attainment, and is one facet of labor market discrimination» [4, p. 145]. Even the advocates of Official English movement acknowledge the fact that because of their poor command of English, millions of young men and women are leaving high school with prospects no brighter than a dishwasher's job at a local restaurant [11, p. 105].

Supporting the idea of American society serving a «melting pot» for immigrant cultures, languages and traditions, the founders of the U.S. English organization often chose to cite the saying of the novelist Paul Theroux: «Foreigners are always aliens in England. No one becomes English. It's a very tribal society. No one becomes Japanese. No one becomes Nigerian. But Nigerians, Japanese, and English become Americans». At the same time they can't but admit that the obvious reason for that lies in political and economic rather than linguistic field: «America is an open society, more open than any other in the world» [11, p. 13],

The official English idea is opposed by representatives of both minority and dominant groups in America, among them lawyers, judges, teachers of English. The 1986 Resolution of the Linguistic Society of America states: «American unity has never rested primarily on unity of language, but rather on common political and social ideals».

6. Conclusion

Analysis of bilingualism from the standpoint of language ideology and linguistic human rights in the United States demonstrates that language policy depends on the interests of those who have access to political power and economic resources. «Language is one arena for struggle, as social (dominant) groups seek to exercise power through their control of language» [18. p. 13]. Language policy is one of key mechanisms (a) for the state control over labor resourses, (b) for the execution of power by those groups which control state policy, (c) for sustaining existing power relationships, i.e. for ideological control.

Both UNO and the USA legislations acknowledge linguistic human rights. The issues of bilingualism or monolingualism do not directly influence economic growth, and minority rights are no threat to the nation state. Rather, in the course of American historic development, cultural and linguistic heterogeneity stimulated the development of the nation.

Today, in the United States bilingualism and multicultural principles, though generally acknowledged as democratic and highly desirable, still remain proclaimed rather than translated into practical policies. The concept of national solidarity, loyalty, and patriotism tend to be associated with language, mainly with speaking American English. Speakers of other languages are automatically denied political rights such as voting, economic opportunities and social equality which gives rise to a protest public movement of minorities, in particular, for their linguistic human rights.

The sociolinguistic approach employed in this article may open perspectives for further analysis of the issues of bilingualism and multiculturalism in Europe, Asia and Africa.

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