

Language and Universalization A “Linguistic Ecology” Reading of Bahá'í Writ

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Abstract

In this article, interpretation of Bahá'í writings regarding language, cultural diversity, and worldwide communication leads to the seemingly paradoxical position that the promotion of linguistic minority rights in must coincide with promotion of an International Auxiliary Language (IAL). Opposing trends toward increased globalization and growing nationalism are noted and their concurrence explained. The notion of “cultural justice” is expounded and the unregulated global spread of English today critically assessed in its light. By contrast, from the perspective of Bahá'í writ, IAL emerges as a language intended to facilitate worldwide communication without unduly impinging on humankind's native linguistic traditions. Thus, Bahá'í writings appear to support a worldwide linguistic ecology better planned, more equitable, less prone to precipitous change, and more cognizant of the singular role of language in humanity's individual and collective identity.

Résumé

Dans le présent article, l'interprétation des Écrits bahá'ís concernant la langue, la diversité culturelle et la communication sur le plan mondial, mène au point de vue apparemment paradoxal selon lequel la promotion des droits linguistiques minoritaires doit coïncider avec la promotion d'une langue auxiliaire internationale. La concurrence entre la mondialisation croissante et la montée du nationalisme est ensuite soulignée et expliquée. Puis, la notion de justice culturelle est développée, afin de fournir un contexte où analyser de façon critique l'expansion globale effrénée de l'anglais à l'heure actuelle. Par contraste, la langue internationale auxiliaire émerge des Écrits bahá'ís comme une langue qui vise à faciliter la communication mondiale sans toutefois empiéter sur les traditions linguistiques natives de l'humanité. Ainsi, les Écrits bahá'ís semblent appuyer une écologie linguistique mondiale mieux planifiée, plus équitable, moins sujette à des changements abruptes et qui reconnaît davantage le rôle particulier que la langue joue par rapport à l'identité individuelle et collective l'humanité.

Resumen

En este artículo, la interpretación de los escritos bahá'ís en lo que se refiere a idioma, diversidad cultural, y comunicación mundial nos encamina hacia la posición paradójica de que la promoción de derechos minoritarios lingüísticos necesariamente coincide con la promoción de un Idioma Auxiliar Internacional (IAI). Se toma en cuenta y se explican las corrientes opuestas del ensanche de la globalización y el aumento del nacionalismo. Se amplía el concepto de “justicia cultural” y se escruta a su luz el esparcimiento global descontrolado del inglés. En contraste, la IAI emerge del mandato bahá'í como un idioma que busca facilitar la comunicación mundial sin impactar en las tradiciones lingüísticas autóctonas de la humanidad. Por esto, los escritos bahá'ís parecen apoyar una ecología lingüística mundial mejor diseñado, mas equitativo, menos dispuesto a cambios repentinos, y más conocedor del rol único del idioma en la identidad colectiva e individual de la humanidad.

The day is approaching when all the peoples of the world will have adopted one universal language and one common script. These things are obligatory and absolutely essential. It is incumbent upon every man of insight and understanding to strive to translate that which hath been written into reality and action.

—Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*

The paramount challenge of multiculturalism today lies in ensuring harmonious relations between dominant and nondominant groups, whereby “dominance” can occur at levels ranging from local to global. Indeed, our increasingly interdependent and transcultural planet has created more opportunity than ever before for confrontation and conflict over language, ethnicity, and religion—the foremost determinants of any culture’s values, whether within or among sovereign states. For instance, not to appreciate the significance of societal multilingualism to the identity and political reality of most of humankind, is to underestimate the paramount role of language to many of humanity’s most cherished assets, i.e., its values, thoughts, and feelings of group adherence. It is no surprise that the degree to which the cultural priorities of our still numerous¹ linguistic minorities are treated seriously represents a significant key to many societies’ success at achieving longer-term stability, greater unity, higher overall standards of living, and fuller participation in the international community. As argued below, to negotiate issues of linguistic dominance effectively is essential for *all* of humankind to achieve sustained peace and stability.

Reflecting humanity’s evolution toward ever greater oneness—a notion pivotal to Bahá’í doctrine—language has contributed much to the consolidation of ever larger political aggregates, from tribes, city-states, and principalities to states in the contemporary sense. In today’s postcolonial world, traditional nation-states are outnumbered by states comprising multiple ethnocultural “nations.” State-level control over matters of language and culture is frequently inhibited by the dynamics of substate nationalism, or that of a suprastate world order, or both. In fact, at the current stage in world history, two concurrent, intensifying, and opposing processes—globalization² and localization—have been repeatedly noted (e.g., Fishman, “Summary and Interpretation” 639).

Unfortunately, linguistic globalization is frequently viewed with suspicion by anthropologists and sociolinguists. It is often perceived as an evil that runs counter to the cultural interests of local, indigenous, or minority³ language groups. The position represented in this article, however, is that such conflict need not and in fact should not exist. All depends on how tensions between the twin processes of globalization and increased local assertiveness are negotiated. What follows, then, is a Bahá’í-inspired view of global linguistic ecology, a reading of Bahá’í writings that supports the seemingly paradoxical position that the safeguarding of linguistic minority rights can, and indeed must, go hand in hand with the promotion and choice of an International Auxiliary Language (IAL) for worldwide communication. The notion of “cultural justice” is central here, whereby “justice” is seen in a manner contrasting, yet not conflicting, with that in “Whither the International Auxiliary Language?” by Phyllis Chew.

Culture and Justice

One of the few twentieth-century linguists known to embrace the IAL issue was the American Edward Sapir (e.g., “The Function of an International Auxiliary Language”). Presaging the views of later social theorists such as Bourdieu (*The Logic of Practice*), Sapir saw “culture” as the set of values, customs, institutions, and commodities that most significantly characterize a community’s identity, i.e., the “spirit” or “genius” that distinguishes it from others. Among the combined ideational and material factors thus defining culture, Sapir considered the nonmaterial ones most important, i.e., those that spring from values (“Culture, Genuine and Spurious”). Bahá’í writings, too, teach that the spiritual and social lives of human beings are inextricably linked. Shoghi Effendi explains, “We cannot segregate the human heart from the environment outside us. . . . Man is organic with the world. His inner life moulds the environment and is itself also deeply affected by it. The one acts upon the other. . . .” (from a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, qtd. in *Conservation of the Earth’s Resources* 15). Indeed, we can affirm the appropriateness of Sapir’s interpretation of culture as the way in which our inner values interact with those values of the society that affect us most, and with the behaviors, customs, and institutions that society deems most significant. Thus culture, as the nexus of humans’ socially acquired value set, is connected to our underlying spiritual essence, which, according to Bahá’í writings, is quintessentially the same for all humans, a notion often associated with the work of French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (e.g., *Structural Anthropology*).

But what of the cultural significance of language, the relation between language and values? Elucidating the paramount significance of language to culture and validating Sapir’s notion of culture, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá reportedly called language the most profound characteristic of a people, the garment of the spirit of the people (Fallscheer, “Aus dem Schatz”). This lends credence to another of Sapir’s views, inspired by his mentor Franz Boas, that of language as the primary pillar of culture, the greatest socializing

force (Duranti, *Linguistic Anthropology* 52ff.), for “a common speech serves as a peculiarly potent symbol of the social solidarity” of its speakers as a group (Sapir, “Language” 15).

By appreciating the paramount role of language for the identity of humanity’s countless speech communities, we better grasp the significance of such concepts as “language rights,” or “linguistic human rights,” as formulated in the 1996 Universal Declaration (*Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights*). Indeed, the Declaration’s premise that such cultural rights are both collective and individual, inseparable and interdependent (*Universal Declaration* 4), is buttressed by the above Bahá’í quotations on the intertwinedness of our inner and social lives. Sapir, too, emphasized that language was not just essential to the group, but to the individual as well, regarding language as the most significant element for the growth of individual identity (“Language” 17). The connection between language and individual identity is another assertion Bahá’í writings confirm, such as in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s statement on language as the encryptor of the human heart: “The heart is like a box, and language is the key. Only by using the key can we open the box and observe the gems it contains” (*Promulgation* 60).

On the basis of Bahá’í writings on the essential role of language and culture to the human condition, it is argued here that Bahá’í principles support an interpretation of language rights as basic and inalienable human rights. Language rights, rather than being mere ethical or political options, emerge from this reading of Bahá’í writings as a matter of fundamental justice, of “cultural justice.” Justice, in turn, is the principal prerequisite for societal harmony and stability. Indeed, Bahá’u’lláh clarifies that the “purpose of justice is the appearance of unity among men” (*Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh* 67). “The organization of the world and the tranquillity of mankind depend upon it” (qtd. in Shoghi Effendi, *Advent of Divine Justice* 28). As discussed below, this concurs with Bahá’í teachings on the purpose of IAL.

Cultural Minorities

There can be no doubt as to the universalist orientation of the Bahá’í dispensation. The oneness of humankind is the single most overriding notion in Bahá’í social teachings, in Shoghi Effendi’s words, “the pivot round which all the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh revolve . . .” (*World Order of Bahá’u’lláh* 42). Bahá’u’lláh proclaims: “The distinguishing feature that marketh the preeminent character of this Supreme Revelation consisteth in that We have . . . laid down the essential prerequisites of concord, of understanding, of complete and enduring unity” (*Gleanings* 97). That this universalist Bahá’í ideology includes matters of global communication is evidenced by Bahá’í teachings on IAL. The Universal House of Justice explains that “Bahá’u’lláh enjoins the adoption of a universal language and script. His Writings envisage two stages in this process. The first stage is to consist of the selection of an existing language or an invented one which would then be . . . an auxiliary to the mother tongues . . . The second stage, in the distant future, would be the eventual adoption of one single language and common script for all on earth” (*Kitáb-i-Aqdas* n.193).

Yet Bahá’í doctrine combines this unequivocally universalist disposition with great emphasis on the value of cultural diversity. Shoghi Effendi states that “the world-wide Law of Bahá’u’lláh. . . does not ignore, nor does it attempt to suppress, the diversity of ethnical origins, of climate, of history, of language and tradition, of thought and habit, that differentiate the peoples and nations of the world . . . It repudiates excessive centralization on one hand, and disclaims all attempts at uniformity on the other. Its watchword is unity in diversity . . .” (*World Order* 41–42). Thus, vis-à-vis minorities, Bahá’í teachings explicitly encourage an attitude of consideration, appreciation, and protection against undue oppression. The Universal House of Justice stresses that to “discriminate against any tribe because they are in a minority is a violation of the spirit that animates the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh. As followers . . . it is our obligation to protect the just interests of any minority element within the Bahá’í Community. In fact in the administration of our Bahá’í affairs, representatives of minority groups are not only enabled to enjoy equal rights and privileges, but they are even favored and accorded priority” (qtd. in *Lights of Guidance* 529–30).

In this context, it is helpful to consider the perspective of linguistic minority groups. In both developed and developing countries, such groups tend to experience very considerable pressures on their languages, often with concomitant political and/or socioeconomic pressure to assimilate or to become marginalized. They generally experience conflict, at times violent, between their need for primary identity and group adherence on one hand, and the risks and rewards of participation in larger, transcultural institutions, markets, and identities on the other. The less dominant the group, the more its members are thought to experience pressure to become multilingual, and indeed multicultural, to “re-ethnify and relinguify in the direction of the more powerful reward-systems that surround them” (Fishman, “On the Limits of Ethnolinguistic Democracy” 59–60). While there is no reason to assume that nondominant group members pursue social, material, and spiritual well-being less than others, there are often limits to their

willingness to assimilate linguistically, even at the price of relative ostracism. Indeed, the pressures of globalization frequently appear to heighten the need for cultural resistance on the part of less powerful language groups, while simultaneously providing them with added means with which to assert local languages and cultures. A view arising from research on cultural resistance among linguistic minority groups (e.g., Meyjes, “On the Status of Creole in Guadeloupe”) is that oppression, discrimination, coerced assimilation, and the like intensify rather than decrease such resistance. Conversely, the extent to which a group perceives itself as having achieved cultural emancipation correlates with its openness to bilingualism, biculturalism, and even its de facto assimilation. This is not surprising. When we think of Bahá’u’lláh’s principle of the independent search for truth, we realize that values best evolve from within. To place pressures on a group that contrast with its values, is to invite resistance. The less acceptable the pressure, the deeper the resistance. For such is the function of values, that they act as yardsticks for the acceptability of behaviors and conditions. This applies to the great majority of language communities in the world today, which tend to speak nonofficial, substate languages. Indeed, sociolinguists would agree with Phillipson et al. that only speakers of official languages “enjoy *all* linguistic human rights” (*Linguistic Human Rights* 2).

Against this backdrop, the question of minority language rights gains in poignancy. Bahá’í scriptures point to achievement of a harmonious linguistic ecology, world cultural relations in which dominant and nondominant language needs—be they local, national, regional, or universal—are effectively and justly balanced. But how should the perceived paradox between concern for the cultural integrity of minorities and the call for an IAL be resolved? Are not the alien, global, and universal patently at odds with the indigenous, the local, and the culturally specific? How are we to achieve a Bahá’í-inspired vision of cultural justice in matters of language?

Organic Development

Shoghi Effendi explains that humanity is currently witnessing the final stage in its evolution from the family, the tribe, the city-state, and sovereign nations to this, the dawn of the oneness of humankind through the “gradual diffusion of the spirit of world solidarity which is spontaneously arising out of the welter of a disorganized society” (*World Order* 44). It is noteworthy that he mentions disorganization, for, in matters of linguistic ecology, the unregulated and yet unprecedentedly dominant role of English today is particularly relevant. Like no other language before, English reflects globalization and the dynamics thereof (see, for example, Kachru, *The Other Tongue*; Pennycook, *Cultural Politics of English*; or Phillipson, *Linguistic Imperialism*). Going beyond the status of other international languages or intercultural lingua francas, English has become, especially since World War II, the preferred global language of trade, diplomacy, science and technology, finance, popular culture, air-traffic control, the United Nations, telecommunications, scholarly journals, and so on. It has done so, without having the greatest number of native speakers, by virtue of its paramount geographic distribution among the world’s middle classes.

From a Bahá’í viewpoint, one may be inclined to welcome this course of events and to interpret them as reflecting universalist Bahá’í teachings, notably regarding IAL. Besides, in Robertson’s terms, the “macrostructuration of world order” witnessed today is a patently complex process not credibly reducible to mere Western imperialism, cultural or otherwise (“Mapping the Global Condition” 22). However, it is to be questioned whether the spread of English today reflects Bahá’í standards of cultural justice, language rights, and the gradual emergence of a truly universal culture. The prevailing globalization of both English and Occidental culture in the world today may well be more symptomatic of the “disorganization” than of the “unity” referred to in the above quotation. Indeed, the onward march of English is often considered unstoppable, and the emergence of local varieties of so-called Englishes is touted as evidence that English is spread in a culturally nonimperialistic manner. Is, however, such unchecked linguistic globalization truly in the interest of world unity? Or is the resistance it generates on the part of certain nondominant groups symptomatic of grave, though perhaps largely unintended, cultural injustice? The aforementioned Declaration, and the documents preceding it, were a response to humanity’s experience with forcefully imposing dominant languages on speakers of nondominant languages (*Universal Declaration* 6–10). Especially in (post)colonial settings, superlanguage English has often been granted official language status next to or above indigenous language(s). Yet considerable tensions often persist between competing demands: local versus countrywide identity, local versus foreign values, narrower versus broader community, indigenous language versus English—a struggle often favoring English, touted by the influential classes as the language of science, unity, and (post)modernization (e.g., Dua, “The Spread of English in India”).

For IAL to come into use at the cost of cultural displacement and cultural imposition directly conflicts with Bahá'í views on diversity and the cultural rights of minorities. Those promoting English as an international language today should consider Sapir's admonition that "the deliberate attempt to impose a culture directly and speedily, no matter how backed by good will, is an affront to the human spirit" ("Culture" 328). In matters of communication, the result of the current precipitous and "disorganized" worldwide trend is unlikely to be justice or unity in diversity. Rather, it is likely to lead to the very situation witnessed today, namely, unreflected "globalization" on the one hand and widespread struggles for the maintenance of cultural specificity on the other. Indeed, the very expeditiousness of the current globalizing process is ominous, as stable and true world unity is likely to require a just, gradual, and harmonious process of what could be termed "universalization" as opposed to the explosion in various forms of one linguistic tradition throughout the world. Universalization thus perceived would be a process of world unification in which all cultures can participate and contribute in an environment of supportiveness and nonoppression. Only such a process would be in keeping with the twin Bahá'í axioms of valuing diversity and achieving ever greater unity. For uniformity tends not to equal unity; globalization may well preclude true universalization; and cultural power easily excludes cultural justice.

Language rights as justified here are not based on the often-evoked "biodiversity" argument, however appealing, that "the perpetuation and cultivation of both linguistic and cultural diversity is essential for the growth of knowledge and development of human faculties just as biodiversity is essential for the survival of the planet and for economic growth" (Dua, Introduction). Nor does such concern for language rights spring from nostalgia for maintaining the linguistic patrimonies of minorities. The goal is not forever to freeze past or current levels of cultural specificity as an end in itself. The goal, rather, is to enable a heterogeneous humanity to succeed in gradually and harmoniously establishing a new universal identity and cultural *modus vivendi*. Shoghi Effendi describes ". . . one organic commonwealth, one vast, unified, and harmoniously functioning system" (*World Order* 193), ". . . in which all nations, races, creeds and classes are closely and permanently united, and in which the autonomy of its state members and the personal freedom and initiative of the individuals that compose them are definitely and completely safeguarded" (*World Order* 203).

From a Bahá'í vantage point, the eventual emergence of world unity is divinely ordained, and, therefore, it is considered inevitable that cultural change ultimately take place in the direction of universalization. The quality of both the process and the outcome, however, is for the intervening generations to realize. It is, in the words of Fishman, "the responsibility of the largest and most secure languages to respond constructively and magnanimously to this universal problem in human cultural-ecology" ("On the Limits" 60–61). The idea is not that language and culture be denied change, or that language shift or language loss be disallowed—if this were practicable. The idea is that whatever cultural change takes place not be imposed, for this would ultimately defeat the purpose of sustainable unity. Certain familiar terms may come to mind in this context, such as the need for cultural "self-determination," or ethnolinguistic "democracy"⁴ (Fishman, "On the Limits"), or other concepts laden with historical meaning. Yet in view of the perceived uniqueness of humanity's unified future, a new terminology may be required. After all, a Bahá'í vision of the future world, Shoghi Effendi asserts, ". . . calls for a wider loyalty, for a larger aspiration than any that has animated the human race . . . implies an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced" (*World Order* 41–42, 43). Taking our cue from this quotation, we could call the kind of cultural change required "organic." A just linguistic ecology, then, is not "global" in the assimilationist⁵ sense. At the current stage of world relations, termed that of humankind's burgeoning "maturity" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, qtd. in Shoghi Effendi, *World Order* 165), the world's nondominant communities need to be protected and cherished as a prerequisite to the organic development of a world-embracing culture. This view is in harmony with Fishman ("On the Limits"), who advocates negotiating the inevitable tensions between "narrower," more local ethnolinguistic identities and "broader," more global ones. What is needed is to organize world communication such that it is assured through IAL *and* that native languages and cultures are protected. But a Bahá'í-inspired view is also open to eventual reassessments of today's ecolinguistic priorities. It calls for flexibility, for with the emergence of a universal culture, nourished and informed by protected local cultures, will eventually come the age of universalism, as predicted in Bahá'í scripture. Ultimately, the choice of a single, nonauxiliary, worldwide Universal Language (UL)⁶ is presaged, though those developments are far in the future. For the foreseeable future, the just and gradual realization of cultural universalization requires an environment of true diversity. As to the choice of either language, Bahá'í scriptures do not appear to indicate whether linguistic similarity between IAL and UL need or need not exist.

It is in this context that our precise understanding of IAL becomes crucial. Bahá'í sacred texts support the view of IAL not as the all-consuming language of disorganized and rampant globalization, but rather the opposite, as a language to facilitate worldwide communication precisely *without* unduly impinging on humanity's native linguistic traditions. Thus understood, IAL is both a channel for global communication and a buffer to oppression from an aggressive global language such as English in this day and age. Thus, Bahá'u'lláh states, humanity would be “acquiring only two languages, one their own native tongue, the other the language in which all the peoples of the world would converse” (*Epistle to Son of the Wolf* 138). Some scriptural evidence for the deliberately restricted role of IAL can be found in the stipulation that this language “be taught in all the schools of the world as an auxiliary to the mother tongues” (Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, note 193). Exactly how much deference to local mother tongues this implies may not at first be evident, but linguists agree that native tongues are intuitively “acquired” (see Slobin, “Universal and Particular”), while subsequent language “learning” increasingly requires different cognitive skills, resulting in different linguistic competence levels. It follows that to teach IAL as a subject in schools—when the native tongue is well established—protects its status as secondary to that of humanity's mother tongues.⁷ Indeed, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá reportedly elucidated this aspect of the Bahá'í teachings describing a native tongue as like the native air which we need for living, which surrounds us from cradle to grave, which is and remains our most personal property, while comparing the common world language to a bridge to the rest of the world (Fallscheer, “Aus dem Schatz”).

What then emerges is that Bahá'í scripture does not portray IAL as a lingua franca in the traditional sense, a language merely used for practical reasons between speakers of different mother tongues. It is both greater in stature and more *formally* limited in cultural power. It is greater, notably, in that the Universal House of Justice stipulates it is to be selected by the collective “governments of the world through their parliaments . . .” (Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, note 193). On the one hand, this gives IAL a standing significantly more regulated, stable, and world embracing than any traditional lingua franca, such as Latin, French, Swahili, in various times and places in world history. On the other hand, the very *establishment* of IAL as a secondary language not superimposed on primary languages precludes it from unofficially invading communities by the mere power of its speakers, making it more formally limited in cultural invasiveness than traditional lingua francas. By contrast, English as an international language today has been faulted for not peacefully coexisting with less dominant languages (Dua, *Hegemony of English*), thus marginalizing and even supplanting less dominant languages. The very status of English as an unregulated global superlanguage makes it a suspect contender for IAL, as its dynamic bodes ill for linguistic minority rights. Indeed, it is in the face of the current unchecked dynamic of English, that the choice of any IAL has become a matter of increasing urgency. In the process of selecting a particular IAL, political and other societal criteria threaten to outweigh linguistic criteria, so as to render the latter criteria moot. Yet rather than accept the possible irrelevance of linguistic grounds for choosing a particular IAL as a foregone conclusion, a position more in keeping with Bahá'í guidance may well be to support research into the optimal choice of IAL, as argued in a forthcoming paper on IAL selection criteria by this author.

Summary

The Bahá'í-inspired position represented here, then, is that IAL and language rights are more than just “not incompatible.” They depend on each other, and it is seen as a particular challenge of cultural politics today that the two be made to coexist sensibly. In the interest of protecting language rights, the selection of any IAL is pressing. Lingua francas create and have created a world of unprecedented language death, great intercultural stresses and confrontations, ubiquitous borderlands and partial identities. By contrast, the above Bahá'í-inspired perspective offers a just remedy against the cultural confusion and destruction that unbridled linguistic globalization, albeit to varying degrees, evidently imposes on nondominant speech communities. Bahá'í principles as interpreted here are intended to generate a linguistic ecology more world embracing, more stable, more surveyable, and far less violent vis-à-vis nondominant languages, whether at substate or interstate levels. The goal is neither to prejudice developments against the eventual emergence of UL, nor to hamper the process of the lasting unification of humankind. On the contrary, the position taken here is that Bahá'í writings regarding language, culture, diversity, social change, and global communication are intended to foster relations among speech communities that are less prone to precipitous change, more inclusive, better planned, more equitable, and more cognizant of the singular role of language in humanity's individual and collective identity. It is thought that such an approach would best promote the Bahá'í objective of peace through justice, in the interest of a richer and deeper unity of humankind. Rather than advocate current trends in unilateral linguistic globalization, the above

interpretation of Bahá'í writ supports a more stable, two-tiered view of global linguistic ecology, such that for the foreseeable future international communication be conducted by a yet-to-be-selected IAL, occupying a position nonthreatening to native languages and enabling primary speech communities to contribute gradually, peacefully, and organically to the evolution of a richly diverse and dynamic world civilization. Only then, it is believed, will cultural justice be served such that IAL, as stipulated in Bahá'u'lláh's *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* will truly become “the cause of unity . . . and the greatest instrument for promoting harmony and civilization. . .” (88).

Notes

1. The reported number of languages spoken today varies considerably—from approximately 3,000 (Coulmas, *Sprache und Staat* 14–15) to 5,000 (Edwards, *Multilingualism* 1), to 6,000–7,000 (Phillipson et al., *Linguistic Human Rights* 2), or exactly 6,703 (Grimes, *Ethnologue*). Paradoxically, despite the record language mortality currently attested, languages are growing in number, as traditional definitions of language/dialect continue to be challenged.

2. “Globalization” today, it has been suggested, is only partly a function of central state-level activity. For a brief discussion of this frequently invoked, yet loosely defined concept, see Robertson (“Mapping the Global Condition”).

3. The term “minority” is stretched here to include nondominance not only of small speech-communities but also of any language group, even larger suprastate ones, as long as its speech community is subjected to undue external sociolinguistic pressures.

4. A difficulty with evaluating cultural imposition is that nondominant groups, or elements thereof, may themselves desire it, to gain access to the dominant culture. Such groups may believe they can simultaneously retain their primary culture and gain access to the dominant one (see Meyjes, “On the Status” 92–93). Unfortunately, the naiveté of this position can become evident to the groups themselves only after assimilation is no longer preventable or easily reversible.

5. See Reagan (“Fostering Language Rights as Human Rights”) for a recapitulation of relevant language-planning theories.

6. Emphasis on UL appears inappropriate at the current stage of world cultural development because as explained above (a) the selection of UL is sociopolitically irrelevant for the foreseeable future, (b) the protection of local language rights through selection of IAL requires urgent attention, and (c) the protection of language rights precedes the organic development toward UL.

7. As pointed out by Pei, IAL learnability concerns primarily adults (*One Language for the World* 70, 187–88). If IAL transmission to children were the goal, methods more effective than teaching it in schools are imaginable, confirming the notion that Bahá'í teachings favor protection of native languages. On IAL simplicity/learnability, see, for example, Meyjes, “The Choice of an Auxiliary Language.”

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