

WHAT DO WE OWE TO MINOR AND/OR MINORITY LANGUAGES

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It sounds banal that we live in a world of linguistic diversity. It is not hard to see that this well-known fact cannot be dissociated from the fact that linguistic diversity means linguistic inequality. It therefore seems appropriate to look more closely into this inequality. At this point five classes of languages may be given: a) Languages covering all oral and written forms of communication not only within their native speech community but also between members of different speech communities, e.g. English; b) Languages covering all oral and written forms of communication but mainly or only within their native speech community, e.g. the Scandinavian languages or Italian; c) Languages covering all oral and written forms of communication with the exception of specific speech acts like scientific communication, e.g. Turkish or Swahili; d) Languages covering mainly oral forms of communication although being written, but only in regional newspapers etc. and some fiction and poetry, e.g. Irish; e) Languages covering only oral forms of communication, e.g. Romanes. In my paper I will discuss questions concerning this inequality of languages, especially referring to minor and/or minority languages, like a) Are we obliged to strengthen the use of languages of class d)? b) Should we encourage the development of an alphabet for languages of class e)? c) Is the lack of an alphabet a serious social disadvantage? Etc.