Linguistic Justice: English as panacea or pandemic
Robert Phillipson

The great sociologist of language Joshua Fishman wondered in 1976 whether English ‘would continue to spread as a second language the world over, as a benevolent bonus or creeping cancer of modernity’. Implementing language rights so as to ensure linguistic justice can serve to counteract the market forces that promote English linguistic imperialism. The Deklaration om Nordisk Språkpolitik (in 8 languages) aims to ensure a healthy balance between English and national languages, and there are follow-up recommendations on ‘parallel competence’ in higher education. Whether the increasing dominance of English, and energetic US and UK efforts to promote it worldwide, represent a bonus or a cancerous infection, a panacea or a pandemic, needs analysis at macro, meso and micro levels. Language rights are weakly represented in Eurolaw, and in international human rights covenants, and are often neglected nationally. Policies for ensuring linguistic justice for speakers of all languages, and maintaining language diversity, are urgently needed.

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