

Summary Lecture Minority Languages March 25, 2023

There are over 6000 languages around the world. Most of these belong to a minority language, a language spoken by a relatively small group. For many people who speak these languages, their preservation and maintenance is of great importance. After all, language is connected, among other things, to everyone's dignity, ensures connection with others, contributes to the formation of everyone's cultural identity and plays a role in the transfer of values within groups. This is also the case for groups that are relatively small in size and communicate in their own language (mother tongue). We can think for example, of Sranantongo, Sarnámi, Papiamentu, various indigenous languages all over the world, such as Kichwa, African languages and dialects in various countries, including the Netherlands.

Special guest speaker at the lecture on minority languages was Mrs. Hilda de Windt Ayoubi, writer, poet, columnist, artist and Hispanist from Curaçao, She is known for her translation into Papiamentu of the famous book *The Prophet* by Kahlil Gibran, her Dutch translation of a selection of poems by Professor Marco Martos from Peru, *El Enigma de tu Belleza. Jouw Raadselachtige schoonheid* (Your Enigmatic Beauty), Hilda and Jose Alleleijn and her many years of publications of poems in four languages in the newspaper Amigoe on Curaçao.

Partly through her poems, Hilda stands up for small oppressed groups all over the world. She wrote several short stories and two collections of poetry. In 2019, her book of language-related poems was released, *Geef me je Taal. Dat ik je beter versta. Duna mi bo idioma pa mi por komprondé bo mihó*. She dedicated this book to Professor Pieter Muysken and Frank Martinus Arion. In 2022 her book on the importance and preservation of mother tongues, *Translingualism, Translation and Caribbean Poetry - Mother Tongue has crossed the Ocean/Lenga di Mama a krusa Laman*, which she and the late Professor Pieter Muysken from Nijmegen have written, followed.

The latter book was presented for the first time in Nijmegen on March 25, 2023. At the heart of this book is the poem 'Mother Tongue', which has been translated into about 60 languages, including many minority languages. During the meeting the poem was recited in Dutch (Hannah Muysken), Sranantongo (Wine Nieuwendam-Spier), Sarnámi (Usha Ganesh) and Papiamentu (by Hilda herself).

Hilda started her lecture with the significance of Kahlil Gibran in her life.

Through his writings he wanted to build bridges between different peoples, countries and religions. He did not only inspire her to write hundreds of poems, but also sparked her interest in *poetic prose* and *mystical poetry*, two literary genres that are characteristic of his writings. She then spoke about the function of language in our lives. Language, written or oral, is very diverse in its expression but important as a means of communication. For example, in learning processes, in the transfer of knowledge and traditions, to express and develop feelings of belonging and togetherness with others, etc.

Hilda distinguishes between *minority languages* and *minoritized languages*. Minority languages are typically languages spoken by less than half of the population in a country. Minoritized languages are languages that are suppressed, marginalized, considered inferior, banned or whose speakers are persecuted. The guest speaker emphasizes the importance of preserving and maintaining all languages as they are part of the cultural heritage of man. This can be done, for example, by continuing to write in the language to keep it alive through stories, articles, poems, reading books for children, translation, etc. But also by publishing textbooks, books of proverbs and dictionaries in the language.

The guest speaker concludes, by referring to the words of the late Pieter Muysken, that every language is like a cathedral: the result of the creative efforts of communities over the centuries.