

## TWO TYPOLOGIES OF LINGUISTIC RIGHTS

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Gomes de Matos represents **FIPLV** on the Follow-up Scientific Council of the **Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights** ([www.linguistic-declaration.org](http://www.linguistic-declaration.org)). He teaches **Direitos Lingüísticos** at the **Educar para os Direitos Humanos** Course, sponsored by the **Dom Helder** Camara Committee for Human Rights and held at the Universidade Federal de Pernambuco's Centro de Artes e Comunicação.

**Note:** the typology below was originally published in Portuguese in the March 1984 issue of Revista Cultura Vozes (Petrópolis, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil) as part of the article Por uma Declaração de Direitos Lingüísticos Individuais (A plea for a Declaration of Individual Linguistic Rights), pp. 67-71. It is now shared in translation, to reach a wider audience.

A one-page Plea in English, focused on Gomes de Matos' Plea appeared that same year in the April issue of FIPLV WORLD News, a publication of the International Federation of Language Teacher Associations, with the support of the UNESCO ALSED Program. That brief was titled *A Plea for a Language Rights Declaration*. The translation below was done by the author, especially for the Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies Website [www.humiliationstudies.org](http://www.humiliationstudies.org).

How can a Declaration of Individual Linguistic Rights be drafted? As a prerequisite a list of some of those rights would be made, together with educational implications thereof. This is a personal contribution, revealing of the author's perception of linguistic rights 23 years ago. In such spirit, readers are asked to add and enhance the listing, thus contributing to diversified ways of classifying **individual** linguistic rights according to personal experience and expertise.

# Typology 1

## The right to ....

1. Linguistic equality: Every human being has the right to be treated linguistically with respect and equality.
2. Language acquisition: Every person has the right to acquire his/her native language. In instances of countries that have become independent, its citizens have the right to choose their national language.
3. The learning of the native language: Every person has the right to become literate, and thus develop linguistically (Right to individual linguistic development), in the light of life-long education.
4. Use the native language: Every person has the right to use his/her native language as long as s/he lives.
5. Linguistic choice-making: Every language user has the right to choose a variety (regional, social, professional) according to his/her communicative needs. Accordingly, s/he has the right to choose the pronunciation, the vocabulary, the grammar (syntactic constructions), and the style to use. Being a polyglot in one's own native language should be an individual linguistic right, as eloquently expressed by the Brazilian grammarian Evanildo Bechara in his article *O ensino da gramática: opressão, liberdade?* (The teaching of grammar: oppression? freedom? (Boletim da ABRALIN, Associação Brasileira de Linguística, dezembro de 1981/ Newsletter of the Brazilian Association of Linguistics, Dezember 1981, p. 38).
6. Maintenance and sustaining of the native language. Everyone has the right to maintain and sustain the use of his/her native language, as for instance indigenous languages, languages used by immigrants and temporary visitors (to a country) and other linguistic minorities.
7. Right to enriching and valuing one's native language. Every person has the right to contribute to the lexical treasury of his/her native language and the right to value that language as a means for communication locally, nationally, regionally, and internationally.
8. Right to acquisition-learning of a second language. Every person, after initial schooling, has the right to learn one or more languages.
9. Comprehension and production. A person has the right to understand his/her interlocutor (when both share the language used) and has the right to make mistakes, to self-correct, to learn to be clear, precise and relevant.

10. To be given specialized medical treatment for communication disorders. Every person has the right to claim such rights and to be assured his/her right to be treated according to speech and language disorders, through speech therapy, neuron-linguistic assistance and the like.

## Typology 2

### The individual linguistic rights of ...

1. **Children.** Every child has the right to be understood by his/her parents and to be interacted with so as to experience initial linguistic development.
2. **Parents.** Each parent has the right to adapt his/her communication to his/her child and to be kept informed by the school about his/her son/daughter's linguistic development.
3. **Learners** (at school). Every learner has the right to make mistakes, without being punished or **humiliated** because of inappropriate linguistic choices. Additionally, every learner should have the right to be sensitized against linguistic prejudice and discrimination, to have the right to be guided on how to identify uses of biased/language (in advertising), to have the right to use dictionaries in written assignments.
4. **Teachers.** Every teacher has the right to correct his/her learners' mistakes **humanizingly**, the right to become minimally knowledgeable about the nature, structures, and uses of language, the right to study Linguistics applied to the learning-teaching of uses of one's native language; the right to improve one's linguistic performance.
5. **Authors, writers, journalists.** Those professionals have the right to be creative and to coin new words/terms; the right to be concise or prolix, redundant or economical, simple or complex, informal or formal (as language users).
6. **Patients.** Every patient (medical) has the right to understand the medical language used by the health professional during an interview or other interactions (at the doctor's office, the hospital, etc)
7. **Women.** Every woman has the right to be treated with linguistic equality, that is, without being subject to linguistic discrimination. On linguistic sexism, see the M.A. Thesis by Elizabeth Angélica Santos Siqueira "Sexismo lingüístico no Português do Brasil: alguns estereótipos"/Linguistic sexism in Brazilian Portuguese: Some "stereotypes", presented at the Graduate Program in Letters and Linguistics, Federal University of Pernambuco, March 1983.
8. **Bilinguals.** Every bilingual has the right to shift from one language to another or to engage in language mixing. In the latter, the language user should

be aware of his/her concomitant **communicative responsibility**, namely, that of assuring the listener/reader/signer of the right to understand the message

9. **Participants in international meetings.** Every participant in international meetings should have the right to choose the language in which to give his/her paper (from among the options made available by the meeting organizers). A recent instance of such communicatively democratic policy is the forthcoming colloquium sponsored by TERMIA, International Association of Terminology, to take place in Luxembourg: participants will have the right to choose one of the languages suggested by the organizing committee.

Concluding remarks:

The above 1984 typologies were published in Brazil's best-known cultural Journal, which ceased publication a couple of years ago. The text by Gomes de Matos was drafted with a perspective of **individual** linguistic rights. For a follow-up in English, of his explorations in the now burgeoning field of Linguistic Rights, see his chapter Second Language Learners' Rights, in Vivian Cook(ed) Portraits of the L2 User (Multilingual Matters, 2002). Therein an educational typology is discussed: pronunciation, grammatical, and vocabulary rights and the rights of test-takers.