Institutional and community barriers to the acquisition of linguistic capital by African immigrant women in Spain

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During the last number of decades teaching the national or local language to the immigrants has been a growing concern in Spain. With this purpose, language classes started to bloom, and immigrants started receiving classes funded by state or at a level local. However, these classes provide immigrants with a very elementary level of linguistic knowledge which can only help them survive in the host society or find low-paid unskilled jobs. For some profiles of immigrant women, it is not only this institutional gatekeeping that causes their exclusion. Their families and communities also play a role. As they are mostly “brought” to Spain to be spouses, housewives and child-rearers, their access to language is hindered, especially during the first period of their migration. Additionally, they are subject to gender-biased classrooms where the linguistic capital is distributed unequally. This paper is based on an ethnographical data collected between 2011 and 2013 in language classes for immigrants in Madrid and Catalonia. We shall survey different language trajectories of the informants through descriptive analysis of interviews and explain how language capital is distributed in these classrooms.

Keywords: Language and migration, Language and gender.