In language policy and planning – on the political level as well as in research – considerable importance is attached to counting and determining numbers of languages and speakers. This is especially the case when minority-majority relations and linguistic rights are at stake. Counting and quantifying presuppose the recognition of pre-established categories. However, categorizations are neither neutral nor ‘innocent’ but reflect particular ideological visions of the world. The problem with any categorization is not only that particular categories are established as bounded and countable units (e.g. ‘a language’) but also in which way such categories are constructed as related to each other: how sameness and otherness are constructed within particular socio-cultural formations has an impact on the perception of social ‘reality’ (Foucault 1970). In my contribution I will explore how the establishment of statistical categories is informed by language ideologies – e.g. ideologies grounded in a monolingual habitus –, by assumptions on ethnicity and identity and by power relations. In the first part, I will trace the history of statistical data collection on language which is intimately linked with ethnicizing colonial politics. In the second part, I will discuss the recommendations of the “European Conference of Statisticians” concerning the population census in 2010. Referring to the Austrian statistics on “population according to home language”, I will show how the current categories reflect language ideologies linked to different time-spaces and how multilingual speakers are redefined as monolinguals in the course of data processing.

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