"They cannot speak their mother tongue!" Online commentaries about "decreasing" language competencies in Serbia, Sweden and Lithuania

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One of the common challenges to the standard language ideology (SLI) are the debates about ”mother tongue competences” (MTC), or, more precisely, the failure of many pupils and students to fulfill the demands of language exams. The subject often gains public attention, sparkling enraged discussions in the public sphere. These debates are largely ideological – various commentators use cognitive/metaphorical models to clarify the relationship between language and external entities of importance (such as general education, literacy, aesthetic values etc.). Some reinforce the SLI, some challenge it and some propose new language ideologies.

To explore the relationship between language, its ideals, societal values and other ideologies, this presentation builds largely on the folk linguistics approach to language ideologies (Niedzielski & Preston, 2000), to show how different uses of language related metaphors constitute what he refers to as "folk cultural models”. In order to find different cultural models, this presentation compares findings from three countries. Metalinguistic commentaries related to ”bad” MTC and bad results on exams are analysed under online newsportals in Lithuania, Serbia and Sweden and the prevailing types of grass-root ideologies are compared. Finally, I attempt to classify the metaphorical shapes of the ideologies, in the light of previous work in the field (Blommaert, Creve & Willaert, 2006; Berthele, 2008), and look for historical, cultural and other possible explanations of differences in the studied language communities.

References:


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