Materialized Cultures: Considerations on Cultural Minorities and Indigenous populations around the world’s educational institutions

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How are the minorities’ claims for more recognition of their languages substantiated by the material culture in schools or universities?

Academia is the locus of majority power and teaching is the largest avenue to integration and assimilation of minorities, despite the sociolinguistics advances and large recognition.

In her definition of the Material Culture of Multilingualism, Larissa Aronin assumes that the ”interpretation of individual and collective identities, including beliefs, attitudes, and identity as reflected via material objects artifacts and proxemics” reflects one of the potential ”avenues” of the research on this new sociolinguistic approach.

Using and applying this definition to a few European, Asian and Latino-American examples, this paper will attempt to determine how the material culture can either undermine (as in Ireland) or enhance (as in Catalonia) the language policies and linguistic status of minority languages. Indeed, this year 2014 has witnessed the downfall of the Irish official language policy with major criticism from its former Commissioner while in Catalonia, it is the background of the upcoming referendum demanding its independence.

In Thailand, a country attracting a lot of attention for political reasons, we will examine how the Issan minority is using a European Programme to materialize its presence and how the material aspects of Buddhism are a direct consequence of the uprise of Southern Moslem Thais.

More than a landscape, absence or presence, the use of certain types of artefacts, notebooks, school material or dress codes translate in the school some majority-minority struggle and force the educators to pay more attention to material details reflecting the plurality of languages and cultures at stake.

References:

Larissa Aronin & Muiris Ó Laoire (2012): The material culture of multilingualism: moving beyond the linguistic landscape, International Journal of Multilingualism,


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