Material Culture of Multilingualism: Russian and Tajik Languages on Packages of Daily Consumer Goods – Case Study from Tajikistan

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The roles of Tajik and Russian languages in the Republic of Tajikistan are still, after 20 years of independence, shifting. The language law defines the language choice in many occasions but does not control the use of language on packages or wrappings of consumer goods. Since this field is not controlled by law, it reveals interesting aspects about the relationship of these two languages and helps to better understand their roles in the society. As Aronin and Ó Laoire (2012, 8) write, the presence or absence of certain multilingual materialities gives valuable insights into the character of multilingualism in particular settings. The consumption of food, according to Michael Dietler (2010, 223), is linked to the construction and display of social and personal identity as well as to production and the broader political economy.

My research focuses on the use of Tajik and Russian languages in written unofficial public texts on wrappings and packages of daily consumer goods, such as food, hygiene products and medicines. The items studied were collected in a single family’s house in the city of Tursunzoda, which is historically a multilingual city where the inhabitants speak Tajik, Uzbek or Russian, many of them all three languages.

The results of the study demonstrate that Russian language has a high status and it is preferred over the Tajik language, even on packages and wrappings of domestic goods. The informants value items of Russian origin higher than local product, which at least partly explains the wide use of Russian language on domestically produced items.


Keywords: material culture, multilingualism.