Tourism, of ever-increasing importance in the economies of the ‘periphery’, commodifies cultural difference. The decline of visible cultural difference – exotic clothing, food, built environment etc. – have given language a prominent role in conveying ‘otherness’ to the tourist but the use of minoritised languages in prompting this mnemonic link has been limited because of their lack of public presence. Recently, language revitalization efforts have transformed the visibility of minority languages and this paper examines the impacts of this development on material culture in two areas, Wales and Brittany.

Sociolinguistic change emerges in the form of a move from representations of language as an aural and interactional difference to a visual one. The proliferation of public parallel text bilingualism (Coupland 2010) means tourists now have many (visual) contacts with Welsh or Breton, even where the languages are ‘postvernacular’ (Shandler 2008). As mnemonic devices souvenirs generate contextualising stories that relate the minutiae of family holidays but also include perceptions of languages.

However, the material culture of tourism that commodifies language on objects in order to confirm the authenticity of holiday experiences overlaps with that which appeals to ’local’ consumers, offering an alternative connection of place and history for the insider. This material culture is an arena, as personal or domestic display, in which to assert a contested identity and with material culture as a metaphor for society as a whole, from which the minoritised language has been excluded.


Keywords: representation, material culture, tourism.