

ROM1(2)B133 Minority Languages in Europe

What is it a minoritized language?

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First questions

What is a minority/minoritized language?

(From the point of view of general linguistics) a minority or minoritized language is just a human natural language.

Where is the difference between a minoritized language and the other human natural languages?

(From the point of view of general linguistics) nowhere.

Etymology 1

minority

Originally a substantive.

From French *minorité*, 1376, «situation d'une personne mineure» (CNRTL). This from medieval Latin.

First 1493 in Scotland (OED).

England, 1716, «A group [...] whose views or actions distinguish it from the main body of people; [...] a party voting together against a majority [...].»

USA, 1837, «A small group of people differing from the rest of the community in ethnic origin, religion, language, etc.». Adjective first 1919 in the USA. (OED).

minority language, 1924, USA (OED).

Commentary

In the etymology the key moments in the evolution of the meaning are the two passages in England and in the USA. They show that not the language but the political life is the original field for the meaning of minority.

Another information we get is that the word has a literate origin. Already in Latin it was the product of the medieval jurists and it applies to French and Scotland too.

Also the politicians and journalists that innovated the meaning in England and the USA were well educated members of the highest social ranks.

The word was used to satisfy the expressive needs of the high society and to express its point of view.

Commentary

The word was used to satisfy the expressive needs of the high society and express its point of root view.

Funny: in the USA a small minority started to call *minority* groups of people counting more members than itself could.

It is a usual behaviour of the ranks exercising the political power to employ the official language of the community so that they define the social elements and phenomena from their standpoint.

(Other example: the movement for women's rights is often part of the minorities agenda.)

How does it work?

min-or-ity

The Latin root **min-** «smaller; less», is the same Indo-European root that you find in cz. *menší*, ger. *minderer*, ecc.

The meaning of the root bears the idea of comparing two elements. If I use it in a word to define an object, I define it depending on something that I take as the basis.

When I indicate a group of persons as a minority, at the same time I define them as *different* from what then looks like *normal*.

Whatever, using this root *I do not define the object by itself*, but only depending on something else.

Conclusion

minority language

The expression presents the language of a community as something different from the “normal” official language and it suggests that the speakers are few, anyway not enough to let this language be considered as an essential element for the culture of the whole largest community.

Such a view then justify the fact, that this language can not be employed in certain social situation, first of all not in a courthouse or in the parliament.

Conclusion

minority language

For the speakers of any language it is a normal part of their life to speak it in the same way as for every speaker of every language.

Only few of the 6000 languages in the world are official languages of a state. Normal is to be not official.

The most of the communities in the world are multilingual. It is not normal to hear in a community only one language.

Etymology 2

minoritized

I did not find the word in no vocabulary, but Wikipedia has the article *Minoritized language* and you find it in many scientific papers. The situation for the corresponding terms is for the other European languages almost the same.

In the following I will give you the data I was able to collect, but the etymology is not complete.

Etymology 2

minoritized

In the 70s of the 20th century, the French philosophers **Michel Foucault** and **Gilles Deleuze** started to use the French equivalent *minorisé* as a rebellion to the idea that certain behaviours, although common to many people, are presented as not normal and therefore they can be discriminated by the political power.

The concept of *minorització* was applied in the 80s to sociolinguistics by the Catalan linguist **Lluís Aracil** and spread in many other European languages.

(Deleuze was inspired also by a reflection of Franz Kafka.)

What is the use?

A minoritized language is for a linguist just a language.

We can indicate a language as minoritized only in the context of the society that speaks it. The societies differ one from the other and so the context of each language.

Then, what is the use of the term minority or minoritized language?

What is the use?

The original aim is to justify the limitation of the rights of some part of the population.

Today is common the opposite: to sustain a language policy protecting or strengthening the use of a language together with the cultural life of a group.