

ROM1(2)B133 Minority Languages in Europe

Various minoritizations (2)

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Variety in the community

A community is made of various individuals. Inside a community you find **subcommunities**. The same individual can be a member of more subcommunities.

A subcommunity can be part of more communities.

Example: you can be at the same time an inhabitant of Brno and of Minsk and at a same time a member of the subcommunity of the women.

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Variety and control

The control of the rulers on the subcommunities where they are not members is limited. In that case their interest in control is perceived by the members as an illegitimate pressure from outside the subcommunity.

Since the Romantic era (1789–1830) the idea of language as a fundamental component of the **nation** identity spread in Europe, together with the idea that each nation needs its own **state** in order to fully express itself.

On nation and state in European modern history:

HROCH, Miroslav. *European nations: explaining their formation*. First published. London: Verso, 2015.

HROCH, Miroslav. *Národy nejsou dílem náhody: příčiny a předpoklady utváření moderních evropských národů*. Praha: SLON, 2009.

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Variety and conflict

In a community, individuals have not equal rights and it applies between different subcommunities too.

The main difficulty is that disparity causes conflicts between individuals and between subcommunities.

We all take variety, disparity and conflict in our community for natural. Usually we are not conscious of them, they are not disturbing us.

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However there are moments when a conflict affords a crisis, the members of the community feel that something is bad for themselves.

Not always the real problem is identified and, in case it is, it can be attributed to a wrong cause.

Variety and conflict

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Example: the period of the witch-hunts in Early Modern Europe.

The problem was the distance between popular and official culture. The real cause was the policy of the religious organizations aiming to control cultural life and restricting the active participation of women in social life.

The language is a consequence

The mankind tends to see in the language the cause of a certain situation. In reality, language is just the tangible signal of a social issue.

When an authority forbids the public use of a language, it seems that something changed. However, the physical manifestation of a language is only a stream of sound waves.

The presence of a linguistic variety is the consequence of the existence of a social group using it. The language is never the real cause.

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When a language disappears from the public life because of a ban, the functions it fulfilled and the issues it expressed are still on the scene.

The language is a consequence

One of the function of a language is to identify the speakers as members of a community or subcommunity.

Very often the ban of a language is not the only act that an authority adopts against the social group speaking it.

Example: when Italians fascist government forbade the public use of languages other than Italian, it also convinced the Catholic church to transfer the local priests into other regions (Slovenians to Sardinia) and it recruited the local conscript soldiers into dedicated units quartered very faraway from the original region.

The language is a consequence

The action of the authority can be aimed first on other issues, then it can also affect a subcommunity with a strong linguistic identity.

Example: the witch-hunts were particularly extensive in the regions inhabited by the Basques and by the Friulians.

CARO BAROJA, Julio. *Brujería vasca*. 4^a ed. San Sebastián: Txertoa, 1985.

GINZBURG, Carlo. *The Night Battles: Witchcraft and Agrarian Cults in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1983.

In Czech: *Benandanti*. Praha: Argo, 2002.

In Italian: *I benandanti*. Torino: Einaudi, 1966.

The language is the history

From over: «However, the physical manifestation of a language is only a stream of sound waves.»

On the other side, the language is the product of history and it conveys not only synchronic communication, but even the history of the community.

From over: «The presence of a linguistic variety is the consequence of the existence of a social group using it.»

The presence of a linguistic variety is the consequence of a long period of existence of a social group using it and it testifies the historical changes that the group underwent.

Therefore it is impossible to get rid of a subcommunity only by forbidding its language.