

Everyday Forms of Language-based Marginalization: Focus on Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The common manifestations of language marginalization that have been acknowledged in the relevant literature include lack of recognition of minority languages at various levels in the school system, limited or no space at all for marginal languages in the printed and electronic media, inadequate representation of marginalized language speakers in the corridors of power, limited socio-economic opportunities faced by minor language speakers as well as relatively low levels of communicative currency associated with the languages (May, 2001: 147). Based on the findings of field research carried out in Zimbabwe from November 2005 to May 2006, this article seeks to extend and build on the traditionally acknowledged forms of language marginalization while at the same time exposing the more specific and salient everyday effects of linguistic inequalities on individual language speakers. Chief among the factors under consideration in this paper are the following: negative perceptions and stereotypes about minority languages, forced assimilation of minority language speakers into majority language groups, denial of the right to use one's language(s) of choice, linguistic imperial tendencies of dominant language speakers as well as internalized domination and inferiority complexes among speakers of socio-politically weak languages. These effects of everyday language-based marginalization are not easily discernible as they lie hidden in the fissures of insincere ethnolinguistic tolerance that is often accompanied by an admixture of patrimonial and paternalistic tendencies. Therefore, the main goal of this article is to surgically examine those micro-social forms of language-based marginalization that often go undetected due to the seemingly stable relations among the diverse ethnolinguistic polities of Zimbabwe.