Intersecting indexicalities of otherness: How young Assyrian/Syrian adults in Sweden experience their multilingual lives.

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Abstract

There has been a significant number of studies on language practices and how structures of domination and discrimination are contested in interlocutors’ everyday speech (Rampton 1995, 2011; Heller 1999; Pavlenko & Blackledge 2004; Haglund 2005; Nortier & Svendsen 2015). However, this has encompassed mainly children’s and adolescents’ experiences, and little research has been done on young adults (but see Giampapa 2004). Using concepts such as indexicality (Silverstein 2003) and intersectionality (McCall 2005) and framed conceptually within Bourdieu’s thinking of symbolic power, the current paper presents data from a longitudinal study of young adults who identify themselves as Assyrian/Syrian and reside in two different sociogeographic places in Sweden, one of them the peripheral center (Eliaso Magnusson 2015) for the ethnic minority in Sweden, Södertälje, and the other, a minor city in Western Sweden. The data comprises participant observation, audio-recorded interactions, and fieldnotes to illustrate the indexicalities of social categories – often fluid and contested - that emerge along axes of power and are valued differently in different kinds of encounters. The paper will trace the multilingual participants’ experiences of different degrees and types of linguistically construed ‘otherness’ (subordination and/or ‘enablement’) in different settings. It will attempt to account for this complexity by way of reference to the idea of ‘intersecting indexicalities of otherness’.

References


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Caroline Kerfoot