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Book review

**Review of Svetlana Moskvitcheva & Alain Viaut (eds.). 2019.  
*Minority Languages from Western Europe and Russia.  
Comparative Approaches and Categorical Configurations.*  
Switzerland, Springer. ISBN 978-3-030-24339-5**

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Рецензия

**Рецензия на монографию  
Svetlana Moskvitcheva & Alain Viaut (eds.). 2019.  
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The book “Minority Languages from Western Europe and Russia. Comparative Approaches and Categorical Configurations” is part of a long-term multidisciplinary study coordinated in Bordeaux and conducted by an international group of researchers. The research is based on a wide range of data from Canada to China, with the main focus on Europe and Russia. The principle objective of the research is to categorize minority languages in terms of their status and

characteristics in order to avoid ambiguities and misunderstandings among the actors of language policies in different countries and regions (p. 6).

The problem of minorities and their languages, in fact, is still crucial in the new millennium with its context of globalization. Language policy is a powerful tool for the distribution of power, and minority groups suffering from their marginal position in nation states may derive advantage from current global balancing mechanisms (Wright 2016). It is impossible to regulate language policies unless the contours of notions of minority situations are defined and specified, as well as links of language, ethnicity, identity, society and territory.

The research question raised in the book becomes explicit as soon as the terms applied to minority languages in different countries are compared: “linguistic minority” (*minoranza linguistica*, in Italy), “native language” (*rodnoj jazyk*, in Russia), “lesser-used language” (European Bureau for Lesser-Used Languages), “immigration language,” non-territorial language, and so on. To categorize notions relating to minority languages, the authors use a multidisciplinary and comparative approach combining a wide range of semantic analysis methods, such as componential analysis, prototype theory, propositional conception, associative method, etc.

Taking “minority language” as an umbrella term and a macro-notion (p. 3), the authors identify four major common semantic components, namely statistical, legal, territorial, and historical semes. Every semantic feature defined clarifies criteria relating to the notion of minority language. Thus, the statistical seme shows a minority to majority ratio at the state or infra-state level; the legal seme reveals the factual and legal status attached to the language (p. 3); the territorial seme is linked with the correspondence of a minority language to a given territory or to a community; and the historical seme is connected both to the origin and the territory, presupposing stability in diachrony (*ibid*). Specification of these four semes allows the author to describe the process of minoritization and to define a language as a minority one. These methodological foundations are highlighted in the book’s introduction and become fundamental for the description of minority languages in the other chapters of the book.

The volume starts with a chapter entitled “An Introduction to Comparing Categorizations of Minority Languages,” written by Svetlana Moskvitcheva and Alain Viaut. The introduction describes the critical understanding of the term ‘minority language’ as a macro-notion covering other notions such as “minoritized language,” accounting for the nature of the minority character via the historical-and-political context (p. 3). The introduction also discusses epistemological data of the research and its methodology. With regard to the first of these, the authors explain that the notions used to describe minority languages derive from a range of different discursive practices. These notions are based on diverse communicative data and are thus considered as having an “oscillating structure” (p. 5) formed by “different actors, epochs and situations.” They are constituents of a general framework for comparing approaches to different systems. The authors adopt Bakhtin’s ideas of the decentered structure of society (Bakhtin 2012) and claim that

the categories of minority languages are of a discursive nature. Basing their comments on a socio-ideological conception of discourse, they argue that the instability of sub-categories of minority languages results from complex processes of ideological and historical change, as well as from attitudes of various actors. This idea recurs in different parts and chapters of the book.

The volume consists of three parts: each combining three to four thematically related chapters by different authors from different countries and institutions.

Part 1 presents a comparative approach to minority languages as constituting a legal, linguistic and social entity, based on a perspective of European experience. The first chapter entitled “Reflections on a Multidisciplinary Approach to ‘Minority Languages’ as a Legal Object in Europe: the Categorization of Regional and Minority Languages under the Charter” by Olivier Dubos and Victor Gusset explores the question of legalizing the sociolinguistic categorization of minority languages by the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages of the Council of Europe. Protection of languages entails protection of their speakers. Based on the idea that the law must be applied to facts that are defined by concepts, the authors show that the process of categorization of minority languages is of primary importance and does not admit inaccuracies. Discussing the terms of regional or minority languages defined in Article 1 of the European Charter, the authors examine the scope of excluded and protected languages and reveal problems in interpretation of these terms, taking into account their “historicity”, “territoriality” and “traditionality” (Viaut 2014). They argue for the necessity of involvement of sociolinguistic expertise in the conception and application of legal rules on minority languages.

The second chapter, “Reflection on a Multidisciplinary Approach to “Minority Languages” as a Linguistic Object in Europe” by Alain Viaut, reveals the complexity of the notion “minority language,” appealing both to law and social reality. According to the author, complexity is conditioned by the dynamics of the quantitative situation and by language dominance, which alters the practical, instrumental and symbolically significant functions of languages. The dynamics of the territory (in terms of historical settlement) influence the quantity of language speakers via social and political intricacies, such as political change, shifting of frontiers, language planning and revitalization, minorization processes and so on. The final part of this chapter describes the most salient characteristics of minority languages, such as the fragility of the contractual link between actual or potential speakers and their linguistic expression (p. 29), and the possible significance of a spontaneous link between speakers and language variety. It discusses glottopolitical procedures launched by the concerned linguistic groups and supported by state or sub-state authorities, whose occasional dispersal contributes to a fragmented or imprecise perception of minority status. Another factor is the tension implicit in situations that the language representatives face, and the necessity for protective and promotional measures in order to attach social, communicational and generally significant functions to a minority language. The analysis demonstrates that the minority language, as a complex object, requires a multidisciplinary approach

combining linguistics, macrosociolinguistics, political sciences, psycholinguistics and didactics.

The third chapter, “The Epistemological Significance of Comparative Social and Scientific Approaches to Minority Languages in France and Spain” by Christian Lagarde, extends the idea of the importance of sociolinguistic experience in devising linguistic policies, demonstrating this in a comparative study of French and Spanish language situations, in the light of the current politico-cultural context. Focusing on the legal concepts that characterize the plurality of languages in existing constitutional texts in France and Spain, as well as in other legal documents, the author establishes a critical typology of the most commonly encountered terms showing their officiality, number and political or apolitical type in France and Spain. Comparative analysis reveals differences in political tendencies towards centralization or decentralization, and strong interdependency among sociolinguistic, socio-cultural, socio-economic, socio-political and legal-linguistic dimensions.

Part 2 focuses on the naming of minority languages in Russia and the former Soviet Union from the west to the east, comparing this with the language situation in China. Starting from a deep theoretical analysis of the key sociolinguistic categories, it reveals differences in understanding and interpretation of minority languages in official and non-official discourses, their status and speakers' attitudes towards them. This part of the book is especially topical, in the light of the launch of the Program for the Preservation and Revitalization of the Languages of Russia that is being prepared by the Institute of Linguistics of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Kibrik 2021).

The chapter entitled “Prototypical Notions of Minority Languages in the Soviet Union and Russia: ‘Native Language’ (rodnoi yazyk) and ‘National Language’ (natsional'nyi yazyk)” by Svetlana Moskvitcheva discusses the dynamics and context of two key sociolinguistic categories as well as their place in the system of categories of minority languages in the former Soviet Union. Two notions, “native language” and “national language” from the highly developed Russian terminology of language categorization, are chosen mainly because of their widespread prevalence and high frequency in official and non-official discourses over the last hundred years. Using definitions from explanatory dictionaries of the Russian language and a “Dictionary of Sociolinguistic Terms” (Mihalchenko 2006), as well as a corpus, Russian Web 2011 (ruTenTen11) built via the Sketch Engine program, the author analyzes the semantic structures and semantic changes over the 20th century in legal, public and academic discourses and explains reasons for the coexistence of these closely related but different categories.

The chapter by Tatiana Agranat, “The Categorization of the Languages in Ingria and the Language Loyalty of their Native Speakers,” concerns the comparative study of the categorization of three closely related minority languages: Votic, Ingrian and Finnish located in the western area of the European part of Russia. It is claimed that, despite the difference of their categorization in different historical periods, all the three languages are currently considered indigenous. Though the conditions of their existence are similar, the attitudes of these languages' native speakers differ. Based

on the results of a sociolinguistic survey, the author demonstrates three specific attitudes: 1) an idealization of Votes towards their native language, despite the fact that it is not transferred to younger generations anymore; 2) both positive and negative evaluative attitudes among Ingrians, and 3) a strongly instrumental attitude with positive evaluative loyalty among Ingrian Finns.

The next chapter, “Categorization of Minor Pamir Languages in Tajikistan” by Leyli Dodykhudoeva, presents categories of the varieties of Iranian languages in Tajikistan and reveals new tendencies in attitudes of indigenous ethnic minorities towards their mother tongues. Presenting a nomenclature of language status, the author analyzes the language policy and dynamics of the language situation in the Republic of Tajikistan and the place of Pamir languages in the overall language picture. It appears that designations used for Pamir languages in legal, scholarly and media discourses become sources for a specific nomenclature for minority languages in Western Pamir, including collective nominations, such as 'Father's tongue', 'ancestor's tongue', 'our language', etc. (p. 95), as well as providing terms for categories of endangered language. The author claims that a more rigorous terminology for minority languages in Tajikistan, and more thorough language planning, that includes legal identification of functions of Tajik and other languages including minority Pamir, is required.

The final chapter of the second part of the book, “From Nominations of Socio-Ethnic Groups to Categorization of Minority Languages in China: Semantic Analysis” (p. 99) by Xue Li, continues the discussion of the idea of language categorization introduced in the previous chapters. The linguistic material of this chapter which concerns the Chinese language space extends the context of the book as a whole and allows for the identification of new parameters for sociolinguistic categorization. Analyzing the semantics of Chinese nominations of languages and categories of social and ethnic groups as well as their correlations, the author highlights parameters for language categorization that focus on language policy and the social status of languages. The study not only demonstrates the linguistic diversity of minority languages in China, but also highlights contradictions of the language policy of “promoting Putonghua” and the social need to protect dialects as a part of traditional Chinese culture.

Part 3 discusses a typology of migration and diaspora languages in different language situations. This is an attempt to analyse the difficulties involved in determining the statuses of such languages and attitudes towards them among their native speakers.

The chapter “Typology of Migration Languages and Linguistic Representations in a Bicultural Situation” by Antoine Pascaud constitutes a theoretical basis for the further research of migration languages presented in this chapter. The author classifies languages in migration situations, taking into account different levels of biculturalism as well as types of communities, including diasporas and transnational migrants. Distinguishing between transnational community languages and diaspora languages, and languages in diaspora, following Marie-Christine Varol (1994), the author combines the criteria of

majority – minority – official – minored, and identifies twelve types of migration languages. This theoretically constructed typology is exemplified by data from the author's survey of linguistic representations carried out in 2014, among three immigrant communities of European origin in the Bordeaux agglomeration. The mixture of inductive and deductive methods makes the typology convincing, and the work contributes to the categorization of minority languages, crucial for understanding language situations and language planning in general.

The next chapter, “Social and political status of “nonclassical” diasporas on the territory of the ex-USSR” by Ekaterina Nedopekina, is a description of six language cases in old diasporas in the Russian Federation and some territories of the USSR, namely Greeks, Jews, Koreans, Chinese, Germans and Gypsies. Reviewing some definitions of the notion 'diaspora', the author lists its main features and discusses six ethnic groups considered as atypical diasporas and their languages from the perspective of their status, levels of use and necessity of preservation.

The last chapter by Marina Kutsaeva entitled “Categorization of the Chuvash Language in the Chuvash Republic and beyond” (p. 149) presents research into a particular minority language. It discusses a modern type of territorialization of migration and minority languages, describes situations of internal labor migration and examines speakers' language loyalty and their recognition of an ethnic language as a native one. Analyzing legal documents, data of censuses and results of a survey with the participation of 100 Chuvash, the author explains some reasons for the misinterpretation, and ambiguity, of the term ‘native language’. In legal documents, it refers mainly to a mother tongue, whereas minority groups tend to understand it as an ethnic language, a language of the early years and a language of the homeland. This chapter also provides a detailed analysis of the current status of the Chuvash language and data relevant for the construction of a common typology of minority languages.

In conclusion, the collective monograph under review is important research contributing to the understanding of sociolinguistic aspects and language policy, since it defines the main principles for determining the status of minority languages, a necessary first step for their preservation and revitalization. A wide range of case studies conducted in different regions and collected in the book reveals not only specifics of minority situations, but also similar issues in their definition and self-determination, which makes it possible to get closer to building a general typology of minority languages.

The book can be recommended to researchers working in the field of sociolinguistics, political linguistics, linguistic contactology, sociology, migrationology, culturology, etc. It may also represent a valuable resource for those who are interested in the future of endangered languages and cultures.

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