

Language Ideologies and Negotiation of Identity



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Taking the notion of language ideology as a point of departure, this paper investigates linguistic practices in the construction of group identities in the multilingual region of Istria in Croatia. It aims at explaining this association as contingent of transformations in the political and economic conditions of discursive production emerging within the historically complex social context of contested and changing cultural imaginaries embedded in relations of power. The answers to the following questions will be sought: what particular ideologies and categorization processes „from above“ related to regionalism, nation-building or Europeanization are in circulation in ethnic discourses in the region; how is official rhetoric used in politics of identity at the everyday level, in perceptions of self and other, what linguistic strategies are developed „from below“ by ethnic communities to define themselves and to make borders and identities fuzzier by manipulating ideologies. The analysis is based on a comprehensive empirical survey on linguistic practices of self-making and „othering“ within the region from the respondents in Istria. It demonstrates that the emerging regional identity based on shared economic concerns and rejection of elite nationalist politics is characterized linguistically by persistence of the regional codes and bilingual practices, and by resistance against hegemony and symbolic domination of the standard languages. By looking into processes through which different dimensions of identity become salient, specific attention is given to how power relations influence the dynamics of identity negotiation and the re/articulation of potential hierarchy of differences.