
ARTICLE

Multilingual Rebellion: A Decolonial Approach to the Subjectivity of Language

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Building on Kramsch's body of work on the subjectivity of language, together with her more recent work on the decolonialisation of applied linguistics, this article discusses the implications of challenging the unequal power relationships and coloniality of language (Kramsch et al., 2023). This decolonial approach will be further expanded by drawing on the notion of "linguistic encirclement" (Wa Thiong'o, 1981, 1986), which will highlight the oppression of linguistic and cultural minorities and their knowledges. The discussion on decolonising through language will centre on the positionality of the researcher. Firstly, the notion of "the locus of enunciation" will introduce how the subjectivity of the researcher can be amplified and foregrounded. Secondly, autoethnography will be presented as a methodology of decoloniality that allows the researcher to be congruent with such a decentring approach to language that challenges and restores inequalities of power through multilingual resistance.

Because each speaker's experiences are different, each speaker inflects conventional symbolic forms with personal, often idiosyncratic, meaning. (Kramsch, 2009, p. 7)

THE WEAPON OF LANGUAGE

Drap de la pols, escombra, espolsadors,
plomall, raspall, fregall d'esparg, camussa,
sabó de tall, baieta, lleixiu, sorra,
i sabó en pols, blauet, netol, galleda.

Cossi, cubell, i picamatalassos,
esponja, pala de plegar escombraries,
gibrell i cendra, sulfumant, capçanes,

surt el guerrer vers el camp de batalla.

(Maria Mercè Marçal, *fregall d'esparg*, 1977)

Rebelling against the subjugation of a colonised language is something Maria Mercè Marçal, author of the poem *Fregall d'esparg* (Scrubbing Pad), was very familiar with. Marçal knew that language is not only susceptible of being colonised, but is a powerful weapon against

oppression. Her words became a domestic arsenal with which to exercise epistemological disobedience against the triple subjugation of patriarchy, working-class disadvantage, and linguistic oppression. In the poem above, a litany of domestic chores and cleaning implements (duster, broom, brushes, soaps, cloths, bleach and others) are used to declare warfare on the silencing of minority voices in Catalonia in the 1970s.

This evocative poem is an apt introduction to my commentary on Kramersch's key axiom: the belief that the symbolic power of language is central to the building of subjectivity (Kramersch, 2009, 2021). Whereas at first glance the "symbolic" referred to by Kramersch seems to invoke the representational in language, at closer inspection, we get a more radical reading: a view of language that does not just index reality, but foregrounds the 'I' of language. For her, the subjective resonances of language are far reaching. "The symbolic" in Kramersch's work does not only refer to a linear and direct relationship between the system of signs and the reality it denotes, the sign and its signified. Instead, it explores the subtle entanglements the speaking subject creates with language.

The abundant subjective resonances of languages point to what Kramersch refers to as a "multilingual mindset" (Kramersch et al., 2023), where language allows individuals to resist fixed boundaries between different named languages and different ways of being that reproduce a monolingual reading of the world. By eschewing the rigid thinking, defining and compartmentalising of languages and their ways of seeing the world, Kramersch proposes a "multilingual mindset" that allows for a view of language where layers of grammatical, symbolic, and socio-political meanings from different times, spaces and geographies co-exist. In this theoretical standpoint, speaking more than one language grants the multilingual individual the possibility to stretch their intercultural imagination by "resisting the separation of language, thought and symbolic power, grammatical form and social/cultural/political content, speakers and the place/body from which they speak, writers and the discourses that they echo or challenge" (Kramersch et al., 2023, p. 20).

This is an understanding of the subjective that does not project the inner essence of the individual onto a reified newly acquired language, but a view of language that welcomes a multiplicity of viewpoints—one that is built on the organic nature of subjectivity and its unpredictable journeys. By combining both the formality of a linguistic system and the informality of confederations of personal meanings, the speaking subject reinterprets the social reality through the context and circumstance of the speakers' languages. Here, multilingual subjects realign their subjectivities by forming new alliances with new realities. As Kramersch points out:

For non-native speakers, the power that comes from being able to sound like or even pass for someone else, to put one's own experience into someone else's words, to speak English but to feel Persian or speak German with an American sensibility, creates new symbolic power relations that enable learners to break with conventions and to bring about other symbolic realities (...) and bring a new sense of self. (Kramersch, 2009, p. 7)

Indeed, multilingual subjects are given the power to mould themselves through language, so that it is not only that the subjects of these multilingual realms see the world differently, as if through a tinted glass, but that they metamorphose themselves and their worlds with it. For multilingual subjects, a sense of self emerges from abstract and embodied experiences of language felt by a "flesh-and-blood-individual" (Kramersch, 2009). As a result, living through another language has a spiritual, quasi-religious feeling that allows the

multilingual speaker to be in subjective harmony with oneself and with one's words. One that gives a sense of plenitude and joy (Kramersch, 2009, p. 89).

The symbolic power of language resides not so much in pointing and indexing a reality out there, but on figuring out how the subject performs language with body and mind. But as Kramersch points out in her edited collection on decolonial applied linguistics (Castañeda-Peña et al., 2023), language education should be seen beyond the purely functional. In this reading, an enactment of the self that borders on the spiritual has the potential to serve a critical agenda, one where individuals do not only speak and adopt other languages and enact different cultures and ways of being, but actively resist hierarchies and the oppression exercised by dominant languages and cultures. In this sense, Kramersch draws on Catherine Walsh's notion of *interculturalidad crítica*, as she expounds below:

a critical interculturality that recognizes the problem of power (*el problema del poder*) and the patterns of racialization and heteronormativity that have been derived from it and responds to the needs of the people who have suffered historical and institutional domination (*la gente que ha sufrido un histórico sometimiento y subalternización*). (Kramersch et al., 2023, p. 16)

This oppression of dominant languages can be resisted through a dynamic “linguaging” that involves the positioning of the self. Building on Kramersch's body of work on the subjectivity of language, together with Kramersch's more recent work on the decolonialisation of applied linguistics, this article discusses the implications of challenging the unequal power relationships of the coloniality of language (Kramersch et al., 2023). A useful concept to focus on concerning positionality is that of the “locus of enunciation” of both speaker and researcher. This article discusses the use of autoethnography in taking a decolonial approach to language that restores balance by challenging linguistic inequalities of power. This contestation of the colonial will be expanded by drawing on the notion of “linguistic encirclement” (Wa Thiong'o, 1981, 1986), which explores how individuals can become aware and contest these imbalances of power.

Linguistic Encirclement

The term “linguistic encirclement” was coined by Wa Thiong'o (1986) in his native country of Kenya to denounce the colonial project that divides languages into privileged and indigenous languages, thus creating a hierarchy of value that imposes linguistic subjectivities that alienate the subject from one's cultures and traditions of knowing.

As Ndhlovu (2024) has written:

The notion of linguistic encirclement covers colonial projects that produced types of ‘indigenous African languages’ that were and continue to be used as mechanisms for consigning Africans into language-based categories or hierarchies of humanity. (p. 56)

Linguistic encirclement is an ideological classification of language that, rather than protect certain languages, as the word “indigenous” may denote, exercises “epistemic violence” against them by colonising languages that confine indigenous languages and their speakers to a fixed place and territory they cannot escape from (Spivak, 1988). Such encirclement puts a straitjacket on speakers' movements by constraining their agencies, their

thinking, and their subjectivities, and by forbidding them to use their language in a variety of spaces and domains. In other words, linguistic encirclement is used to oppress and put boundaries on the privileges of an individual in a particular culture, and language is weaponised to achieve this aim:

Encirclement affects people's praxes, their agency, their thinking, their independence, their autonomy, their creativity, and their ontology. There is no action that they take which is on their own terms unless, of course, they manage to subvert the system through exercising epistemic disobedience. (Mignolo, 2011, in Ndvolu, 2024, p. 55)

THE PAIN AND PLEASURE OF THE COLONISED MULTILINGUAL SELF

A great deal of literature on the relationship between identity and language has highlighted the functional and even symbolic aspects of speaking and living in another language. These accounts talk about the liberatory powers and pleasure of speaking and imagining oneself in another language (Kramersch, 2009; Norton, 2013; Ros i Solé, 2016), the feeling of rebirth that many speakers experience when adopting a new language, and the feelings of resilience developed through another language that help the asylum seeker overcome trauma (Capstick, 2018). In all these accounts, the new language is a positive influence on the subject and their subjectivity. It helps them overcome a trauma in the past, imagine themselves in a new language, or fulfil a long-held desire (Takahashi, 2013). These accounts are often told from the privilege of colonising languages, where both the researcher and the researched are in positions of power, learners of Spanish in American universities, learners of French in the UK, or learners of English in Japan. These are languages with great cultural as well as economic capital in the West (e.g., Coffey & Street, 2008; Kinginger, 2004; Wilson, 2013). In these cases, the newly “learned” or what I prefer to call “adopted” language is not seen as a threat to one's subjectivity, but rather an extension and a project of the self (Coffey & Street, 2008), a way of constructing a new personal world (Ros i Solé, 2016). Instead of encroaching on the self, these new languages complement one's linguistic repertoire. These experiences, however, miss another common experience with languages and multilingual mindsets, where the experiencing or silencing of the first or heritage language (and often mother tongue) causes pain and loss. Far from a pleasurable experience, this experience of language points to the pain of its subjectivity, where language can be the cause for a conflict with one's sense of self (McNamara, 2020). I will apply such a view of the relationship between one's languages and what I will refer to as the pain of language and its encircled subjectivity to the case of a minority language in Europe, Catalan.

Subjectivity, The “Locus of Enunciation,” and Autoethnography

But how do we investigate this subjective feeling of language? And how do we identify such private, intimate, and painful thoughts? An autoethnographic methodology is particularly well suited to investigate the subjective and the personal in language (Ros i Solé, 2016). To highlight the subjective resonances of language as well as how language may exercise oppression, inequality, and pain, I use what Kramersch et al. (2023) call the locus of enunciation to foreground how the individual positions themselves vis-à-vis other languages and their geographical, ideological, historical, and embodied meanings:

Unmasking one's own locus of enunciation (and/or that of others) means being conscious of and explicit about the geographical, historical, bodily, and ideological context from which one is speaking. (de Figueiredo & Martinez, 2021, p. 356)

In this way, this approach not only adopts a critical approach to interculturality that aims to redress imbalances of power but, in doing so, also denounces positivist approaches to methodology that evince the impact of colonialism and coloniality on research methodologies. Indeed, autobiographic and autoethnographic methodological approaches help us decentre colonial and Western-centric understandings of language that foreground the abstract and the objective at the expense of the embodied and the subjective (Ros i Solé, 2025).

An autoethnographic methodology provides both an appropriate epistemological stance to investigate the subjective in language and provides a decolonial lens by foregrounding partial, contingent, and embodied understandings of the experience of language. As well as being a rigorous scientific tool, autoethnography challenges dominant epistemologies of the intercultural by providing a battery of tools to dismantle its colonial gaze (Ferri, 2022). With its relational, embodied, and subjective lens, autoethnography contests the Western and colonial tendency to place the rational, the objective and the disembodied as the only way of knowing in scientific and rigorous research. Moreover, it urges us to pose different types of research questions, questions that focus on lived lives, trajectories, and biographies. As Hanna King, a PhD candidate (Birkbeck, University of London) pointed out in her thesis defense whilst explaining her motivation for her PhD, “We research something because we have noticed something in ourselves” (King, 2024). An autoethnographic perspective not only comes from a personal place, but also allows us to rebel against linguistic oppression. As Ferri (2022) points out, autoethnographic research allows us to challenge imbalances of power in the researcher-researched relationship and dismantle both the master's house and their tools.

In order to challenge the hierarchies implicit not only in coloniality in language but also coloniality in approaches to research, we need to become aware of the complex web of colonial and patriarchal exploitation beyond simplistic representations of binary Western/non-Western cultures. An autoethnographic lens to research challenges an extractionist approach, questioning the relationships of superiority and inferiority that treat the subject as a person to extract information from rather than a co-researcher with their own agency.

Autoethnography: A Decolonial Arsenal to Research the Subjective

Autoethnography is a personal narrative, a way of refiguring the past and ourselves that can be used to make sense of the intercultural—a way of accessing knowledge that foregrounds lived experience. In being a privileged first-hand account of reality and a decentred way of accessing knowledge, it presents itself as a fruitful approach for investigating what happens when our cultural historicities, practices, and materialities reposition us in the world. Although autoethnography and autobiography have not been much used in applied linguistics, more recently, and alongside similar efforts in the social sciences (Hamdan, 2012), they have become a popular methodology and epistemology to investigate the intercultural (see Block, 2024; Holliday, 2022; Ros i Solé, 2004; Pavlenko, 2007).

Autoethnographies allow us to tell deviant stories (Muncey, 2010) that have not been told before within mainstream narratives. They urge us to investigate overlooked stories that struggle for recognition, where physical and psychological conflicts are silenced (Block, 2024;

Choi, 2026). The auto-ethnographer, whose real voice often struggles to be heard, adopts a privileged position deciding what to include in the research and how to interpret it (Block, 2024). These are accounts that are often left out, and the inclusion of such decentred stories brings complexity by uncovering multiple layers. Whilst this is not a neat and coherent representation of reality, it is characterised by a nuance of meaning and its uncovering of the messiness of lived experience.

In the field of intercultural communication, language education, and migration studies, where lived experience is key, the first person and subjective selection and interpretation of narratives and stories of displacement become an invaluable source of knowledge. And yet, it has often been seen with suspicion and as a methodology lacking in rigour. One of the criticisms that has been directed at autoethnography and autobiography is that they risk not being faithful to the past by distorting what we select and remember from what actually happened (Block, 2024). But if what we are after is a thick description and a subjective account of what goes on in in our bodies (as well as our minds), autoethnography gives a privileged insight into the experience of inhabiting another language.

Autoethnography, then, provides a methodology that is apt for exploring a subjective understanding of culture, one that is partial, deviant and contingent. It is an approximation to culture rather than a complete and finished description, one that fixes it for a moment, stops its flow momentarily, and gets at the practiced values and meanings of a performed culture. As Holliday (2022) has pointed out, culture does not define us, but instead the details of the everyday of our existence and the possibilities for change do. These minutiae of the everyday give us a more accurate account of what goes on when one lives and performs language. Cultures and languages are not fixed and do not fix people to place but “make them” in all the mundanity of the everyday (Bradley & Pöyhönen, 2024). Languages and cultures are social constructs (Pennycook & Makoni, 2019) that exist in our subjectivities as long as they provide meaning to a particular instance, practice, and circumstance of our experience:

to observe everyday life and those fleeting moments, which—as far as we often remember—seemed insignificant, but which still give life a rhythm. (Bradley & Pöyhönen, 2024, p. 363)

When the interest in a subject such as that of interculturality is through the subjectivity of the auto-ethnographer, it is the fleeting contingency of experience and the snippets of biography that we are after. It is about selecting from memory the events that have left an imprint and a mark on our bodies, so that they help us reconstruct who we are and where we belong.

But autoethnography does not consist of a self-indulgent exercise, as it is not the person themselves we are interested in but the combined itinerary of body and circumstance. I am interested, then, about how this “me” has internalised and absorbed, territorialised, and digested the world in a particular time-space coordinate, whether this is at the dinner table, the school or the airport. It is about dissecting my relations with the world, and how these guide me to interpret my feelings and my subjectivity. In other words, through autoethnography, the “I” of the researcher is able to get close to the experience of another language and culture as an assemblage of bodies (Hua et al., 2017; Pennycook, 2024). As a result, autobiographies are not just accounts of individual paths, but a reference to historical and everyday events, the social and the material milieu that has shaped who we are (Roberts, 2002). As Holliday (2022) points out, autoethnography is “grounded in a constructivist ethnographic tradition which

appreciates how [both grand and personal] narratives are socially if not ideologically constructed” (p. 17).

The use of autoethnography has been used for investigating complex relationships with languages and cultures. It was used in Fanon’s classic text *Black Skins, White Masks* (Fanon, 1968), where harrowing experiences of racism and alienation in situations of colonialism were narrated. Autoethnography is also the methodology used in Holliday’s (2022) *Contesting Grand Narratives of the Intercultural*, in which he recounts his experiences in Iran in the 1970s, including memories of his mum’s mild adoration of “the Shah,” and other exotic imagery that was current currency at the time. We are also privileged to have access to Eva Hoffman’s brilliant account of her teenager feelings of alienation in *Lost in Translation* (Hoffman, 1989) after migrating to Canada, the autobiographical account of a young woman experiencing life in France in *Alice Doesn’t Live Here Anymore* (Kinging, 2004), or Robert’s Rodriguez and Gloria Anzaldúa autobiographies chronicling conflictual experiences of Spanish heritage in the U.S. (Ros i Solé, 2004).

All these autobiographies are reminders that autoethnography is a powerful tool to uncover the joyful lived experience of language, but also the psychological conflict and trauma of colonised and oppressed languages. This article uses an autoethnographic account to explore such a conflictual experience of language, that of a speaker of Catalan, where both the joy and the pain of the subjectivity of language are felt but where also the defiance and challenging of linguistic inequality are enacted.

A Potted History of Catalan

Catalan is a romance language that is currently an official language in Spain alongside Spanish and other autochthonous languages such as Galician and Basque. Originally part of the Carolingian empire (8th-10th century) in the “*Catalunya Nord*,” it extended to the rest of Catalunya and neighbouring regions (Valencia, Balearic Islands, Aragón, Sardinia and Murcia). It currently spreads over a territory that spans four different states: Andorra, Spain, France and Italy (Gencat, 2025).

Catalan enjoyed a literary renaissance in the 19th century, and at the beginning of the 20th century it was introduced to institutional and administrative spaces. It currently enjoys a very strong position and prestige in society and in politics, even though numbers are declining. But Catalan also has a long history of prohibition and repression. In particular, after the Spanish Civil War, during the Franco dictatorship, the persecution of Catalan was intense, especially during the forties and fifties when Catalan was prohibited in education, the publishing of books, magazines, newspapers and films, theatre, and even telephone conversations! The only space where Catalan was not policed was inside people’s houses, so Catalan was maintained as the language of family and intergenerational communication well into the 1970s. During this time of repression, a great deal of Catalan literature was written from exile by writers who were educated in pre-Franco Spain, away from the authoritarian Franco regime (Gencat, 2025).

After Franco’s death in 1975, the new 1978 constitution recognised the plurality of languages in Catalunya, including Catalan. New laws and linguistic policies aimed at restoring the language in Catalan territory, including the creation of a Catalan TV and radio, the use of Catalan as a language of instruction in Catalunya. Nowadays, Catalunya has 20 TV channels, more than 100 radio stations, and more than 30 digital and printed newspapers, as well as 150 magazines (Gencat, 2025).

The Hegemony of English and Barcelona’s “Lifestylers”

Whereas nowadays Catalan has a high status and yields political and cultural power, the use of Catalan is once again in crisis, and there has been much debate as to its future (e.g., Junyent, 2023). As Barcelona has become a tourism hotspot and Europe’s playground (Hedgecoe, 2024), the future of Catalan in an increasingly globalised culture and the hegemony of English is a current concern (e.g. Coma, 2025; Guasch, 2023). As a result, the use of Catalan and the construction of a Catalan identity, especially in the Barcelona area, is no longer pitted against just Castilian, but a myriad of linguistic and identity resources available to the newcomer (Codó, 2018; Woolard & Frekko, 2013). Indeed, in the cosmopolitan Barcelona of the 21st century, and building on its success as the host for the Olympic Games in 1992, Barcelona has become a favourite destination for transnational individuals. This is a new type of migrant who no longer chooses between two languages, Spanish or Catalan, Spanish or English, but someone seeking a plurilingual transnational identity. Codó (2018) has called this new type of migrant “middling transnationals” and “lifestylers,” for whom the uptake of Catalan is not a prerequisite for social or economic mobility but rather a dispensable resource for self-identity and the re-imagining of one’s life trajectory.

A Catalan Émigré’s “Locus of Enunciation”

Through the sharing of two brief extracts of my own autobiography, I argue that a “locus of enunciation” is a useful device to foreground the subjectivity of language and explore how I position myself and use my agency to rebel against a (subjective) oppression and colonisation of Catalan under Franco’s dictatorship, and the current globalisation of English and the emergence of migrant transnational “lifestylers.” I will do this by contextualising my experience of Catalan in two periods in my biography and my subjectivity of Catalan: (1) during my growing up in the Franco dictatorship, the transition to a democracy and early democracy (1970s and 1980s) and (2) my life in the UK for the last 35 years, during the homogenization of culture by Global English and transnational identities. I will call the first period “Spanish-encircled Catalan” and the second period “lifestylers’ English-encircled Catalan.”

The discussion of this subjective double-encirclement and “locus of enunciation” is crucial for understanding how we construct our subjectivities in relation to other languages and linguistic repertoires, and how we build our self-identity through them. Let’s first see how Kramersch states how her locus of enunciation and languages position her in a similar multilevel “conflictual” subjectivity:

As a French academic, born of a French father and a Jewish-English mother and educated in German language and literature studies in the 1950s at the Sorbonne, I emigrated to the U.S. as an adult and embraced the field of applied linguistics as a way out of the desiccating philology in which I was trained in my youth. My conflicted positionality as a multilingual French citizen between the Anglo and the French worlds of my family, and the German world of my husband and my profession; my interest in Latin American scholars through their French and other European connections; my intellectual dedication to both theoretical inquiry and educational practice; and my personal and professional multilingual disposition – have all led me to instinctively gravitate towards complexities and even incommensurabilities among the linguistic and epistemic worlds I belong to. (Kramersch et al., 2023, p. 23)

Similarly, my own locus of enunciation is one that is very much contingent on my own multiple conflictual life-trajectory. The following account of my experience of Catalan therefore will be a truly subjective one and it will only speak from my own specific biography and linguistic repertoire.

Similarly to Kramsch, I also identify my locus of enunciation as that of an individual with a “multilingual mindset,” with several contradictory intercultural layers that contain both pain and pleasure. Brought up in Catalan and Spanish at home, I studied English, Arabic and Italian at university, and having lived in the UK in an Anglo-German household for 30 years and amongst a super-diverse local linguistic community, I have acquired a “multilingual mindset.” But Catalan, my mother tongue, is closest to my heart. Like many inhabitants in Catalunya and Barcelona and as a Catalan émigré in the UK for the last 30 years, I feel the mourning, the spirituality, and the pain of Catalan language and culture surfacing to the top. I miss the food, the landscape, the climate, the people, the food, and “the water I was raised with” (Pennycook & Makoni, 2019). Last time I visited Barcelona, I came face to face with such a deep nostalgia and I came to the realisation that my identity has been deeply marked by a constant oppression and colonisation of my mother tongue: during and as a result of the Franco-dictatorship growing up in Barcelona in the “Spanish-encircled Catalan” period, and as a result of my migration and life in the UK and the experiencing of Barcelona from a “lifestylers’ English-encircled Catalan” perspective.

My twice-encircled and colonised Catalan becomes more acute in my visits to Barcelona when I am about to depart from Barcelona at the airport. There, I not only feel the pain of leaving my family behind, but I also feel linguistic and cultural erasure. Below, I reproduce the sensations and feelings I experience at Barcelona Airport through two autobiographic extracts depicting moments after I left Barcelona when the feelings were fresh in my body and mind. They both speak to the feelings of sadness at being reminded of the pain of living and having lived life with my mother tongue and culture “encircled.”

In the first extract, I talk about how cafés and counters at the airport do not reflect my experience of local culture, and my mourning of this loss through the absence of local food:

A l'aeroport vaig a buscar menjar i beguda que per última vegada em connectarà visceralment amb Barcelona, la meua ciutat natal, plena de memòries i maneres de ser que no s'obliden. Al bar (a l'aeroport ja no es diu així), agafo (més que demano) un entrepà de pernil, una canya de cabells d'àngel, un suc de taronja i un cafè amb llet. Miro a les noies i nois que serveixen, els parlo en català, em contesten en castellà. És un ritual que constata la retirada de la llengua Catalana a un espai cada vegada més internacional. Em poso trista i nostàlgica, però respiro fondo i veig que ja han anunciat el vol. És hora de marxar. Enfilo direcció cap a la cua per embarcar al vol de Londres. M'acomio de Barcelona amb la mirada i el regust de cafè amb llet. Connecto amb el silenci de la llengua Catalana que ja s'ha amagat fins que torni un altre cop. Me'n vaig, ja no pronuncio el meu món o la meua subjectivitat en Català

At the airport I go to get some food and drink that for one last time will connect me viscerally to my land. A cured (Serrano) ham sandwich, a traditional pumpkin jam pastry, an orange juice and a milky coffee. All products of a Catalan gastronomy that give me a feeling of home. I look at the young women and men that serve the food, I speak to them in Catalan, they answer in Spanish. It's like a linguistic choreography that testifies to the reality of the Catalan language. I feel sad but I take a deep breath and see that they have just announced the flight on the board. It's time to leave. I start walking to the cue to board the plane to London. I say goodbye to Barcelona, silently,

like the language that will stay inside my skin when I board the plane. I am about to go and my language hides.

The second extract, equally symptomatic of my nostalgia and the missing of the Catalan language and culture, tells the story of a bitter-sweet realisation: that since Franco-times, and despite Catalan now being widespread in Catalan society and having a prominent place in public places, in my subjectivity, my mother tongue has never really left the realm of the home, just like in Franco-dictatorship times.

This realisation happened during a flight from Barcelona to London, when, to my surprise, the pilot made the announcement in Catalan and validated my language and mother tongue. Inside the plane, the absence of Catalan and the oppression of Catalan by other dominant language is made explicit through the flaunting of the expected usage: making the pilot's announcement through the loudspeaker in one of the state languages. But to my surprise, the pilot's announcement defies expectations and flaunts sociolinguistic rules:

Per primer cop a la vida he pogut experimentar com el Català ha traspassat fronteres de la manera més inesperada i màgica. En tota la meva trajectòria lingüística i cosmopolita no havia vist mai res igual. Avui, el pilot que conduïa l'avió d'EasyJet de Barcelona a London Gatwick s'ha lluit i ha fet història: ha donat el missatge informatiu de la megafonia en Català i ha traspassat fronteres a l'àmbit d'ús internacional. Ha sigut un moment tan simbòlic com emotiu. Em volia aixecar i anar a donar un petó al pilot per mostrar la meva gratitud infinita, però he optat per una acció més elegant, com faria la mamà: he aplaudit quan s'ha acabat l'anunci de la megafonia. I aleshores, de manera inesperada, la resta de viatgers i viatgeres de l'avió m'han seguit en l'aplaudiment, no sé si conscients que era un moment de desobediència lingüística. M'he sentit secretament satisfeta. Un nou èxit per al Català. Aquest pilot pirata del llenguatge segur que aquesta nit dormirà pla, satisfet d'escampar el Català pels cels del món.

Last time I flew into the UK from my hometown I had a revelation. It was the first time I heard my mother-tongue spoken through the plane loudspeaker. I cannot tell you how elated I was. After over 20 years of shuttling between Barcelona and London, it was the first time my language, Catalan, was used by the usual formal welcome of the pilot and their technical account of the flight path, the weather conditions to be encountered, and the duration of the flight. My mother tongue, the intimate, personal language that had accompanied me through the early part of my life, had suddenly made it big. My heart filled with joy, my language suddenly connected with the privileged aerospace realm, and its beautiful tinted blue skies and sea of clouds. I wanted to get up and give a huge hug to the pilot to show my infinite gratitude for the bravery of including my language, a minority language, in his announcement. I felt visible and validated. It was at this moment that I fully realised how linguistically deprived, and how different my relationship with my mother tongue was to those of monolingual speakers of English or Spanish. Whilst in my life-time Catalan had so far travelled hidden from view and unheard, it finally travelled first class.

This symbolic act was also a subversive powerful act, one that touched my conflictual multilingual mindset and shook it to the core. It felt as if the teacher in my school had said my name in class and the "I" of my language and together with my culture was all of a sudden made visible and became accepted. I then realised how the oppression Catalan quietly endured during my life-trajectory meant a great deal to who I was and my linguistic subjectivity.

Catalan, Indigenised?

In the globalised and homogenised semiotic landscape of the airport of El Prat in Barcelona, Catalan is silenced and encircled to make room for something more international and cosmopolitan, a lifestyler identity. But this contemporary reality oppresses and encircles my subjectivity of Catalan, a subjectivity that is steeped in history and memory, that of the Franco-dictatorship repression of the language and my living of Catalan as both a migrant and a transnational lifestyler myself.

The situation of the lack of visibility of Catalan culture in Barcelona airport is indeed very different from the Kenyan context where the terms “indigenised” and “linguistic encirclement” were coined, and yet these concepts resonate with my subjective linguistic experience of Catalan and the pain of having lived my own mother tongue through a strait-jacket because of a twice-colonised Catalan language. As a result, the experience of linguistic erasure and linguistic encirclement I feel every time I visit Barcelona has become part of who I am now, despite the 20 TV channels and the 150 magazines produced in Catalan.

Barcelona’s highly visited international airport, rather than reminding me that I am back at home, reminds me of my linguistic encirclement within my multilingual mindset, one where the silencing of Catalan and its subjectivity is foregrounded. In the episodes narrated above, the lack of local food at the airport and the use of Catalan by the pilot becomes both pain and pleasure. The act of clapping at the pilot’s announcement in Catalan is both a celebration, but also an act of rebellion against the epistemic violence that Catalan has suffered in my lifetime.

Languages are not only spoken, they are felt, and like Maria Mercè Marçal (1977) shows in her poem, they can also be the causes and the conduits for subversive acts. We can feel comfortable or uncomfortable, we can feel nostalgic, or like the plane pilot, we can also rebel and challenge an ideologised version of reality through language.

Resisting an Ideologized Reality Through Language

The exercising of epistemic disobedience through language is well exemplified by a novel by Abdulrazak Gurnah. Whilst the context is very different here, that of an asylum seeker in a UK coastal town, this novel illustrates the power of disobedience to express one’s subjectivity through language.

Saleh Omar, a fictional character in Abdulrazak Gurnah’s novel *By the Sea* uses language to resist the silencing of his voice and the colonisation of his subjectivity. Saleh feels that there is no need to talk, as he does not believe the subjectivity of an asylum seeker will be listened to. He thinks that his particular reality, the always ideologized version of reality, has been constructed and decoded for him (McNamara, 2020), and he rebels and subverts that. Saleh wants to know what has already been said for him before he ventures an explanation. When confronted with the news that an expert had been contacted to translate his words (and perhaps translate him into something else), Saleh reflects on what this will mean for how he is understood in this alien place. In this ironic and rebellious reflection, he ponders about the use of “experts” on other cultures:

An expert in my **area**, someone who has written books about me no doubt, who knows all about me, more than I know about myself. He will have visited all the places of interest and significance in my **area**, and will know their historical and cultural

context when I will be certain never to have seen them and will only have heard vague myths and popular tales about them. He will have slipped in and out of my **area** for decades, studying me and noting me down, explaining me and summarising me, and I would have been unaware of his busy existence. (p. 65)

This extract in Abdulrazak Gurnah's novel resonated with the erasure and silencing of culture in my experience of Catalan and the epistemological disobedience that the pilot uses. Like the pilot's (and mine through the clapping) act of disobedience, Saleh refuses to speak to protest against the silencing of his subjectivity.

SUBVERSIVE SUBJECTIVITIES

Multilingualism is often studied and referred to as something separate from the people that speak and embody their languages, their experiences, their histories, and their subjectivities. Whereas politicians do not cease to remind us that migrants need to learn the majority and official language of the country in order to integrate into their new destinations to be “good” migrants and citizens, we often forget the feelings, the spirituality, and the subjectivity of the migrant.

Languages and cultures do not define us, but they are an important part of our subjectivities and our multilingual mindsets. It is through conversations between different subjectivities and different voices that we change and challenge ourselves and our realities, not through the imposition of a single language that silences other voices. Catalan or other minority, endangered, or heritage languages and ways of being do not need to disappear, they need not die or be oppressed by linguistic policies, coercive political regimes or global transnational lifestyle linguistic encirclements. Such acts will not silence epistemic disobedience and multilingual rebellion, but will just cause pain.

Instead, it is through conversations that we can welcome subjectivities that foster multilingual mindsets. Rather than silencing difference, we should encourage a way of languaging that foregrounds the multiple realities of the subjective of language.

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