

Material culture of multilingualism and affectivity

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Abstract

Affectivity is an important dimension in humans' social and individual lives. It is either a stimulating or hindering aspect of language learning. This article aims to draw attention to material culture as a powerful, but mostly neglected source of data on the use and acquisition of languages, and demonstrates the close and intricate links between affectivity and material culture. It is hoped that revealing these interrelationships will assist in understanding and managing language diversity. It will allow practitioners and teachers to carry out social and private encounters, events and language teaching with more care, understanding and expertise. Researchers will be encouraged to join the investigation of yet one more important facet of multilingualism – material culture.

Keywords: material culture, multilingualism, affectivity, language use, language teaching

Affectivity, a concept including “the state of being susceptible to emotional stimuli; a complex and usually strong subjective response, such as love or hate” (Affectivity, n.d.), has been discussed in relation to language teaching and learning, and studied as an important factor in the use of languages in society. It is a popular matter of research in psychology and sociology. Less frequently, researchers interest themselves in the connection of emotions, feelings and affective states to spaces and materialities. But those who do interest them-

selves in links between emotions and materialities investigate fascinating matters such as affective objects (see e.g., Schreier & Picard, 2000), relational artefacts and evocative objects (Turkle, 2007, 2011).

Using Hartmann's approach and his hierarchy of effectivity (see e.g., Zaborowsky, 2011) researchers strive to understand emotive energies discharged by properties and objects, based on an approach which combines language and materiality with theories of affect and subjectivity (Navaro-Yashin, 2009) or how the affective capacity of some objects is sustained over time (Börjesson, n.d.).

Affectivity includes an appraisal system (Gabryś-Barker, 2011). Lazarus and Smith (as cited in Gabryś-Barker, 2011) explain that "each positive emotion is said to be produced by a particular kind of appraised benefit, and each negative emotion by a particular kind of appraised harm" (p. 82).

Of great importance is the finding that "affective objects have the capability to change the way that people communicate" (Schreier & Picard, 2000, p. 18), and of course it is important to investigate how objects and devices evoking affectivity of all kinds impact on language use and language acquisition. Emotions in reference to language acquisition and use have been investigated from a variety of angles, covering the emotional states and anxiety of bilingual learners and users (see e.g., Aronin, 2004; Dewaele, 2010; Pavlenko, 2005).

Multilingual practices are carried out directly or indirectly, through material culture. Material culture provides the physical, historical, and emotional background for communication; among other things, it maintains, conveys and transmits affective aspects into the multilingual reality of a community. The relationship of affectivity factors, material culture and language acquisition and use has not yet been explored, to my knowledge. Demonstrating this important relationship constitutes the purpose of this article.

The Material Culture of Multilingualism

Research on material culture is a novel development in multilingualism. While material culture has been a subject of study in ethnography and sociology, it is only recently that materialities have been introduced as a subject of interest in multilingual studies (Aronin & Ó Laoire, 2007, 2011). The rationale and theoretical premises for the study of material culture of multilingualism, as well as the main directions and priorities of such research have been suggested in the works of Aronin and Ó Laoire (2012a, 2012b) and Aronin and Singleton (2012).

Drawing on the basic research on material culture accumulated by ethnographers and sociologists, we can use the basic points about material culture as the foundation of materialities research in multilingualism. Marshall (1981) defined material culture as "the array of artefacts and cultural land-

scapes that people create according to traditional, patterned and often tacit concept of value and utility that have been developed over time through use and experiments" (p. 17). He noted that "these artefacts and landscapes objectively represent a group's subjective vision of custom and order" (p. 17). In contemporary multilingual and diverse social settings where at least several groups with their subjective visions of custom and order intersect, the concept of material culture seems to be essential. The more so as artefacts have been long recognized as "a mirror to culture, a code from which the researcher can infer beliefs, attitudes and values" (Bronner, 1985, p. 131).

The realm of material culture which permeates human life and is its core and ineluctable constituent includes materialities that are found in homes and work places, public spaces and technological sites. It embraces furniture and home utensils, keepsakes, cosmetics and medications, food and books, monuments, stellas and buildings, roads and events, cityscapes and other spaces. Phenomena which are not tangible and may not immediately be thought of as material are also included in material culture rubrics – these are sound waves, smells, events and procedures involving temporal ordering.

Material culture research goes beyond the interest of linguistic landscape in the static public signage and embraces a wider scope of phenomena: objects and spaces, complemented by music and rhythm, smells, and time patterns. Materialities are dynamic, changeable, movable, portable and modifiable. They can be used habitually or rarely, with reverence or neglect, in private or public spaces. They may be hidden or on display, changed, modified, or carefully kept as they originally were, created, bought or collected, given as gifts or sold – all these characteristics, are the variables which are measurable in principle. Therefore material culture data in studies of multilingualism can be of use to researchers as "solid," unambiguous evidence. The essential importance of studying material culture is seen in its evidential function (see e.g., Schlereth, 1985). In fact, the potential of materialities as a research tool seems to be extraordinary. Studies in material culture can help us to understand how materialities create and modify multilingual reality, being instrumental in shaping and re-shaping identities of both individuals and communities.

With this in mind, the material objects relevant for multilingual investigation and their types were identified (Aronin & Ó Laoire 2012a, 2012b; Aronin & Singleton, 2012). Multilingual artefacts are those which have inscriptions or language signs on them, and meaningfully relate to an individual's identity and surrounding social reality. The crucial property of such objects is the relationship between verbal and material components. This relationship is not always noticed, as human perception of artefacts of multilingual material culture blends their "thing" qualities such as form, size, substances they are

made of, and their functions with the language constituent. Therefore we described a language-defined object as “a meaningful wholeness of material and verbal components considered as a representation of its user or users, exclusively in relation to its linguistic environment” (Aronin & Ó Laoire, 2012a).

Linguistically defined objects differ from other cultural objects in that they include a linguistic component. The linguistic component merges with the quality of an object, transforming it and defining its complex nature. Words or signs in the linguistically defined object make it more focused, exact and specific than any cultural object without the linguistic component. At the same time, by virtue of the interplay of font and texture, material, shades of colour and everything that makes a material object different from an isolated inscription and *what* is written or inscribed, a linguistically defined object always bears a specific and often unique meaning.

Material culture of a multilingual society can be defined as a specific blend of materialities, originating from many cultures which constitute a multilingual society (Aronin & Ó Laoire, 2012b). It comprises materialities relating to a multilingual way of existence, whether by individuals or the societies.

Material culture research has a vast potential in terms of theoretical basis. Research on materialities of multilingualism has a rich pool of knowledge on which to draw, since it brings into play a host of linguistic disciplines. It can be based on a solid theoretical foundation of any one of numerous disciplines, such as archeology, sociology, ethnography, linguistics, globalization studies, applied linguistics, history and philosophy. The sources and the insight could be many, among them, semiotics by Ferdinand de Saussure (Saussure, [1916] 1974), “cultural semiotics” or “semiotics of culture” by Yuri Lotman (1990), the vision of commodities in cultural perspective by Arjun Appadurai (1988), the object value system as presented by Jean Baudrillard ([1968] 1996, [1970] 1998) and many others depending on the choice of direction and particular interest of a researcher.

The above very brief enumeration of sources also points to a number of possible directions and subfields in exploring the material culture of multilingualism.

Table 1 Possible directions/aspects in exploring material culture of multilingualism

Processes, events, traditions in multilingual contexts	Objects and artefacts in multilingual settings	Public spaces: cityscapes landscapes roads, squares
Material culture of multilingualism in private spheres e.g., apartments, houses, personal belongings	Group controlled spaces: closed clubs, professional/institutional buildings and spaces e.g., university campus, hospital premises	Material culture of mobility: What (objects, traditions) survives geographical and identity transitions in an individual and in a group
Historical study of material culture of multilingualism	Interpretation of changes or lack of change in material culture through time and space	Linguistic landscape

The table is not comprehensive and categorization of aspects of material culture can be conceived differently. Rather, this table is food for thought inviting researchers to consider how to study the material culture of multilingualism systematically.

The material culture items and spaces of language learning should be probably the first choice for those interested in education and didactics. The classroom research includes interest in material culture in teaching materials, academic text-books, student reports, boxes, book shelves, correspondence to parents, locally produced items, students certificates, official school papers, charts and posters, flags, and visual aids (see e.g., Coady, 2003; Escamilla, 1994). Johnson in 1980 looked into the material culture of public school classrooms for the purpose of studying the symbolic integration of local schools and national culture (Johnson, 1980). In addition, investigations into material culture would contribute to the existing debates on authentic materials and authenticity in foreign language learning (Gilmore, 2007).

The common premise of the research on materialities, be it in its social aspect or educational and didactic sphere, is the existence of interaction, interrelationship between objects and beliefs, objects and ways of life, objects and human behaviour, objects and identity. These inevitably spark emotions, feelings and all kinds of affectivity. Material objects can invoke images and memories, music and rhythm. They possess immeasurable expressive power and influence. Material culture lends itself to both qualitative and quantitative research. The affective aspects evoked through the use and display of material culture can be studied in case studies and qualitative research.

In the next section I will discuss and illustrate how linguistically defined objects of material culture maintain and modify the affective dimensions of a community and individuals in connection with language use and acquisition.

Affectivity and Material Culture

This section contains examples and a discussion of how linguistically defined objects concern and maintain individual and community memory, attitudes towards historical events that bear affective connotations (pride, sorrow and hope), self-perception and the image of a community.

I will consider some artefacts of the Circassian community in Israel. The community numbers about 4000 people who live in two villages: Kfar Kama and Rehaneya. The people of the community are multilingual and deploy Circassian, Arabic, Hebrew, Russian, and English in their daily life. There are other languages which are familiar to Circassians in Israel, such as Turkish, emerging from the historical past, and crystallized in books and documents, which are cherished and held in homes and in libraries. These, inscribed on

material artefacts figuring in the daily life of the whole community and each individual, remind them about their complicated past, and accompany them through a variety of countries and encounters with other peoples. The municipal emblems and community flags represent this complexity and diversity of the past and present of the Circassian community (see Figure 1).



Figure 1 Emblem of the village council (adapted from Gutterman, n.d.)

The emblem was adopted on 17 November 1974. It combines the words in three languages: Adiga, Russian and Hebrew, executed in two scripts: Cyrillic and Roman. The lower inscription in this flag reads:

АДЫГЭ ХАСЭ: ADYGE QASE
KФАР КАМА: KFAR KAMA

The first inscription word is in Circassian, in Cyrillic alphabet, the first word, “АДЫГЭ,” is the self-designated name for this ethnic group (endonym) and the second one means ‘council.’

The second line contains the name of the village in Russian and in English.

Let us look inside the village of Kfar Kama for emotionally charged, evocative, and linguistically defined artefacts. The village of Kfar Kama in the Lower Galilee is inhabited by Muslim Circassians, and was founded in 1876. The artefacts are submitted and described by a mother of a Circassian family, Lousianne Hatukai (2012). Out of the language constellation a Circassian family and community share, different languages may be dominant with different community members. For example, though her mother’s language is Circassian, Lousianne reads and writes very little in Circassian. In fact, Lousianne’s dominant language is Arabic, due to the fact that she lived and studied in Nazareth, where her father used to work as a District Officer in the

Ministry of the Interior. Lousianne started learning Hebrew and English in primary school in the third and the fourth grades respectively. Lousianne's husband is also a Circassian; his dominant language is Hebrew, next to Circassian, because he studied in Afula High School. The family's eldest son has finished his mandatory service in the Israeli Defense Forces, and their second son is in Kadoori High School (therefore both are fluent in Hebrew). The youngest child is ten years old, he learns Hebrew and Arabic in school. At home, the parents speak to him in Circassian. His mother notes that the boy is outstandingly gifted in English, and that although the language of education in the village is Hebrew, his dominant language is English. Lousianne reports that the boy writes stories, poems and word definitions in English, which she attributes to his giftedness and long exposure to TV and Internet.

Lousianne's home contains multiple artefacts, which are language-defined objects meaningful for the whole family, and each of the family members as an individual. These include books, furniture, utensils, souvenirs, hand-craft objects, stickers and framed pictures. In her list of meaningful material culture Lousianne also included cultural landscapes from the village.

The first object, a door, is literally on the border of the public and the individual domains (see Figure 2)



Figure 2a The Hatukai's door. General view (adapted from Hatukai, 2012)



Figure 2b The Hatukai's door. Bas relief (adapted from Hatukai, 2012)

There are humorous stickers in Hebrew: a non-smoking sign and a sticker in Hebrew asking: Who is there? Above the door handle on the left side of the

door, there is a little bas relief made of copper. In the enlarged image on the right is an embossed print in Russian. The bas relief portrays the glory of the Circassian warrior. The war was lost more than two hundred years ago. Another artefact with an inscription relating to the same war is a sticker of a mourning lady full of sorrow (see Figure 3), praying for a cease to all wars, with a message to remember massacres of the Russian-Circassian war that took place in 1864. The sticker is on Lousianne's bedroom door. Unlike in linguistic landscape which is mostly limited to largely static public places, the material culture enquiry investigates objects that are portable. The place and time-space trajectories of artefacts speak volumes to a researcher. The place where the sticker is attached – the bedroom door, testifies to the importance and closeness of these memories to an individual. It is often the case that in communities, people commemorate wars and events of the same magnitude mostly through public ceremonies, unless they are very active participants in events. And here the object, by its existence, and by its location, demonstrates the depth of sadness and the memories in the heart of this Israeli Circassian woman.



Figure 3 A sticker to remember massacres of the Russian-Circassian war of 1864 (adapted from Hatukai, 2012)

The above artefacts transmit to a careful observer the importance of far-away history for the Circassians, as well as their perception of their present and their hopes. "Here we are in another place of the world building our future," says Lousianne.

The next artefact communicates a more recent and acute sorrow. The object, a small memorial table-stella "Yezkor" (memorial) with the information in Hebrew about a Circassian young man, stands, as we can see in the background of a plate with Arabic inscriptions. The positioning of the table-stella

inside the home, but within the zone of public display, conveys the feeling of loss and sadness of this family, also shared by the community.

The feeling of pride for their community emerges through the bulk of artefacts and variety of material objects with inscriptions in different languages which are used, or were used, by the Circassians. Along with frequently showing the traditional male outfit of Circassian dancers or warriors, these objects very often have the word *Adiga* on them. These items are available in the local shops in the village or are brought from other Circassian communities. A wooden souvenir plate with inscriptions in Russian was brought by Lousianne from the second international conference held in the Republic of Adygea in Russia in 1993, where representatives of Circassian people from the Diaspora and the homeland in Caucasia gathered to discuss the maintenance of language, culture, folklore and history.

These and multiple other artefacts, both those produced as souvenirs, and those used in daily life, whether made in Israel or in Russia, include the endonym, self-name *Adige* (Адыгэ) in Roman, Hebrew or Cyrillic script. Not less significant is that it is an endonym, and not the exonyms *Circassians* or *Cherkess* which the wider world applies to them that is reproduced in the souvenirs and goods in daily use.

We can infer that material culture cries out, insists we call this people as they wish to be called: *Adiga*. *Adiga* is the name Circassians have chosen to call themselves since ancient times, and it means 'the striving to be perfect,' as opposed to *Cherkess*, the name other people have chosen to call them. This is the message we would have received, if we had paid careful attention to the material culture.

Circassian, Arabic, Hebrew, Russian, English, Turkish – the material objects in use and on display in this home embody the complexity and specificity of linguistic, cultural, religious and historical threads so tightly woven, which represent the life of this small and proud community. Material cultural objects make all this complex information visual and tangible for any perceptive observer. Just look at the materialities from one family house. The first historical comprehensive encyclopedia about the Circassians was published in 2009 in Arabic, authored by Muhammed Kheir Mamser Batsej from Amman, Jordan, and the Koran was published in a variety of translations, languages and scripts.

Multilingual artefacts of Kfar Kama villagers show the active multilingualism of its inhabitants. It projects to the outer world the villagers' integration into the wider Israeli society, and at the same time their strong wish to be their own people, *Adiga*, with their own language, ways of life, traditions, values, their own vision of their future and history.

Let us now move on to a representative of another minority in Israel, namely the so-called Russian-speakers who at the same time represents the culture of the young. The Russian-speaking young restaurant waiter wears his T-shirt in Israel where Hebrew, Arabic, Russian, English and other languages are in use. At his job he not only makes public his identity, but he also represents the hotel and Israelis for the tourists from other countries.

The material object he wears, a shirt with an inscription in English "I'm too sexy for my shirt," arouses emotions from both those familiar with the source of this quotation, and from those who are not. It turns out that the sentence is a quotation from a dance song "I'm Too Sexy" (Fairbrass, Fairbrass, & Manzoli, 1991) a hit in the United Kingdom and a number of other countries, released in 1991 by a popular English pop band Right Said Fred.

This material culture artefact, a T-shirt, carries out a dialogue with the "audience;" it performs the communicative functions of identification, it conveys a cultural message, and also signals the common grounds of this global trend for those with similarly inclined taste in music.

Materialities, attitudes to them and ways of dealing with them may be shared by subcommunities of a bigger community or society, or indeed may indicate the differences between them. For example, trilingual keyboards of the public computers in the classes and halls at the universities and colleges of Israel – Hebrew, Arabic and English – allow for societal discourse in three languages, which is common in Israel. The foreigners or citizens who are not fluent in Hebrew will be at ease in this public sphere by having the opportunity to e-mail, or write a document in English. The keyboard at my home is trilingual too, but, according to my needs it is in Hebrew, English and Russian, which affords communication and dialogue with overlapping different communities that I deal with, on a daily basis.

Artefacts are active voices which represent our attitudes and behaviour; in a multilingual, heterogeneous community, they convey the particular linguistic and cultural group voice, and of course individual voices within a certain public sphere. Material culture underlies oral linguistic communication, because through it the interlocutors may perceive the clues for each other's points of view, beliefs, origins, and values and shows what the sensibilities of the interlocutor are.

Conclusion

Material culture constitutes an indispensable part of multilingual reality. Materialities carry out innumerable social functions; among them arousing, maintaining and sustaining emotions, attitudes and affectivity of various kinds.

Language-defined materialities are sensory, embodied, and mobile elements of human practice, enriched by the linguistic element. Material artefacts with linguistic component originate and maintain attachment, sorrow, love, irony, apprehension or adverse feelings. Both in a multilingual and monolingual environments, affective feelings or memory-laden material objects, modify and enhance the use of particular languages, maintain the use of language and attachment to it and to a particular culture through generations.

In addition to psychological and social dimensions, material culture of multilingualism serves language teaching and language learning in a number of ways. Material culture, and in particular linguistically determined objects, play a role in supplying affective dimension which is either conducive to, or hinders language acquisition and use. Materialities may stimulate or initiate interest for learning a language through adding an affective nuance to the situation.

Material artefacts cause a range of emotions and feelings; some cause patriotic feelings and awareness of one's origins; others foster attachment to other countries. Souvenirs influence may be limited to just reminding a devoted traveler of his visited places and mark his pride. Keepsakes and memorabilia embody attachments from various countries. Some artefacts, cityscapes and events raise interest and curiosity, others enhance and speed language learning, still others produce long-standing bonds with a nonnative language and culture. All of them may bring understanding of how cultures and communities become "blended," or dominant, and what it means for an individual to speak several languages.

Special attention should be paid to the evocative, emotionally charged materialities if we wish to modify language attitudes for the languages multilinguals use and stimulate motivation for language learning.

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