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The Possibility of the Mirandese Language as a Model  
for the Establishment and Promotion of Lesser-used Minority Languages

This paper analyses the reasons behind the establishment and promotion of the Mirandese language, which is classified in the Romance languages group and originally spoken Northeast corner of Portugal, and the ongoing problems surrounding this language, as well as the geographical situation and the phonological morphological and lexicological features of this language.

One of the characteristics of Mirandese, which has historically been treated as a “dialect”, is its almost complete lack of connection to ethnicity and nationalism, i.e., the Mirandese consider themselves Portuguese. Such consciousness brings into question the over-simplistic link between ethnicity and the taxonomic classification of languages.

However, Mirandese itself arouses complicated problems. The Mirandese Language, which is considered an extreme minority language, also includes (or borders on) other linguistic minorities as Sendinese (spoken in the southernmost area of the original distribution of Mirandese), which raises questions concerning linguistic rights, because, after the official recognition of Mirandese, speakers of Sendinese could be discriminated against due to their use of an unofficial and subordinated “dialect” in much the same way that Mirandese itself had been despised in the past because of such taxonomic classification. In order to avoid such infinite controversy, we shall consider who should share the linguistic rights. This paper argues the linguistic rights should be treated at both community and personal levels. With respect to individual linguistic rights, everyone has the right to claim a mother tongue (even mother ‘tongues’), regardless of whether or not it has been subordinated or discriminated against by some external party. In this sense, the author suggests a parallel system of languages, instead of the conventional hierarchical system. In this context, for example, Valencian could be the Valencian Language within the Catalan Language, or Miyako could be the Miyako Language within the Ryukyu Language and/or within the Japanese Language. This concept is in harmony with plurilingualism and allows former marginalized minority languages to be incorporated into this didactic system. In addition, it fosters the acquisition of several languages, instead of the definitive choice of a single language, which ultimately helps individuals to communicate, trade, express and identify with each other.