

The ‘Standard Language Ideology’ and the Obsolescence of Multilingualism: An Historical Case Study of Macau

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Milroy and Milroy (1985, 1999) argue that the process of standardisation doesn't produce a linguistic variety per se, but instead produces a social ideology. The 'standard language ideology' seeks to establish a single variety with minimal variation and maximal functionality, and this is accomplished, in part, by promoting a 'myth of purity' about the standard language. The 'myth of purity' is responsible, in part, for the perpetuation of the idea that a standard language can and should be used without non-standard variation and without mixing of other languages. The former Portuguese colony of Macau sits on the western bank of the Pearl River Delta and it represents one of the oldest continuous international cities in Southeast Asia. The city was founded as a trading outpost under Portuguese rule and protection and, over the five centuries of the city's history, allowed a number of different languages to freely enter the territory's linguistic ecology. European languages were brought to make as the first and last colony of China; Southeast Asian languages were brought to Macau by workers and traders from the region; and Chinese languages from across China were brought to the territory along with the hopes of economic development. The 20th century, however, witnessed the demise of much of the territory's diverse linguistic ecology as powerful standard languages began to arise in the territory: namely English, Portuguese, Putonghua and Cantonese. This examination of the history of Macau's linguistic ecology will explore the residual diversity that remains in the territory and suggest some of the mechanisms by which the 'standard language ideology' renders this diversity obsolete.