

Language Policy and the Construction of National Identity in Colombia

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ABSTRACT

The connection between identity and language is hard to deny. In the production of national identities, language plays a key role in the homogenizing of the population by political will. Since the conquest of Colombia over 500 years ago, language has been a crucial tool in the construction of national identity and the concept of nation. This article, through archival research, critical reading, textual analysis, and grounded theory, examines the role of language from pre-colonial Colombia to modern day Colombia in the formation of national identity and character. It carefully and critically examines the roles and conflicts of Spanish and indigenous languages in colonial laws until modern education legislation, and the current rise of English in education law, and what this means in terms of national identity for Colombia.

Key words: *national identity, language policy, language education, identity theory.*

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La Política Lingüística y la Construcción de la Identidad Nacional en Colombia

RESUMEN

La conexión entre la identidad y el lenguaje es difícil de negar. En la producción de identidades nacionales, el lenguaje desempeña un papel clave en la homogenización de la población por la voluntad política. Desde la conquista de Colombia hace más de 500 años, el lenguaje ha sido una herramienta crucial en la construcción de la identidad y el concepto de nacionalidad. Este artículo, a través de la investigación archivística, lectura crítica, análisis del texto y muestreo teórico, examina el papel del lenguaje desde la Colombia pre-colonial hasta la Colombia moderna en cuanto a la formación de la identidad y carácter nacional. También examina cuidadosa y críticamente los papeles y conflictos entre el español y las lenguas indígenas en las leyes coloniales hasta la legislación educativa moderna, y el auge actual del inglés en las leyes educativas, y lo que este último significa en cuanto a la identidad nacional de Colombia.

Palabras clave: *identidad nacional, política lingüística, educación lingüística, teoría de identidad.*

Política Linguística e Construção da Identidade Nacional na Colômbia

RESUMO

A conexão entre identidade e idioma é difícil de negar. Na produção de identidades nacionais, a linguagem desempenha um papel fundamental na homogeneização da população por vontade política. Desde a conquista da Colômbia há mais de 500 anos, a linguagem tem sido uma ferramenta crucial na construção de identidade e conceito nacional. Este artigo, através da pesquisa arquivística, leitura crítica, análise textual e teoria fundamentada, examina o papel da linguagem da colônia précolonial para o moderno Colômbia na formação da identidade e do caráter nacionais. Examina com cuidado e criticamente os papéis e conflitos das línguas espanholas e indígenas nas leis coloniais até a legislação educacional moderna e o aumento atual do inglês na legislação educacional e o que isso significa em termos de identidade nacional para a Colômbia.

Palavras chave: *identidade nacional, política linguística, educação linguística, teoria da identidade.*

1. Introduction

Since the colonisation of what we now know as the Republic of Colombia 516 years ago, the area has taken many shapes and forms: colonised, decolonised, divided, and even sold off. The formation of the state of Colombia has been at times a bloody crusade of arms, and at other times, a refined intellectual affair, but to all phases of the state of Colombia three central themes have been used to create the identity of the state, chosen originally by Spain and then adopted by the various incarnations of the Colombian republic – race, language, and religion (Charry, 2011). It is important to recognise that Colombia was not discovered as a *Terra Nullius* and when the Spaniards arrived, they discovered indigenous groups ranging from hunting tribes to early stone city builders.

The imposition of the Spanish trifecta of identity – in particular language - has over the course of these centuries greatly affected the identity of the indigenous groups that have survived, the progeny of the colonizers and even those groups that have immigrated to Colombia since – whether by choice or by force. However, today this original trifecta is not the lone player in the game of national identity in the country. Education in Spanish, foreign language education in English, and ethno-education all have important roles in the current development of national identity, although the role each plays is vastly different.

This article uses archival research, critical reading, text analysis, and grounded theory in terms of identity and identity theory on a wide variety of sources. As such, this article

examines how language policy has not only affected Colombians of all varieties, but also how it has been used to create national identity and how this policy is being used today to create a future identity for the country.

2. Methodology

As previously mentioned, this article uses archival research, critical reading, text analysis, and grounded theory. Archival research refers to researching documents that may not be widely known or accessible. Critical reading and text analysis are techniques whereby texts are submitted to detailed and careful analysis of their contents in terms of who wrote them, what was written, how they were written, and why they were written (University of Bradford, 2016) in addition to finding