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Globalization and Colonization and the Effect of Language Loss on Cultural Identity

1. INTRODUCTION:

I am approaching this research project as an exploration of language and how it is linked to identity, focusing specifically on Irish. It is my intent to explore the correlation between the subjugation of the Irish people and language loss. Applying an archeological approach to research, I will begin with the onset of the Cromwellian plantation, exploring the suppression of the Irish people and “dig” through the year 1785. My goal is to discover how the long term effects of subjugation of a people correlates with the loss of their native language and how that loss affects the identity of the group. Due to the intricacy and complexity of the topic, this project will serve as a foundation and scaffolding for a larger capstone project for next semester, which will in turn—hopefully—provide a solid base for future graduate research in the field of Irish Studies. My intention is to include an epilogue with this project, to include events that took place beyond 1785—such as the Potato Famine—that speak to the devastation of the Irish people and the decline of their language, providing segue for the capstone project. One purpose of studying the Irish specifically is to examine how religion has been substituted for language as a major identifier of the Irish. I am curious to know if this is a viable substitute, or is something vital— rawer—lost from a people group with the disintegration of language. To hone in on this chord, I will examine the poetic works of the Irish poet Seamus Heaney, whose early poetry heavily addressed the issue of Irish vernacular and a duality in the Irish because of language. An exploration of his works may also offer insight into the connection between geography, culture, and language.

On a personal note, this topic interests me not only because of my own Irish heritage but also because we have four Kosovar students currently living in our home. They will be with us while they pursue their undergraduate and perhaps graduate degrees. Studying in America and mastering English, provides them great employment opportunities in their own country. I cannot help but wonder if their own language—Albanian will suffer over time, having to submit to the economically superior English language. Although speaking English consistently is to their academic and future career advantage, I am pleased that they are able to use their vernacular with one another. They often apologize for this when I am in the room or car with them, but they explain that their own language offers them the opportunity to express themselves more freely and concisely, even though their English skills are quite good. I find it interesting that often the Albanian does not neatly translate into English—it loses something. It is this bit of loss that intrigues me. Does the loss of a native language correlate to losing an aspect of uniqueness and authenticity of a people group? Will this loss, this dimension of different peoples, eventually lead to a more corporate or global people group? This is the “body” that I ultimately want to excavate.

2. Leading Research Question and Working Hypothesis:

1. My leading research questions thus far are: How does the subjugation of a people group contribute to the dissolution of its language? What is the significance of the loss of language to its native speakers and the rest of mankind? How are **language** and identity connected?
2. My working hypothesis is language is inherit and relational. It instills a sense of empowerment and connectivity. Losing it is a breakdown of these and reflects an unnatural assimilation. The swallowing of one language by another are reflective of domination and power on a global level and may eventually lead to a universal global language, which will corporatize language, extinguishing an inherit, guttural quality of people groups. At this point, beginning at ground zero with the examination of language at an undergraduate level, I do not purpose to prove my claims, but rather look forward to discovery of the Irish experience and the fallout as it relates to their identity, culture, and language.

3. MATERIALS AND RESEARCH STRATEGY:

I have learned during the preparation of this proposal that there are approximately 6,500 **languages in the world today. Human vision, creativity and ingenuity are tied to language, each unique culture and people group expressing an array of philosophy and theory through their native tongue. Sadly, it is estimated that in the next century about half of the world’s languages will be extinct. Due to globalization, the tides are tipping towards a universal language. But what impact does the dying of language have on its people? On the rest of the world? For this project, these questions will be explored and applied to the experience of the Irish. An historical examination of the Irish struggle against colonization and subjugation by the English, especially during the 16th and 17th centuries. I intend to incorporate a variety of methods including:**

* + Document analysis—analyzing primary sources including newspapers, official documents and personal accounts – also tangible material culture (images and objects), maps, music, travel narratives, poetry
  + Analyzing research already conducted
  + Observations
  + Interviews
  + Discussion circle of the issue
  + Literary analysis

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