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## Maintenance and Loss of Minority Languages Introductory Remarks

Willem Fase, Koen Jaspaert & Sjaak Kroon

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### 1 Introduction

A multitude of different processes are investigated under the heading of language maintenance and language loss. Very often these studies do not explain why maintenance and loss are interpreted in the way they are. To complicate matters even further, a host of other terms is in use which refer to the same or related themes. Language shift, language attrition, language death, language obsolescence are used to describe phenomena which are also sometimes referred to in terms of maintenance and loss. Research fields such as code switching and code mixing are often also hard to delineate from maintenance and loss research.

In spite of the confusion that results from this ill-defined use of terminology, some basic characteristics can be observed. The most common characteristic of the studies that concern us here is that they either deal with the gradual disappearance of a language in a community where it used to be spoken, or with the resistance some languages show to this disappearance. The disappearing language does not merely vanish leaving a linguistic vacuum; it is always replaced by a language with which it is in contact. Similarly, only languages maintained in a contact situation offering opportunities for replacement are eligible for language maintenance research. In that contact situation the language in danger of disappearance is always the dominated language, or, put differently, the danger of disappearance in contact situations is only real for the sociological minority group.

The main distinction between different studies lies in the choice of linguistic facts that are used as an index for maintenance or disappearance. The candidates for this position can be divided into two groups: language use and language proficiency. In this introduction we will refer to changes in language use as language shift, and to changes in language proficiency as language loss. Language maintenance refers to both retention of use and proficiency. Contrary to the disappearance side of the coin, maintenance presupposes maintenance of use as well as maintenance of proficiency. Reduction of proficiency and reduction of use can and do occur separately, hence, the need to distinguish between them terminologically.

The division between language shift and language loss is of course insufficient to clarify with which linguistic facts we will be dealing. Within the fields of language use and language proficiency research, a large diversity of linguistic facts is studied. By way of introduction to this book, before briefly introducing its contents (Section 4), it seems useful to examine this diversity a little closer by going into the concepts of language shift and language loss (Sections 2 and 3).

## 2 Language Shift

Let us start by taking a closer look at what happens in a language contact situation. Imagine, for the sake of argument, a group that migrated to an area in which another language is dominant, and that stops using its own language in a period of three generations. The disappearance of the ethnic group language is really the outcome of a number of changes that have occurred in the ethnic community. Being confronted with another dominant language probably meant, in the first place, being confronted with speakers who only speak that language, or at least do not speak the language of the newly immigrated group. This implies that there is a problem when people of the new immigrant group want to communicate with these monolingual speakers. This problem is typically one of coordination, the type of problem that instigates the creation of social norms (Ullmann-Margalit 1977; Bartsch 1985). Let us review the options members of the ethnic group have, and the chances of these options becoming the norm.

- 1 The ethnic group can choose not to communicate with people who do not speak their language, thus avoiding the emergence of the communication problem. Of course, this avoidance of communication can seldom be complete. There will always be a few instances in which interaction between members of both groups needs to take place. The newly migrated group can limit these contacts to a strict minimum. It can even set up structures for

this kind of communication, so that only a small number of them are involved in the communication process. This option has been selected quite often. Well known cases are the relative isolation of the Pennsylvania Dutch (or German) (Huffines 1980), and the position of first generation migrant worker groups in Western Europe (De Bot and Fase 1991).

- 2 The ethnic group can try to establish communication in its own language. Although it will in most cases oppose this solution, there are instances in which the dominant group would accept the ethnic group language as a legitimate choice for communication with members of the ethnic group in a limited number of well defined situations. Segregation as well as integration policies may call for a limited use of the minority group language through official channels. By allowing the minority language in those situations where communication between members of the two groups is minimally necessary, the dominant group may try to take the necessity out of the learning of the dominant language for minority group members, thus reinforcing the chances of segregation. And by allowing the minority language in certain situations, the dominant group may encourage intergroup contact, and in this way promote integration.
- 3 Members of the two groups can choose to communicate in a third language. Of course, this option implies the availability of a third language to both groups. As a solution to the coordination problem that arises after migration of a group, this seems to be an exceptional choice (Jaspert, Kroon and Vanvolsem 1988).
- 4 The most likely norm for communication with members of the dominant group is, of course, the dominant group language. If a member of the minority group wants to ask directions in the street from a member of the dominant group, or when he is asked directions by somebody from this group, the conversation will almost certainly take place in the dominant group language. The dominant group language will also be the norm in more formalized situations, except in a few instances as described in the previous option, where an exception to this norm is allowed.

The above implies that when migration is followed by a more or less permanent settlement, and both sides choose for integration rather than segregation, members of the minority group almost unavoidably shift towards the use of the dominant language in most of their contacts with the dominant group (Kroon

1990). The extent of the shift will be determined by the extent of the interethnic communication that is established.

Let us return now to the minority group losing its language in the course of three generations. The shift occurring in interethnic communication cannot be held responsible for the final outcome, unless the minority group itself loses its group status. As long as we are dealing with a group, there is also communication within the group, and the norms that develop for interethnic communication do not need to have any impact on intragroup communication. If only interethnic shift occurs, the language situation within the community will evolve towards a form of stable bilingualism: in its most extreme form, it would create a situation in which the minority group language is used for communication within the group, and the dominant group language is used in all other instances (Fishman 1972). This stability does not mean that the amount of use of both languages remains the same. It rather refers to the fact that the functional distribution between the two languages remains intact. In this sense it resembles a diglossic situation. Language death only occurs when intraethnic communication disappears, and, as mentioned before, this can normally only happen when the group itself dissolves owing to demographic causes (Dorian 1980).

If the minority language disappears without the group dissolving, it means that members of the minority group have chosen to communicate in the dominant language within the group.

Unlike in the case of shift in interethnic communication, intraethnic shift is not primarily a question of basic communication needs—the need to understand, the need to be understood. It is not motivated by the need to establish communication, but by the wish to establish it in a certain way.

In the field of language maintenance, this form of shift holds a central position. It accounts for language shift in situations in which the demographic situation of a group does not change substantially. One may argue that language death resulting from this kind of shift also may imply the dissolution of the minority group. With this form of language shift, however, the dissolution of the group is the result rather than the cause of the shift process. This is clearly supported by the fact that language may cease to be a core value for a group, and die without the group structure being affected by it (Smolicz 1981).

The difference between the two forms of shift can be expressed in a different way. In the first case, norms have to be established as a result of the new situation. Once they have been established, they do not change anymore. What does change is the situation to which they apply. If, for instance, a minority group family moves from an area predominantly populated by members of the minority group to an area where no other members live, the amount of use of the minority language will drop drastically. The norm, however, —speak the mi-

minority language with minority group members—will not change. With the second form of shift, the shift process does not imply the creation of new norms, but the adaptation of old ones. This change of norms is an essential part of the shift process. If, in the example of the family moving to an area where no group members live, the situation changes again so that other group members come to live in that area, the use of the group language will increase again. But if, in the meantime, the norm itself has undergone change, the new migration may not lead to increased use of the group language for that family. In other words, the choice of language in interaction with group members should be considered the form of behaviour which is central to questions of language maintenance. As long as there is a minority group, as long as the minority group is not demographically broken up, the use of the minority language will not disappear unless the norms for language use within the group are changed. Whereas the first form of shift creates a stable bilingual situation, the second form destabilizes such a situation to the possible extent that bilingualism may disappear altogether.

As an example we chose a group migrating into a minority situation. The patterns of shift that are discussed, however, also apply to groups that find themselves in a minority situation without migration taking place. Their minority status can be new, resulting from changes in the political constellation, or it can have been latently present for a long time and at a certain time surfaced due to changed political or economic circumstances. Groups that were able to remain segregated from a dominant group for a long time, and functioned as an autonomous “market” (Bourdieu 1982) in every respect, may start to get integrated as a result of political or economic evolution in the country they belong to. Once their relative isolation as a group is threatened, their language is a candidate for shift in much the same way as that of migrating groups is.

The discussion on the nature of shift that is presented here really boils down to this: in order to understand processes of language maintenance and language shift, it is imperative that we study changes in language choice in intragroup communication. Only when we understand the mechanisms that govern these changes will we be able to interpret correctly processes of maintenance and shift in demographically stable situations. In situations that are demographically unstable we will also need to study the demographic changes and the interaction between these changes and the normative changes.

Changes in language choice in intragroup communication are the result of changes of norms. As norms are the results of negotiations between persons and groups that interact socially, it is in the social structure that we should look for the mechanisms underlying these norms.

Interethnic change, on the other hand, deals with the establishment of new norms. As such, it is of interest as a research object for those studying the mechanisms and strategies through which societies react to ethnic diversity. Since the minority group has little say in the matter, the focus in these types of studies is on the behaviour of the dominant group, in many cases through its official channels. Research on language policy forms the core of this line of work.

### 3 Language Loss

While the question of shift is mainly related to the group, the question of loss is basically one that relates to the individual. It is the individual losing the ability to use the language. In as much as loss of language within the minority group is discussed, this loss no longer relates to the change of norms characteristic for a group, but to an aggregate of the loss that occurs within each individual in the group. In spite of this individual character, loss is just as multi-faceted as shift is. Let us try and unravel some of these facets starting from the example of a minority group member losing part of the proficiency in his language.

In its simplest form loss occurs when that minority group member cannot do the things with the minority language he used to be able to do. He used to be able to discuss soccer with his friends, or give a lecture on a scientific subject, or read a newspaper without the aid of a dictionary, and now he encounters difficulty doing these things. Some of the proficiency he used to have is no longer accessible.

The researcher who wants to study the changes in this language user's proficiency is faced with the problem of deciding whether the linguistic facts that are observed can be related to language loss or not. There are a number of methodological problems which are not easily solved. It is, for example, seldom possible to establish beyond doubt the proficiency of the language user before the start of language loss. Since language loss seems to be a slow process, longitudinal research is almost always excluded: the necessary time interval between measures is much larger than most research initiatives can afford to take into account. And the language situation from which the language user originated is seldomly described in such detail as to allow the researcher to confidently reconstruct that proficiency. To make matters worse, some language users acquire a variety of their language which is already marked by the language loss of a preceding generation. In these cases one would not only need a description of the original linguistic situation, but also an understanding of the loss process itself, in order to establish what can be considered loss by an individual (for a dis-

cussion of these methodological problems, see Jaspaert, Kroon and Van Hout 1986).

In spite of these methodological obstacles, language loss has attracted the attention of many researchers (see Lambert and Freed 1982; Weltens, De Bot and Van Els 1986). No doubt the growing popularity of this field is related to the relevance for many areas of research of the facts that are dealt with. These facts relate to what is being lost as well as to how and why this happens. The "what" question refers to the issue of linguistic description. If loss is an inherently structured process, it must be possible to categorize linguistically the elements that are lost. The "how" and "why" questions refer to the psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic explanation of the structure that emerges from the description. If language loss is to be understood, it must be possible not only to describe which linguistic elements will be affected, but also why those elements will be affected and others will not, and how the process of loss will affect these elements.

From a psycholinguistic point of view, the pattern language loss takes may offer insights into the structure of the linguistic system. In much the same way as language acquisition is believed to be governed by general principles of language and language ability, patterns of language loss are believed to offer a similar view of language, be it from the other end. Although language loss is no longer seen as a mirror process of acquisition, it cannot be denied that the explanation for systemacity in both fields raises similar types of questions: the universality of the process, the role of interlinguistic versus intralinguistic factors in the explanation of the process, the degree to which competence and/or performance is involved. The great hope of researchers in individual language loss is no doubt that this line of research will increase substantially our understanding of how the human mind deals with language.

In another sense, language loss research relates closely to research in language variation and language change. Language loss is a clear case of change in progress, resulting in as clear a case of language variation (Gal 1979). The structure and the mechanisms of language loss can be expected to have clear links to the structure and mechanisms of pidginization and creolization (Gonzo and Saltarelli 1983), to the emergence of loans, to processes of informal standardization. These fields, which have most often been approached from a group perspective, have an individual side to them which must resemble language loss in many ways. In all these cases of language change a number of individuals have traded one way of referring to reality for another. The questions what is affected by the changes and why are central to all these fields.

Language loss is also closely related to research on language shift. It is obvious that both processes are linked together: if individuals lose the ability to use their own language, they will automatically shift towards other means of express-



ion. And as language shift proceeds, the lack of opportunity to use the language will cause erosion of the language proficiency involved. In this sense loss of proficiency can also be studied as an indicator of language shift. In this case, it is no longer the change in the individual's linguistic system that is the key concern. The focus of interest shifts towards some sort of collective notion of proficiency present within a community. From this point of view, it becomes relatively unimportant which individual processes have caused the present state of proficiency. Reduction of individual proficiency, failure by some members to fully acquire the language, and social changes resulting in the obsolescing of part of the proficiency do not need to be set apart any longer. Very often, this line of research does not deal with the ability to use selected elements of language structure, but measures the ability to do certain things with certain languages.

All in all, whereas shift should appeal more to researchers interested in the way language is object and subject of social processes, language loss is much more a linguist's matter. Both fields, however, capture the interest of all who want to understand what man does to language and what language does to man, whenever the organic bond between the two is threatened.

#### 4 The Book's Composition

This book has three sections. Section 1 contains three articles written by Clyne, Edwards and Paulston, keynote speakers during the First Noordwijkerhout Conference on Maintenance and Loss of Ethnic Minority Languages. The articles cover a wide spectrum of perspectives and topics in the field of language maintenance and loss. Clyne focusses on the interactions between linguistic and sociolinguistic factors in language contact, thereby working towards a multifacet theory of language loss. In a comparison of mainly Dutch and German speakers in Australia, he depicts a rich diversity of language contact situations and formulates hypotheses regarding grammatical change, code-switching, and the relevance of exposure to the minority language for language shift. Edwards reflects on sociopolitical aspects of maintenance and loss of minority languages. With the work of Haugen, Haarmann, and Giles in mind, he introduces a typology of language situations that is based on three main principles: speaker, language, and setting. This framework facilitates the formulation of a number of research questions that are important prerequisites for more and better systematic observations in minority language situations. Paulston, in her search for causal factors in language maintenance and loss processes, introduces a comparative analysis of language contact situations in Catalonia, Tanzania, Sweden, and Peru. She gives special reference to developments in the political arena, and

underlines that distinct types of social mobilisation have differential effects on maintenance and loss.

Section 2 brings together various approaches to the study of language maintenance and loss that can be seen from three main perspectives: linguistic studies, sociological studies, and descriptive studies.

The first part, linguistic studies, opens with Boeschoten's study on misunderstandings in a non-stabilised bilingual situation. The study is based on recordings of a sample of Turkish children that grow up in Dutch society. Turkish inhabitants in the Netherlands are also central to empirical investigations in two other contributions. Huls and Van de Mond explore language choice and attrition in everyday conversations in two Turkish families. This study is a fine example of participant observation. Schaufeli concentrates on the Turkish vocabulary of bilingual Turkish children. Analyses of formal test scores show clear relationships between length of residence, vocabulary and lexical interference. In a fourth article on linguistic processes, Jaspaert and Kroon introduce a one person case study on the loss of Dutch in American-English surroundings, and question the relationship between change, erosion, and adaptation. Tandefelt, in her account of Swedish speakers in Finland, presents a detailed intergenerational analysis of the relationship between shift and loss.

Social determinants of language maintenance and loss are central to the second part of this section. Allard and Landry study both the concept and the relevance of ethnolinguistic vitality for maintenance and loss in Canada. Observations are derived from a sample of French speaking students in different language situations. Bentahila and Davies, in their account of language shift within the Berber and Jewish communities of Morocco, uncover patterns of similarities in pragmatic attitudes for both groups. De Vries focusses on problems of measurement, and its implications for research designs. His article includes suggestions for the sociological study of language shift. In Landry and Allard's second contribution, one finds a conceptual model to identify conditions for bilingualism of minority and majority group students. It is shown that geographical factors play a crucial role, and, consequently, majority and minority group individuals differ substantially in their bilingual development. Language shift in India is dealt with in an article by Pandharipande. It is argued, by referring to a wide range of language contact situations, that the nature and functions of language shift are very complex, and that the relationship between language shift and shift of the cultural identity of the speech community is problematic. Smolicz presents a study on Polish, Welsh, and Chinese languages in Australia. Central to his analysis of qualitative data is the question whether or not ethnic groups regard their language as a core value, a fundamental aspect of their cultural identities. Williams investigates the conditions of maintenance and loss in

Celtic language communities with special reference to the role of formal education. In doing so, he also presents a research agenda for the analysis of bilingualism.

A third part of Section 2 has four descriptive studies on minority language situations in different countries. Lasimbang, Miller and Otigil report on the community of Kadazan in Malaysia. Special attention is given to the child's competence and use of Kadazan in Malaysia, as can be derived from a survey among parents. Problems of Japan's linguistic minorities, such as Ainu, Okinawans, Koreans, and Chinese, are dealt with by Miyawaki. Apart from statistical evidence on the amount of non-Japanese speakers, social and cultural implications of their linguistic minority positions are discussed. On the basis of an overview of the sociolinguistic history of Hawaii, Niedzielski discusses the rationales for and the effects of recent efforts to revitalize the original language of Hawaii. Tomić reports on Macedonians in Australia and gives special attention to linguistic revitalization as an instrument for improving the status of the minority group.

Section 3, finally, contains Fishman's closing address of the First Noordwijkerhout Conference. Fishman gives a critical review of the state of the art of research into the field of language maintenance and loss, as it was presented during the conference. Furthermore, he reflects on rather neglected areas of concern, such as language revitalization, and by doing so, he contributes to outlining a language maintenance and loss research agenda for the near future.

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