LANGUAGE ENDANGERMENT AND LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE

Edited by David and Maya Bradley
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edited by

David Bradley and Maya Bradley

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Introduction
David Bradley & Maya Bradley

Until recently, most linguists appeared not to be concerned with the rapid disappearance of most of the languages of the world, and linguistics as a discipline also paid only limited attention. Those who did work in this area used terms such as language death and other lugubrious metaphors. More recently, this complacency about the human disaster of loss of language and culture has been replaced by concern and action, and many linguists are now working with communities in documentation, maintenance, salvage and revival programmes. We still must contend with community attitudes which do not value “small” languages and view the global spread of English and other dominant languages as progress.

The level of language endangerment is now much more extreme than that of other kinds of loss of biodiversity. Various scholars have estimated that up to 90 per cent of the world’s languages will disappear during the 21st century unless — and many perhaps even if — we do something now. If 90 per cent of the world’s animal or plant diversity were equally at risk, there would be an international outcry, David Suzuki would move into overdrive, and green politics would garner much greater support. Language is the richest part of our human diversity, yet we have not reached the public consciousness with this issue.

Why is work on endangered languages (ELs) important? There are at least four main types of reason: linguistic, ethical, scientific and symbolic.

1) From the point of view of linguistics, we must describe ELs. If languages disappear undescribed, we will never know whether they had otherwise unattested or rare structures. Also, it is clear that ELs change in different ways from other languages, and this has important implications for historical linguistic theory.

2) Ethical reasons: if languages disappear undescribed, future generations will not be able to learn the language of their ancestors and will not have access to various aspects of
traditional knowledge and culture. From an ethical point of view, we have no right to deprive them of the possibility of retaining or regaining their language and culture.

3) Scientific reasons: every society has different knowledge and encodes it using distinctive linguistic patterns, so each language categorises the world in a unique way which comprises a world view. Furthermore, each society lives in a different ecological system and has unique knowledge of its environment and the plants and animals in it; this would be lost if the language disappears. It may turn out that much of this knowledge has scientific value for the development of new drugs, foods and materials, all of which have practical and economic benefits too.

4) Symbolic reasons: group identity and self-esteem are of paramount importance. Language is a crucial element of this identity, even when speakers do not feel the need to attain fluency in the language.

Of course the first type of reason could be seen as primarily linguistic self-interest. But it and the third are exactly parallel to the biodiversity arguments which have gained so much public support for environmental activism. How would we ever know that the group whose language died did not know about a medicinal plant which can cure cancer or a cultivated plant which can resist pests without chemicals? But the fourth type of reason — the need for identity and a positive self-image — is the one which is crucial to so many communities and groups in this age of globalisation.

The globalisation of English and the spread of other national languages are not so different from the spread of new genetically modified plant varieties controlled by multinational companies. English is even being promoted by many governments in countries where English is nobody’s first language, and nearly all nations promote their national language at the expense of minority and migrant languages. So, if anything, the language experiment now underway will lead to even greater homogeneity than the experiment with our food; and to even greater centralisation and control of knowledge than the commercial monopolies created by the sterile strains of genetically modified plants.
1. THIS VOLUME

This volume contains twenty chapters on many aspects of research on ELs in a wide range of settings. These are grouped into four sections: theoretical overview (Chapters 1 to 4), what happens to languages in various indigenous settings (Chapters 5 to 13), in migrant settings (Chapters 14 to 17), and practical strategies and resources for maintaining ELs (Chapters 18 to 20). Of course there are many theoretical and practical observations in the thirteen chapters on specific indigenous and migrant settings as well.¹

The chapters represent long field experience with ELs, particularly those of Australia and its Pacific and Asian surroundings, and many years of working with speech communities to help them to keep and develop their languages.

Languages of Australia and its territories, Papua New Guinea, eastern Indonesia, mainland Southeast, South and East Asia, Europe, Canada and South America are represented. Since most previous work on ELs has concentrated on those of Europe and North America, the case studies here are novel in a variety of ways. For example, many of these languages are endangered by a non-European language — Chinese, Assamese, Indonesian/Malay, Tok Pisin and so on. There is also one discussion of an endangered creole, that of Norfolk Island; conversely, several Australian Aboriginal languages are being replaced by Kriol, the creole spoken across much of northern Australia.

A number of chapters discuss the distinctive nature of language change during language shift, and others raise a variety of additional theoretical issues which have arisen during research on language endangerment.

Practical issues including the development of dialect surveys, orthographies, fonts, dictionaries, procedures for recovery of recently extinct languages from imperfect written records and other

¹ The editors are most grateful to the anonymous referees and others who have provided comments on the chapters which follow; but of course only we are responsible for remaining shortcomings.
tools for language maintenance (LM) are outlined. Also, we are reminded again and again to listen to the speech community and not to presume that we know what LM strategy is best for them.

The authors are based at nine universities in Australia, Europe and the United States. Six of us have been working in a joint Australian Research Council project with David Bradley as Team Leader since 1998, and nearly all authors participated in a symposium which we convened at La Trobe University in Melbourne, Australia in November 1999.

However this volume is not a conference proceedings. This introduction and several chapters included here were not presented at the conference, and most other chapters have undergone substantial refinement and expansion from the versions which were presented. Two papers presented at the symposium do not appear here.3

1.1 Theoretical issues
The four chapters in this section deal with four important issues often overlooked when considering ELs, and discuss their theoretical ramifications. These are:

1) What people think about language is crucial

2) Linguists have a variety of ways to change attitudes and maintain languages

3) Multilingualism is normal in much of the world, and so it is not unreasonable or cognitively problematic to maintain ELs in addition to Languages of Wider Communication (LWC)

4) However, languages exist as part of a total social system, and we cannot prevent that system from changing.

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2 David Bradley, Blake, Maya Bradley, Burridge, van Engelenhoven and Florey most gratefully acknowledge the support of the Australian Research Council large grant (project A59803475) as well as additional support from the UNESCO Endangered Languages programme for this research.

3 These were by Michael Clyne on the situation of a variety of languages spoken by migrants in Australia, and by David Nash on computer and Internet resources for LM.
The discussion of attitudes to languages in Chapter 1 provides a sociolinguistic framework for issues which arise in all of the following chapters. Wurm’s outline of LM strategies in Chapter 2 similarly foreshadows what is being done by the authors and other linguists to help many communities. Chapter 3 by Aikhenvald gives specific examples of exuberant multilingualism from South America and from Papua New Guinea; parallels are very widespread in the world. She notes that contact with an LWC may result in a breakdown of this stable multilingualism, so that people may lose not only their “own” language, but also their ability in those of many of their neighbours.

Chapter 4 discusses the development of an ecological linguistics, originating with Haugen (1972). Mühlhäusler outlines this model and its implications, referring to his own extended studies of the ecology of language and the development and spread of pidgins and creoles in the Pacific since the nineteenth century, as further exemplified and discussed in his Chapter 12.

1.2 Language in indigenous settings
Even in Europe there are quite a few languages which are not LWCs. Some which are national languages, such as Irish, are severely endangered. National languages spoken by groups outside the borders of the primary countries where they are used may also be in a similar situation, as Swedish is in Finland. Ahlqvist provides background on these two cases in Chapter 5. Of course there are also many regional languages of Europe which have become progressively more endangered by national languages over the last two centuries; but some of these, such as Catalan, Basque, Sami, Romansch and so on, have now become the focus of enthusiastic popular revitalisation movements and are receiving substantial government and European Community support; for some examples, see Dazzi Gross & Mondada (1999).

Countries mainly settled by Anglophone migrants in the initial stage of contact, like the United States, Canada and Australia, have until quite recently made it particularly difficult for indigenous groups to maintain their languages. Now this is changing, but for many communities it may be too late for normal transmission to resume. In the United States there are now many tribal colleges and other tribal organisations struggling to keep languages and cultures alive; their
journal, *Tribal College,* is compelling reading. Similar work is underway among the Original Nations in Canada and in many Australian Aboriginal communities. In Chapter 6 Stebbins discusses efforts to maintain the Sm’algyax language of the Tsimshian Nation in Canada, and her work with them to prepare a dictionary. Chapter 19 by Corris et al. also provides some suggestions about how to go about making dictionaries for practical use, with case studies from various Australian Aboriginal and Papua New Guinea settings. Blake has been working towards language revival for a number of Aboriginal communities in Victoria, Australia whose languages are extinct. He has been recovering data from early materials collected mainly by non-linguists. In Chapter 11 he outlines the procedures he has used and the quantity of available data for the 22 such languages. Blake’s materials have been used by other linguists and by Blake himself to prepare teaching materials for a number of these groups. A revival of the Kaurna language in South Australia is also underway, using materials compiled by Amery and Mühlhäusler from similar old sources. Chapter 20 lists some of the other organisations doing Aboriginal language work in Australia.

Another outcome of colonial contact has been the development of pidgins and creoles. Many, including speakers of some such creoles, may regard them as just “broken” or debased versions of the lexical source language, as in the case of the Torres Strait creole, also known to its speakers just as “Broken”. Mühlhäusler has conducted extensive research into the development of the English-lexicon pidgins and creoles in the Pacific region, and in Chapter 12 of this volume he reports on a project which has just started, to document and maintain the creole of Norfolk Island, an offshore territory of Australia. While other creoles, like Papua New Guinea Tok Pisin and Kriol of northern Australia, are endangering many indigenous languages in the region, such creoles are themselves in turn threatened by decreolisation towards or replacement by English, as is Norfolk creole.

Major political change due to non-Anglophone colonialism and conflict is another source of language endangerment; in Chapter 13 Hajek discusses the situation in East Timor, tracing changes in

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4 Available from PO Box 720, Mancos CO 81328, USA, or <http://www.tribalcollegejournal.org>.
language use during the Portuguese colonial period and the period of Indonesian control from 1975 to 1999. While one indigenous language, Tetum, may have spread, others have declined or even become extinct during the violence of the last 25 years; but Indonesian, which expanded massively after 1975, has now contracted even more rapidly.

Chapters 7 to 10 detail various instances of endangerment and change due to contact between indigenous minority languages and other indigenous languages of Asia and South America. While this is an extremely common type of endangerment, there have been relatively few previous such studies. The linguists involved have also been working with the various communities in maintenance efforts.

Our Chapter 7 discusses minority language policy in China and a survey of a small area of Southwestern China. All minority languages of China are endangered by Chinese, especially those which have been politically lumped into a larger ethnic group. We located a surprising number of unreported and undescribed ELs just within one minority group, the Yi; extending the survey would certainly yield many more. As the government is now teaching literacy in Yi with a character script that, like Chinese, represents meaning but not sound, we have tried to help some communities to prepare materials using a romanised transcription of the local language so that children who do not speak the language of their family background will have a way to learn it and become literate in it at the same time.

Morey has been working in a number of Tai-language communities in northeastern India, each of which has a distinct literary tradition and manuscripts. However, many are losing or have lost the spoken language, which is largely replaced by Indic Assamese. In Chapter 8 he describes the situation and gives examples of the various fonts he has created for these scripts. He has also been printing small books in various of these languages, to assist in LM work.

Chapter 9 discusses a fascinating and very frequently encountered type of language contact: influence from a dominant language into a more localised language. Here, it is Malay into Taba; both are Austronesian languages. Contact between genetically related
languages of course raises special problems: what is genetic, what is drift and what is contact-induced? Bowden observes that many complex syntactic constructions can only be expressed in Taba using Malay words and structures. Whether this is a stage on the way to total replacement of Taba by Malay is not yet clear; but Indonesian/Malay is now replacing many local languages in eastern Indonesia and elsewhere, as Florey and van Engelenhoven observe in Chapters 16 and 17.

In Chapter 10 Aikhenvald provides data on rapid morphosyntactic change and convergence among various Amazonian languages, concentrating on Tariana. In mid-2000 she conducted a workshop, teaching the EL Tariana to non-speakers and testing a new dictionary for the community.

1.3 Language in migrant settings
Another neglected issue in studies of endangered languages concerns dialect death and language loss among migrant communities. One might think that this is not likely to lead to language death, but paradoxically some Austronesian languages of the Moluccas in eastern Indonesia, represented in three chapters by Bowden, Florey and van Engelenhoven, may be less intact in their original homelands than elsewhere, though they are very severely endangered in the migrant setting in the Netherlands as well. Florey and van Engelenhoven discuss some of these using a variety of case study and other materials from the Netherlands in Chapters 16 and 17. Burridge also deals with another instance in Chapter 14: Anabaptist communities in Canada, some maintaining and some losing their distinctive variety of German while also using or losing standard written German as a diglossic High for liturgical purposes — though of course German in Europe is not endangered.

The importance of writing systems and their symbolic value for group identity is illustrated in Chapter 15 by Eira on the Hmong, a group who came after 1975 as refugees from Laos to various countries including Australia. The Hmong, like many groups in Southeast Asia and elsewhere, have cosmologised their former lack of writing in a traditional story. Now they closely associate the development of an orthography with progress and improved self-esteem; and some prefer a new writing system which is maximally distinctive, the Phaj hauj script discussed here.
The parallel with the situation of the various Tai groups in Northeastern India described in Chapter 8 by Morey is not exact, as those Tai scripts have a long history and in most cases a large quantity of manuscripts which can now hardly be read; but the focus on orthographies is similar. On the other hand, an EL may also be maintained in purely oral form; linguists should be the last people to confuse the existence of writing with the status and structural integrity of a language. In China, the minority leadership of some groups has decided that their group will use Chinese for written purposes, and the minority language only orally. This is of course a reasonable option given the need for knowledge and literacy in the national dominant language, but may eventually lead to language shift.

1.4 Practical issues
Thieberger’s Chapter 18 provides a cautionary discussion: what exactly does a speech community mean when it says it wants to maintain its language, and does this mean that linguists and school systems should promote full knowledge and use of the traditional form of the language? His answer, based on extensive experience in Australia and the Pacific, is that language has a symbolic heritage value but the community sometimes does not want to go back to it other than to a limited degree — which an outside linguist might paternalistically regard as insufficient.

As we have seen, Chapter 19 by Corris et al. gives a variety of suggestions about how to make a dictionary accessible and useful for the community of speakers. In the conclusion, Chapter 20, we have outlined some other resources and general desiderata for work on ELs.

2. WHAT IS TO BE DONE?
Even if a community may now have other priorities, it is surely our duty as linguists to preserve what exists — oral and literary traditions of all kinds as well as descriptive materials on threatened languages. Our concern about language endangerment must now be channelled into this work. As Himmelmann (1998) suggests, such documentation research is really a separate subfield of linguistics which requires community involvement and preparation of suitable
materials for community use. Linguists who do this will be producing some outputs which may seem less “theoretical”, and therefore may be less able to draw on conventional forms of support for academic research. Their materials may also take longer to appear because of the need for community participation and approval.

This means that special kinds of funding may be needed, like what the European Community now provides for its regional languages, or what has been provided through various programmes to support Aboriginal language work in Australia. Economic rationalism is sweeping the globe, and it is linked with widespread elite attitudes in favour of English as the global language. Thus such programmes are increasingly vulnerable. Also, many major research funding bodies are still tied to rapidly disseminated theoretical outcomes. So we need to be creative and effective in our advocacy of documentation work and our feedback to communities where we work, and also provide the theoretical framework to account for what is going on.

It is extremely encouraging that most linguists are now aware of and concerned about language endangerment, and that many are now working with communities to provide documentation and help them in LM efforts. Further, many minority communities in the developed world are starting to insist on their linguistic rights. Our next task is to raise the consciousness of other speech communities, both minority and majority, about how precious and unique the resource of human linguistic diversity really is.

REFERENCES


Chapter 1

Language Attitudes: the key factor in language maintenance
David Bradley
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1. ATTITUDES CONCERNING LANGUAGE

Why is it that one minority group assimilates and its language dies, while another maintains its linguistic and cultural identity? Perhaps the crucial factor in language maintenance is the attitudes of the speech community concerning their language. Thus we need to know more about attitudinal factors which disfavour language maintenance (LM) and may lead to language endangerment.

Overall attitudes are extremely important. There is considerable discussion in the literature about ethnolinguistic vitality - the group’s attitude about itself and its language, a concept discussed in Giles (1977). Equally crucial is whether language is regarded as a core cultural value (Smolicz 1981) — whether the group sees their language and its maintenance as a key aspect of the group’s identity.

More specific minority and majority beliefs and preferences about the following are also highly relevant:

- whether bilingualism is accepted and valued or even normal and expected
- how public use of a minority language in the presence of monolingual majority speakers is viewed
- whether minority group members view their language as ‘difficult’ or ‘hard to maintain’

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1 I am very pleased to acknowledge the support of the Australian Research Council (A59803475) and the comments of various colleagues, especially Maya Bradley; all errors are solely my responsibility.
Language Attitudes

the attitudes of the majority, the minority itself, and other minorities about the relative utility, importance and beauty of the majority and various minority languages

whether the society as a whole supports, tolerates or represses LM for minority languages

Another key issue is linguistic boundary maintenance, which ranges along a continuum from purism to acceptance. Maximal purism involves conservative attitudes to the minority language and rejection of any effect of language contact or other change; maximal acceptance naturally also leads to rapid internal change, as several other papers in this volume have indicated. This also determines the source of lexical enrichment — loanwords from a majority language, from a high culture language, or internal coinage of new words; likewise the likelihood of code switching and code mixing between minority and majority languages - do parents choose to speak only the majority language to their children, to ‘help them get ahead’ in the majority society, or do they support and approve of their children’s minority language skills. Even some linguists who are native speakers of endangered languages feel entirely comfortable that their language is dying, because they share the attitudes within their own group that led to the breakdown of transmission.

A further important factor in determining attitudes is the historicity of the minority language. Does it have an orthography or orthographies? How long has it been written? How widespread is literacy? How much and what kind of literature exists? As linguists we know that written language is secondary and that many minority languages are spoken in viable nonliterate societies with a very rich oral tradition, but in contact with literary majority languages, many though of course not all minority groups have accepted the idea that a ‘proper’ language must be written. This may even lead to internal movements to create a new orthography, as in the case of the Hmong (Eira 2000).

Attitudes about a number of linguistic and sociolinguistic factors also have a bearing on the likelihood of LM, such as:

degree of internal difference within the minority language
existence of a traditional standard dialect
use as a local lingua franca
traditions concerning bilingualism

Many endangered languages (ELs) have undergone rapid and substantial internal diversification in the absence of a literary or spoken standard, and because speakers of some languages do not see a need for everyone to speak the same and are more willing and able to understand or even adjust towards a range of other subvarieties. For example, speakers of Lao are highly tolerant of local tonal differences and can readily comprehend them and even mimic them; while speakers of Thai are not, and do not feel that they can or should understand regional varieties.

Some groups with a more puristic attitude may even have a traditional internal standard dialect which speakers of other dialects are able to understand and willing to adjust their speech towards, as in the case of Lahu (Bradley 1979). While this may be negative for the continuation and development of internal dialect differences, it is clearly favourable for LM. In some cases, even out-group members may learn and use a local language as a lingua franca, again as in the case of Lahu (Bradley 1996b) or Bantawa Rai (Bradley 1996d); in this case the lingua franca may survive at the expense of the ELs of smaller groups, as Lahu is now replacing languages such as Bana in Laos, Pyen in Burma and Laomian in China. Small groups who are regarded, and may even regard themselves, as members of a larger minority group may be absorbed into that minority and their own language disappear; this is happening to Akeu which is disappearing into Akha in Thailand, Laos, Burma and China; and to various Kuki languages which are disappearing into Mizo in northeastern India. Small groups may even choose to fuse themselves into larger ethnicities, like the Zeliangrong which includes the former Zemi, Liangmei and Kabui/Pochuri groups in northeastern India (Bradley 1996c) or have this choice made for them, as within the numerous composite national minorities in China like the Yi (Bradley 1996e and Forthcoming).

In many societies, as noted in several other contributions to this volume, bilingualism or multilingualism is normal and traditional.
With language exogamy as among the Kachin (Bradley 1996a) or in the Amazon (Aikhenvald 2000), the family home will have at least two first languages, and there may be other minority or majority lingue franche in use, in addition to a national official language. In such cases there is often a hierarchy of languages or a domain-specific use of different languages for specific purposes, such as the use of Jinghpaw Kachin as an in-group lingua franca and literary language (Bradley 1996a). When a minority is transnational, the same group may use different national languages depending on which country they happen to be in. Reactions can go either way as societies develop: the minority languages lower in the status hierarchy may disappear, or they may seek to assert themselves and become separate literary languages and expand their domains of use, as is now happening for four of the languages within the Kachin group: Lacid, Lhaovo, Ngochang and Zaiwa. The linguistic repertoire of groups lower in such hierarchies can be startling; I have met Kachin and Lisu who can converse happily in at least half a dozen languages, with native knowledge of three or more.

2. SOCIAL FACTORS IN LANGUAGE ATTITUDES

Many characteristics of the social use of the language and beliefs concerning language use are also highly relevant. These concern domains of language use, networks for language use, and the degree of accommodation towards the speech of one’s interlocutors.

Speakers may feel it is more or less appropriate to use their language in certain domains, depending on their attitudes. Some groups maintain their language in a wider range of domains; for others it retreats into the village and the home.

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2 Lacid is better known as Lashi, its Burmese and Jinghpaw name. Lhaovo is known as Maru in Burmese and Jinghpaw, and as Langsu in China; it is also sometimes written as Lawngwaw. Ngochang is also known as Achang in China and as Maingtha in Burmese; it is also spoken by the Tai Sa blacksmiths among the northern Shan of Burma. Zaiwa is known as Atsi in Jinghpaw and as Zi in Burmese. The spelling of the Zaiwa autonym is derived from Chinese pinyin ‘z’ for [ts].
The social network, that is, the patterns of contact and interaction between people, is another major factor in LM. Some ethnic groups have more closed, in-group interaction patterns with a high density and multiplexity of network; that is, the same people talk to each other all the time, in a variety of domains. Others have a more open network; that is, greater contact with out-group members more of the time in more domains. Naturally as governments spread their reach and the network becomes more open, some new domains in which a minority language cannot be used come into existence, and some existing domains may shift to an outside language.

If the local network includes out-group members or younger non-speakers of the group language, this poses great difficulties for LM. Exogamy, in-migration and the extension of government and other services such as schools, medical services, agricultural technology and so on may gradually lead to a higher proportion of outsiders in a minority community. The earliest arrivals in a minority community, such as the first few Lao husbands in the Gong villages in Thailand (Bradley 1989: 37) or local shopkeepers, may learn the ethnic language; but as the proportion of out-group speakers increases, this becomes less necessary and thus less likely.

One of the basic principles of human interaction is that there is accommodation to the speech of the interlocutor; that is, one adjusts to the speech repertoire, abilities and preferences of the people one is speaking with. Thus, as more outsiders move in, more and more of the speech within a community with an increasingly open network will not be in the endangered minority language. Speakers may also begin to choose not to transmit their language to children. In societies where children are largely socialised and cared for by their elder siblings, minority language ability may begin by being restricted to the eldest children, with gradual or abrupt decline in knowledge among younger siblings within each family.

Many studies of language contraction and death have observed the same patterns of network effect: some communities, and families are more language-solidary, and a minority language may survive longer among them while disappearing from other households and villages. Thus at one time various stages of language loss can be observed. For example, the Bisu and Gong languages in Thailand are
completely dead in many former villages; people may deny or even be unaware of their former language and ethnicity. In other villages there are elderly speakers or semispeakers but the language is not used or understood by the young. In some villages, the youngest community members are non-speakers or at best passive understanders of their traditional languages, with middle-aged semispeakers and elderly fluent speakers; but everyone, of whatever age, is fluent in the dominant language, in this case varieties of Thai. In some families the former language may still be known but not used much, and as the last fluent language-solidary elders die the language disappears from everyday use even in those homes.

Even such a bleak picture is not necessarily the end. I was delighted to discover recently that my main Bisu language co-worker, now a prosperous village leader, has been using the Thai-based script which I devised with him in 1976 to write ever since, and is now leading a revival movement with participation of relatively fluent semispeakers and assistance from Payap University. He doesn’t want his language to die! But in the meantime it has disappeared from two other villages and has a precarious hold in only his and one other.

3. PROBLEMS IN LANGUAGE ATTITUDES

Some specific attitudinal problems confront endangered languages. One noted in Schmidt (1990) for Australian Aboriginal languages is that recognition of language loss is often delayed; that is, speakers feel that their language is healthy enough within the in-group network until the remaining fluent speakers are all old, even if younger people are all semispeakers, passive understanders or have no knowledge of the traditional language, and normal transmission stopped long ago. By the time a community becomes aware of impending language loss, it may be very difficult to reverse.

Another kind of problem often confronts communities in which the younger speakers of the language speak something which is radically different from what is spoken by fluent elders. This results from the widely-observed phenomenon of extremely rapid change within an endangered language. If the speech of the younger people is regarded by the elders as inadequate because of puristic attitudes, the
younger people may be discouraged from continuing to speak, as Dorian (1994) has observed. Conversely, if the semispeaker version of the language is accepted within the community, even by the elders, the changed version may persist or rapid change may continue.

It is often suggested that such changed varieties have been simplified and have converged towards the structure of the replacing language, in which all or most speakers are likely to be bilingual. Also, loanwords may become very prevalent, spreading beyond nouns, verbs and discourse markers into all parts of the lexicon including closed classes of grammatical markers. This may lead speakers and outsiders to feel that the language is becoming impoverished. However, widely dispersed findings suggest that some structural changes in ELs may also lead to more complex structures, such as the complex tone sandhi and multiplication of vowels in Gong described in Bradley (1992).

4. CHANGING LANGUAGE ATTITUDES

In many developed countries, indigenous groups are vigorously reasserting their linguistic rights. This major shift from acceptance of a dominant language and linguistic assimilation has taken place at different times in different places over the last century or so, and is a direct reflection of changing linguistic attitudes among the EL community. One spectacularly successful example of revival is Hebrew over the last century. Crystal (2000) traces the remarkable resurgence of Welsh in Wales over the last thirty years. Current efforts are underway among the Basque in Spain, various other small indigenous groups speaking ‘regional languages’ throughout Europe, with many Original Nations in different parts of North America, and in many Australian Aboriginal communities.

We need to look at the successful examples of language revival or reversal of language shift like Hebrew and Welsh, as well as the lessons to be learned from less successful efforts elsewhere. The basic question is: how do we change speakers’ attitudes. A highly relevant but often neglected issue is whether we should do so, or whether communities should be left to make their own decisions.
A revival which is essentially a heritage activity aimed at building community self-esteem or which is based on efforts by an intellectual elite is inherently less likely to maintain a language than something which also changes attitudes and ultimately linguistic behaviour. This is not to belittle such efforts; Thieberger (2000) discusses why our preference as linguists for languages to be maintained intact at all costs is unrealistic, and provides a number of examples where LM activities have had less ambitious goals more in accord with what the community wants and what can realistically be achieved.

The outsider linguist who enters a community for research purposes can become a focus for LM activities, but unless the group itself choose to keep their language, we can do nothing but document the language and hope that the descendants may later find some use for our material. This is happening among various Original Nations in North America, where 19th century ethnographic materials are used in attempts to reclaim their languages and cultures. Some linguists, such as Blake (2000), are using archival materials to describe dead languages and then preparing materials for heritage language activities in various Koori (Australian Aboriginal) communities in Victoria. Even if such attempts may ultimately not succeed in recreating a speech community, they still contribute to a group’s positive feelings and self-knowledge.

Sometimes, however, the linguist may encourage and energise indigenous co-workers who may change their attitudes and work for LM after the linguist goes away. To return to the Bisu in Thailand: I thought the language was well on its way to death in 1976, but more than twenty years later my former co-worker is leading a revival which is publishing textbooks, books of traditional stories and so on, and has recruited linguists from Payap University to assist. How did I help in the meantime? I sent tapes of closely related languages such as Phunoi in Laos and Laomian in China, which showed the Bisu that they are not alone. When they heard these tapes, they wanted to go off to Laos and China immediately to meet their long lost brothers. I also sent materials including notes, stories and so on in our Thai script for Bisu to the Bisu through the team at Payap. Now the Bisu have gone to Burma and found the Pyen, who also speak a very closely related EL. I thought Pyen was completely dead, and would not have been able to go and look for it; but the Bisu found it,
and now the Pyen are talking about sending a group to Thailand for literacy work. Thus broken ethnic links can be re-established, and self-esteem enhanced.

In conclusion, I believe we can try to change attitudes, and we can help people to maintain their languages, but only if they want to. This also requires the training of community members, the provision of interesting materials such as traditional stories which people want to hear or read, helping the minority groups with whom we are associated in other ways, and even acting as advocates for them. So how many linguists does it take to save an EL? None, if the people have a positive attitude based on community needs and desires; but of course we should help them when we can and they want us to.

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Chapter 2

Strategies for Language Maintenance and Revival
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1. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS AND BACKGROUND

The present writer’s many years’ experience with speakers of a large number of small to very small healthy or threatened languages in the New Guinea area and Melanesia, Australia, Indonesia, South America and Siberia, where languages with a hundred or a few hundred, or even less than a hundred speakers, are very common, has acquainted him with some facts which are essential to the maintenance or reinvigoration of such languages. Similar facts do play a part in the maintenance of larger languages, but because the communities speaking such languages are less close-knit and more multi-faceted than very small speech communities, these facts may not be as clear-cut with them as with very small speech communities.

Especially in the New Guinea area and Melanesia, but also in some of the other areas mentioned above, the speakers of small languages regard them as the most important symbol of their identity. This need not be so important with speakers of considerably larger languages with whom other factors may be regarded more important symbols of group identity. One of the reasons of this may be that with larger languages, variations and dialectal differences are more in evidence than with very small languages and therefore, such languages can be less of paramount importance to the community as a whole than other cultural and social characteristics. Languages fragmented into units of regional or group importance while other factors are of importance for identifying the speech community as a whole are less important for group identification than monolithic small languages. In this connection, it is of interest to mention that observations by the present writer have shown that seriously endangered or moribund languages which had few to very few
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speakers when they were healthy, are often less affected by reductions and changes in their grammatical and semantic setup when used by the surviving speakers, than this is the case with many languages which had a large number of speakers, when they were healthy, but are now seriously endangered or even only endangered or potentially endangered (Wurm Forthcoming a).

The great importance attached by speakers of small languages to their own languages allows them, in the areas mentioned above, to deal with other languages penetrating their orbits through resorting to bi- and multilingualism which in consequence, is, or was, very widespread especially in New Guinea, Melanesia, traditional Australia, parts of South America, and, largely as passive bi- and multilingualism in parts of Siberia (Wurm et al. 1996). In the Philippines there is a similar situation.

What has been said above is on the understanding that the members of speech communities remain together, that the impact of speakers of other languages is moderate, and that there is no major impact of a dominant language, which is accompanied and supported by negative attitudes and policies by its speakers aiming at the elimination, through suppression or other less direct means, of small languages in its orbit.

2. RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

In some of the areas mentioned, especially in New Guinea, there has been a rapidly increasing mobility of the population in the last decade or so which lead to a fragmentation of speech communities through more and more frequent intermarriage between speakers of different languages. This resulted in a lowering of the value and importance of small languages to their speakers, and increased the importance of large languages which were more and more becoming family languages in mixed marriages. This in turn decreased the rate of transmission of small languages to the children, accompanied by a frequent and deliberate decision of parents not to teach their children a small language which they regarded to be of no further use and to encourage them to speak
only a large language which they regarded as being of economic and social value to them. The traditional bi- and multilingualism declined in many areas as a result. Deliberate policies aiming at the suppression of small languages were not present in places like Papua New Guinea and much of Melanesia, but had been very much in evidence until some time ago in Australia, Siberia, parts of South America, and in Indonesia. In much of these areas, these negative attitudes and policies have given way to positive and supportive, or at least neutral ones, in recent decades and years, but are in an indirect way, still very much present in Indonesia through the exclusive use of Indonesian in all aspects of education, administration and all aspects of public life, with this being supported by policies of transmigrating, and also of splitting up whole speech communities.

3. LANGUAGE ENDANGERMENT

The result of what has been said above, has, in recent years, been a rapid increase of language endangerment in the areas mentioned, though, apart from Australia, the percentage of extinct (mainly recently extinct) and threatened languages is still comparatively low by world standard in much of them. Language endangerment in this paper is to be understood in a sociolinguistic sense, i.e. the gradual disappearance of speakers of a language until they reach zero.

There is another phenomenon which is also referred to as language endangerment by linguists, and which manifests itself in a gradual change of the nature and structure of a language as a result of the loss of the original culture of its speakers, and the strong influence of another, usually dominant, language. This leads to the reduction of the number of registers in the languages to changes and simplifications of its grammar and the semantic composition of its vocabulary, as well as to the taking over of lexical items and structural features from the dominant language. The result of all this is a new altered form of the original language which often reflects some characteristics of the influencing dominant language. However, this new form of the language may continue to exist without suffering a progressive dwindling of its speakers leading to its eventual
disappearance, though this may also occur. In some other extreme cases it may merge with the dominant language in losing all its original grammatical properties and becoming a language which is a structural copy of the dominant language, with a number of lexical elements with the semantic tags from the original language. An example of this is the present form of the Gamilaraay language in northern New South Wales (Austin 1992). The changed form of an original language may sometimes turn into the form spoken by speakers who have forgotten, or never learned, much of the language (so-called “semi-speakers”). Something similar, though more elaborate, could have been a simple, juvenile register of the former full language, but has become the standard form of it (e.g. Nganasan Samoyedic is on the way to this).

As has been pointed out above, any reference to language endangerment in this article is to be understood in the sociolinguistic sense, unless otherwise indicated. The hallmarks for the various levels of such an endangerment are: 1) decreasing use of the language by children (potentially endangered language); 2) the same by young adults, with very few or no children speakers left (endangered language); 3) the same by middle-aged adults, with the youngest good speakers about 50 years of age (seriously endangered language); 4) the same by the remaining aged speakers whose number is decreasing as they die one after the other (moribund language); and 5) there seems to be no speakers left (extinct language). This scale is not applicable in situations in which a healthy language (usually one with a small to very small number of speakers) is at any stage of endangerment by an approaching likely or imminent man-made or natural catastrophe affecting, damaging, or destroying and annihilating the speakers’ environmental and other bases of existence. These can be for instance logging, mining, successful drilling for oil, local war, or genocide, an epidemic, earthquake, tsunami, volcanic eruption and upheaval etc. All these can lead to the breaking-up of the traditional speech community, the scattering of the speakers, and death and disappearance of most or all of the speakers, either gradually, or fast, or immediately.
4. LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE AND REINVIGORATION

Turning to the question of the maintenance, reinvigoration and revival of a threatened small or minority language, it must first be pointed out that in any of the last mentioned cases involving man-made and material catastrophes, the question of saving the language is subordinate to saving its speakers and ensuring that the members of the speech community stay together at whatever place they may move or be moved to. The future of the language at such a new place will depend very much on the circumstances and conditions at such a place, i.e. whether or not it is adequate for them to continue a way of life comparable to their former existence, whether or not they find themselves in the middle of a large new speech community expecting them to assimilate to them and adopt their language, giving up their own in the process, etc. It may be mentioned that cases of threat to small speech communities through the various catastrophic events listed above are, or were, more common in New Guinea, Australia, Melanesia, South America, Siberia, Indonesia etc. than is generally believed to be the case.

It has been indicated at the beginning of this chapter that one of the most important factors for the maintenance and reinvigoration of a threatened language is the attitude of the speakers towards their own language and the importance which they attach to it as a major symbol of their identity. Another very important factor on which the maintenance and reinvigoration of threatened small or minority language very much depends, are the attitudes, policies and knowledge or ignorance of the speakers of the large or dominant language in whose orbit the threatened language is spoken or with which its speakers have close contacts. Negative attitudes and policies by the dominant language speakers which was the norm in many countries (e.g. Australia, Canada, USSR until the 1970s or later, and are still typical of several countries, such as Indonesia) augur badly for the maintenance of threatened languages. A change of negative attitudes and policies to positive ones often leads to the reinvigoration of a threatened language by itself, or to the re-emergence of an apparently disappeared (in fact, gone secret) threatened language, because of the disappearance of threatening attitudes by authorities. Such changes of attitudes and policies occurred since the
1970s and later, notably in Australia, Canada, Japan, Russia, Spain etc. and resulted in an increase of interest by speakers of threatened languages in these. In this connection, it may be said again that in much of the areas mentioned at the beginning of this article, stable bi- or multilingualism by considerable numbers of the speakers of individual small languages, if not of all their speakers, is (or in some areas, e.g. Australia, was) a characteristic feature. At the same time, the speakers of large languages with whom speakers of small or minority languages have had increasing contacts and have been influenced by their attitudes, beliefs and policies, are mostly monolingual. Moreover, they usually firmly believe that monolingualism is the natural state for a human being to be in, and cannot, or do not want to, understand that bi- and multilingualism is characteristic of the speakers, very many of small languages, and also of some quite large languages (i.e. in India). However, it is this bi- and multilingualism which has permitted the speakers of many small languages to maintain them. In situations of relative absence of negative language policies aiming at depriving speakers of small languages of their languages and making them adopt the dominant language instead, the bi- and multilingual speakers of small languages simply added the knowledge of the large or dominant language to their existing repertoire of languages, as was characteristically the case in Papua New Guinea with the speakers adding the major lingua franca and national language Tok Pisin to their existing language knowledge, with the same being the case with Solomon Pijin in the Solomon Islands and Bislama in Vanuatu in Island Melanesia, Tagalog and other very large lingue franche in the Philippines, large Amerindian lingue franche in South America, etc. In this, it may be remembered that bi- and multilingualism and the bi-culturalism that often goes with it, give speakers intellectual, emotional and social advantages over monolinguals, in addition to situational and sometimes economic advantages resulting from a knowledge of several languages. They are as follows (Wurm 1994, 1997, 1999a):

Such individuals have access to a much wider volume of information and knowledge than monolinguals, have a larger volume of knowledge (both language-oriented and other) in their
minds, understand differing semantic associations better, and being used to switching languages and thought patterns, have more flexible minds, and as a result have greater applied intelligence than monolinguals;

They are less rigid in their attitudes and more tolerant of, i.e., less hostile and less on the defensive against, the unknown than monolinguals, more inclined to regard manifestations of other cultures by individuals as acceptable and to be respected, though they may be different from theirs; and are less single-minded and less culturally aggressive than monolinguals;

Their thought patterns and world view are more balanced because they are familiar with different, often somewhat contradictory concepts. They have better capabilities than monolinguals to learn something entirely new and to fit into novel situations without trauma, and to understand different sides of a problem.

Monolingual dominant language speakers, ignorant of what has been said above, unknowingly tend to deprive, through their attitudes and policies, speakers of small and minority languages in their orbit of the advantages of bi- and multilingualism, and to instil the belief in them that monolingualism is the ‘normal’ state to be in and is preferable to bi- and multilingualism.

In a situation in which small or minority language is getting threatened, with its speakers under pressure from the attitudes and policies of monolingual speakers of a large, usually dominant language (it being metropolitan or otherwise), the first step towards revitalising their flagging language is to make its speakers, or at least a few prominent members of the speech community aware of the advantage of bi- and multilingualism, and to point out to them that in knowing two or several languages, they possess something in their minds which the speakers of the large language, even the otherwise so clever speakers of a metropolitan dominant language do not have. In other words, speakers of a small or minority language, often of several of them, are in this