

LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE AND SHIFT

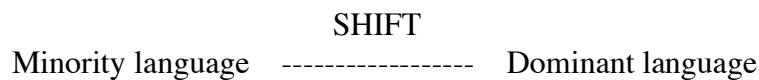
Basic Questions:

What determines the choice of code by speakers of a minority language?
To what extent are political and economic factors relevant to the choice of code by speakers of a minority language?

1. Language shift in different communities

Three scenarios will be examined:

- (i) Migrant minorities



Most common types of shifts:

Shift from L1 in all contexts to L2 in most context;
L1 is used in one domain, L2 is used in another domain;

An important contributor to the process of language shift is the pressure from the wider speech community.

Typical shifts:

- Parents: monolinguals, insufficient knowledge of L2
Children: bilinguals (L1, L2)
Grandchildren: monolinguals in L2

Study the Example #1, p. 53

- (ii) Non-migrant communities

Political, economic and social changes within speech communities may affect native languages – a dominant language, spoken by the majority may cause serious changes, frequently even extinction of native minority languages.

Study the Azeri (in Iran) and the Hungarian (in Austria) situations (Examples #2 and #3, pp. 55-56).

(iii) Migrant majorities

Portugal, Spain, Britain, France, among others -- colonial powers in many parts of the world: their language was imposed on the various communities by becoming the official language (government, law, education, etc.).

In countries where multilingualism was prominent, the language of the colonial powers became just one more language to use (Papua New Guinea, several African countries, etc.). However, in countries where multilingualism was not widespread, the dominant language threatened the native languages, with serious consequences.

Study the Maori case in New Zealand (Example #4, p. 57) Comment!

Find additional examples! What about some of the First Nation languages in Canada?

2. Language death and language loss

Language loss is a gradual process; it correlates with the loss of certain functions of the language. The language is used in fewer and fewer domains, the dominant language taking over most domains – the speakers proficiency in their native language diminishes, eventually it will be able to be used in restricted, private domains, before it becomes lost altogether.

When the last speakers die, the language dies with them – it becomes extinct.

The process of language death affects all areas of the grammar – loss of lexical items, changes in phonology, morphology and syntax.

Examples of lexical loss: Example 6, p. 59

Examples of language death:

(i) Example 5, p. 58.

(ii) The Tlaxcalan Nahuatl (in Central Mexico) case:

- Until 1870 Nahuatl was spoken in the area, Spanish only in the cities;
- The increase of population drove people into cities, most never to return to their villages;
- Technology: electricity, radios, televisions, etc.
- Government policy: education, administration, etc. in Spanish.

“In spite of their pride in the language [Nahuatl], most of its speakers feel that it is in a very sad state, and the genuine *legitimo Mexicano* has disappeared. They say that now the language is no longer pure, but that it is *revuelta* (topsy-turvy) and *mezclada* (mixed) with too many words in Spanish”.

J. Hill & K.Hill: Language death and relexification in Tlaxcalan Nahuatl. 1977.

Attitudes of speakers: too many Spanish words instead of the native words (=relexification) spoils their language.

Comment by referring to code-mixing (Chapter 2, p. 42)!

3. Factors contributing to language shift

In examining language shift the three factors below need to be considered in order to understand the process of language loss and language death.

- (i) *economic, social and political factors*:
poverty (may lead to migration), social and political dominance by the linguistic majority;
- (ii) *demographic factors*:
decreasing number of speakers, geographic isolation, etc.
- (iii) *attitudes and values*:
minority languages may be associated with lack of education, illiteracy, unemployment, poverty, etc.

Study the examples #7 and #8, pp. 62,63.

4. How can a minority language be maintained?

- (i) close-knit communities; members of the minority language live in the same location or meet in shops, markets, etc. (e.g., Chinatowns in North American cities).
- (ii) Frequent contact with the homeland.
- (iii) Institutional support.

Study the Example #10, p. 65.

4. Language revival

Attitude is the most important factor relevant to language revival.

Hebrew: a success story – the language was not in use for 1700 years, except in restricted context (prayers, sacred texts).

Revitalization efforts: Welsh, Maori, Skolt Saami, etc.

Study the Skolt Saami case (power point presentation attached to this lecture).

