There are many different social reasons for choosing a particular code or variety in a multilingual community, as chapter 2 illustrated. But what real choice is there for those who speak lesser-used languages in a community where the people in power use a world language such as English? How do economic and political factors influence language choices? The various constraints on language choice faced by different communities are explored in this chapter, as well as the potential longer-term effects of these choices – language shift or language death. In the final part of the chapter, attempts to reverse these consequences through language revival efforts are described.

### Language shift in different communities

#### Migrant minorities

**Example 1**

Maniben is a young British Hindu woman who lives in Coventry. Her family moved to Britain from Uganda in 1970, when she was 5 years old. She started work on the shop floor in a bicycle factory when she was 16. At home Maniben speaks Gujerati with her parents and grandparents. Although she had learned English at school, she found she didn’t need much at work. Many of the girls working with her also spoke Gujerati, so when it wasn’t too noisy they would talk to each other in their home language. Maniben was good at her job and she got promoted to floor supervisor. In that job, she needed to use English more of the time, though she could still use some Gujerati with her old workmates. She went to evening classes and learned to type. Then, because she was interested, she went on to learn how to use a computer. Now she works in the main office and she uses English almost all the time at work.

Maniben’s pattern of language use at work has gradually shifted over a period of ten years. At one stage she used mainly Gujerati; now she uses English almost exclusively. Maniben’s experience is typical for those who use a minority language in a predominantly monolingual culture and society. The order of domains in which language shift occurs may differ for different individuals and different groups, but gradually over time the language of the wider society displaces the minority language mother tongue. There are many different social factors
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which can lead a community to shift from using one language for most purposes to using a different language, or from using two distinct codes in different domains, to using different varieties of just one language for their communicative needs. Migrant families provide an obvious example of this process of language shift.

In countries like England, Australia, New Zealand and the USA, the school is one of the first domains in which children of migrant families meet English. They may have watched English TV programmes and heard English used in shops before starting school, but at school they are expected to interact in English. They have to use English because it is the only means of communicating with the teacher and other children. For many children of migrants, English soon becomes the normal language for talking to other children – including their brothers and sisters. Because her grandparents knew little English, Maniben continued to use mainly Gujarati at home, even though she had learned English at school and used it more and more at work. In many families, however, English gradually infiltrates the home through the children. Children discuss school and friends in English with each other, and gradually their parents begin to use English to them too, especially if they are working in jobs where they use English.

There is pressure from the wider society too. Immigrants who look and sound ‘different’ are often regarded as threatening by majority group members. There is pressure to conform in all kinds of ways. Language shift to English, for instance, has often been expected of migrants in predominantly monolingual countries such as England, the USA, Australia and New Zealand. Speaking good English has been regarded as a sign of successful assimilation, and it was widely assumed that meant abandoning the minority language. So most migrant families gradually shift from using Gujarati, or Italian or Vietnamese to each other most of the time, to using English. This may take three or four generations, but sometimes language shift is completed in just two generations. Typically migrants are virtually monolingual in their mother tongue, their children are bilingual and their grandchildren are often monolingual in the language of the ‘host’ country. We can observe the shift by noting the change in people’s patterns of language use in different domains over time.

Exercise 1

(a) If you have a friend or acquaintance who belongs to an ethnic minority with a distinct language, they may be willing to share their family history with you. It is very important to be polite and not to put any pressure on someone who is reluctant, however. They may have good reason to feel unwilling to share experiences which may have been painful.

If they are willing to talk to you, find out whether they themselves migrated to the country you live in, or whether it was their parents or grandparents who made the journey. When did they arrive, and why did they come? Try to trace the language history of each generation. What languages do their grandparents/parents/brothers and sisters speak in different domains? Does your friend still speak the ethnic language? If so, who to and in what contexts?

(b) People are often unaware of the range of ethnic minority groups living in their area. How could you find out how many minority ethnic groups there are in the area where you live?

Answer at end of chapter
(c) Walk down the main street of your city, town or village and write down all the material which you think contributes to the linguistic landscape. You should take note of everything visual which has the goal of communication. Note where it occurs, its size and colour, and any other relevant features. What clues distinguish between an ‘official’ sign and an unofficial or informal sign? Who do you think are the intended addressees of the ‘official’ signs compared to the ‘unofficial’ signs?

Answer at end of chapter

Non-migrant communities

Example 2
Armeen is an Iranian teacher of English. He is concerned that Farsi, the official language of Iran, is displacing his native language Azeri. One piece of evidence supporting his concern about Azeri is that the streets of his home town Tabriz are full of signs in the Farsi language. What is more, people are not taught to read and write Azeri, despite the fact that there is a rich literature in the language, some of it housed in books in the Tabriz library. So there is a vicious circle. People don’t use Azeri in public signs because they know that literacy in Azeri is almost non-existent.

Language shift is not always the result of migration. Political, economic and social changes can occur within a community, and this may result in linguistic changes too. As Iran struggles to achieve national unity, Farsi, the language of the largest and most powerful group, the Persians, can be considered a threat to the languages of the minority ethnic groups. Iran is a multi-ethnic country of 74 million people, and in principle minority ethnic languages are protected by the Iranian Constitution. But the reality is that they are not taught in schools, and speakers of even the largest minority language, Azeri, are shifting to Farsi in a number of domains. Farsi has official status and it dominates the public space in Tabriz, and this sends a clear symbolic message about its significance and relevance in Iran, and about the irrelevance of Azeri from the perspective of the government. In a recent political speech, the Governor of East Azerbaijan code-switched frequently and rapidly between Farsi and Azeri, even when addressing an Azeri audience. Though it is in no immediate danger, the long-term prognosis is not good for Azeri unless some assertive action is taken to maintain it.

In Oberwart, an Austrian town on the border of Hungary, the community has been gradually shifting from Hungarian to German for some time.

Example 3
Before the First World War the town of Oberwart (known then by its Hungarian name, Felsőör) was part of Hungary, and most of the townspeople used Hungarian most of the time. However, because the town had been surrounded by German-speaking villages for over 400 years, many people also knew some German. At the end of the war, Oberwart became part of Austria, and German became the official language. Hungarian was banned in schools. This marked the beginning of a period of language shift.
In the 1920s, Oberwart was a small place and the peasants used Hungarian to each other, and German with outsiders. As Oberwart grew and industry replaced farming as the main source of jobs, the functions of German expanded. German became the high language in a broad diglossia situation in Oberwart. German was the language of the school, official transactions and economic advancement. It expressed formality and social distance. Hungarian was the low language, used in most homes and for friendly interaction between townspeople. Hungarian was the language of solidarity, used for social and affective functions. It soon became clear that to 'get on' meant learning German, and so knowledge of German became associated with social and economic progress. Speaking Hungarian was increasingly associated with 'peasantness' and was considered old-fashioned. Young people began to use German to their friends in the pub. Parents began to use German instead of Hungarian to their children. In other words, the domains in which German was appropriate continued to expand and those where Hungarian was used contracted. By the 1970s, God was one of the few addressees to whom young people still used Hungarian when they said their prayers or went to church.

The patterns of language use for any individual in Oberwart in the 1970s depended on their social networks. Who did they interact with? Table 3.1 shows that interactions between older people and 'peasants' (those working in jobs associated with the land) tended still to be in Hungarian. These are in the top left-hand side of the table. Towards the right and bottom of the table are interactions between younger people and those working in jobs associated with the new industries or in professional jobs. Here German predominates. The pattern in the table suggests that German will gradually completely displace Hungarian in Oberwart, unless something unexpected happens.

### Exercise 2

(a) Assuming the direction of shift remains constant, add another two rows (H and L) to Table 3.1 predicting a possible pattern of language use for 10-year-olds in Oberwart for columns 1–6.

(b) This first section has shown how the patterns of use of a minority language shift over time. In which domains might a minority language group realistically hope to maintain their language?

*Answers at end of chapter*

### Table 3.1 Choice of language in Oberwart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Age of speaker</th>
<th>1 To God</th>
<th>2 To older peasants (grandparents’ generation)</th>
<th>3 To parents</th>
<th>4 To friends and workmates of same age</th>
<th>5 To children</th>
<th>6 To doctor and government officials</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>Hu</td>
<td>Hu</td>
<td>Hu</td>
<td>Hu</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>Hu</td>
<td>Hu</td>
<td>Hu</td>
<td>Hu</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>Hu</td>
<td>Hu</td>
<td>Hu</td>
<td>GHu</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Hu</td>
<td>Hu</td>
<td>Hu</td>
<td>GHu</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Hu</td>
<td>GHu</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Hu</td>
<td>GHu</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Hu</td>
<td>GHu</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Adapted from Gal 1979.*
Migrant majorities

The examples discussed so far in this chapter have illustrated that language shift often indicates the influence of political factors and economic factors, such as the need for work. People may shift both location and language for this reason. Over the last couple of centuries, many speakers of Irish, Scottish Gaelic and Welsh, for instance, have shifted to England, and consequently to English, primarily in order to get work. They need English both for their job success and for their social well-being - to make friends. But we find the outcome is the same when it is the majority group who do the physical moving.

When colonial powers invade other countries their languages often become dominant. Countries such as Portugal, Spain, France and Britain have generally imposed their languages along with their rule. This has not always resulted in linguistic subjugation and language shift. Multilingualism was too well-established as normal in countries like India and Papua New Guinea, and in many African countries. It was not possible for a single alien and imported language to displace and eradicate hundreds of indigenous vernacular languages. But when multilingualism was not widespread in an area, or where just one indigenous language had been used before the colonisers arrived, languages were often under threat. In this context, English has been described as a ‘killer language’. Where one group abrogates political power and imposes its language along with its institutions – government administration, law courts, education, religion – it is likely that minority groups will find themselves under increasing pressure to adopt the language of the dominant group.

Example 4

Tamati lives in Wanganui, a large New Zealand town. He is 10 years old and he speaks and understands only English, though he knows a few Maori phrases. None of his mates know any Maori either. His grandfather speaks Maori, however. Whenever there is a big gathering, such as a funeral or an important tribal meeting, his grandfather is one of the best speakers. Tamati’s mother and father understand Maori, but they are not fluent speakers. They can manage a short simple conversation, but that’s about it. Tamati’s little sister, Miriama, has just started at a pre-school where Maori is used, so he thinks maybe he’ll learn a bit from her.

In New Zealand, Maori people have overwhelmingly moved from monolingualism in Maori in the late nineteenth century, through bilingualism in Maori and English, to monolingualism in English in the second half of the twentieth century. Although the 2006 Census figures report a small increase in the number of Maori people who claim to be able to speak Maori, surveys of the health of the language indicate that fewer than 10 per cent of Maori adults can speak Maori fluently, and there are very few domains in which it is possible to use the language.

Most Aboriginal people in Australia, and many American Indian people in the USA, have similarly lost their languages over four or five generations of colonial rule. The indigenous people were swamped by English, the language of the dominant group, and their numbers were decimated by warfare and disease. The result of colonial economic and political control was not diglossia with varying degrees of bilingualism, as found in many African, Asian and South American countries, but the more or less complete eradication of the many indigenous languages. Over time the communities shifted to the coloniser’s language, English, and their own languages died out.
When language shift occurs, it is almost always shift towards the language of the dominant powerful group. A dominant group has little incentive to adopt the language of a minority. The dominant language is associated with status, prestige and social success. It is used in the ‘glamour’ contexts in the wider society – for formal speeches on ceremonial occasions, by news readers on television and radio, and by those whom young people admire – pop stars, fashion models, and DJs (disc jockeys). It is scarcely surprising that many young minority group speakers should see its advantages and abandon their own language.

**Example 5**

In 2011, British newspapers reported that Ayapaneco, an indigenous language of Mexico, was in danger of dying out as the only two remaining fluent speakers (aged 75 and 69) refused to talk to each other.
Chapter 3  Language maintenance and shift

Needless to say, this report conceals a much more complex reality. Firstly, the name Ayapaneco for the language was given by outsiders; the two men actually call it Nuumte Oote (‘True Voice’). Secondly, no one actually knows why the two men do not speak to each other. There may be cultural reasons for their behaviour, e.g. an ‘avoidance relationship’, as appropriate in some Australian Aboriginal cultures. Thirdly, and most relevantly for the discussion in this chapter, the reasons for the disappearance of Ayapaneco can more accurately be linked to factors such as the increasing urbanisation of the population, and the political decision to introduce compulsory education in Spanish, rather than to the lack of communication between these two old men.

Nevertheless, it is generally true that when all the people who speak a language die, the language dies with them. Sometimes this fact is crystal clear. In 1992, when Tefvik Esenç died, so did the linguistically complex Caucasian language Ubykh. Manx has now completely died out in the Isle of Man – the last native speaker, Ned Maddrell, died in 1974. Despite recent attempts to revive it, most people agree that Cornish effectively disappeared from Cornwall in the eighteenth century when Dolly Pentreath of Mousehole died in 1777. Less than half of the 250–300 Aboriginal languages spoken in Australia when the Europeans arrived have survived, and fewer than two dozen are being actively passed on to younger generations. Many disappeared as a direct result of the massacre of the Aboriginal people, or their death from diseases introduced by Europeans. In Tasmania, for instance, the whole indigenous population of between 3000 and 4000 people was exterminated within seventy-five years. Their languages died with them. These are cases of language death rather than language shift. These languages are no longer spoken anywhere.

A community, such as the Turkish community in Britain, may shift to English voluntarily over a couple of generations. This involves the loss of the language for the individuals concerned, and even for the community in Britain. But Turkish is not under threat of disappearing because of this shift. It will continue to thrive in Turkey. But when the last native speaker of Martuthunira, Algy Paterson, died in 1995, this Australian Aboriginal language died with him. Indeed it was predicted that almost all Australian Aboriginal languages would be extinct by the year 2000, a prediction which fortunately has not been completely fulfilled.

When a language dies gradually, as opposed to all its speakers being wiped out by a massacre or epidemic, the process is similar to that of language shift. The functions of the language are taken over in one domain after another by another language. As the domains in which speakers use the language shrink, the speakers of the dying language become gradually less proficient in it.

### Example 6

Annie at 20 is a young speaker of Dyirbal, an Australian Aboriginal language. She also speaks English which she learned at school. There is no written Dyirbal material for her to read, and there are fewer and fewer contexts in which she can appropriately hear and speak the language. So she is steadily becoming less proficient in it. She can understand the Dyirbal she hears used by older people in her community, and she uses it to speak to her grandmother. But her grandmother is scathing about her ability in Dyirbal, saying Annie doesn’t speak the language properly.
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Annie is experiencing language loss. This is the manifestation, in the individual’s experience, of wide-scale language death. Because she uses English for most purposes, her vocabulary in Dyirbal has shrunk and shrunk. When she is talking to her grandmother she keeps finding herself substituting English words like *cook* in her Dyirbal, because she can’t remember the Dyirbal word. She can’t remember all the complicated endings on Dyirbal nouns. They vary depending on the sound at the end of the noun, but she uses just one ending *-gu* for all of them. For other words she simply omits the affix because she can’t remember it. Her grandmother complains vociferously about her word order. Annie finds herself putting words in the order they come in English instead of in the order her grandmother uses in Dyirbal. It is clear that Annie’s Dyirbal is very different from traditional Dyirbal.

Because English is now so widely used in her community it seems unlikely that Dyirbal will survive in a new form based on the variety Annie speaks. It is on its way to extinction. When Annie’s generation die it is pretty certain Dyirbal will die with them. The process of language death for the language comes about through this kind of gradual loss of fluency and competence by its speakers. Competence in the language does not disappear overnight. It gradually erodes over time.

With the spread of a majority group language into more and more domains, the number of contexts in which individuals use the ethnic language diminishes. The language usually retreats till it is used only in the home, and finally it is restricted to such personal activities as counting, praying and dreaming. The stylistic range that people acquire when they use a language in a wider range of domains disappears. Even in the contexts where the language is still used, there is a gradual reduction in the complexity and diversity of structural features of the language – speakers’ sound rules get simplified, their grammatical patterns become less complex and their vocabulary in the language gets smaller and smaller.

In the wider community, the language may survive for ritual or ceremonial occasions, but those who use it in these contexts will be few in number and their fluency is often restricted to prayers and set speeches or incantations. In many Maori communities in New Zealand, for instance, the amount of Maori used in ceremonies is entirely dependent on the availability of respected elders who still retain some knowledge of the appropriate discourse. Maori is now used in some communities only for formal ceremonial speeches, prayers for the sick and perhaps for a prayer to open a meeting.

**Exercise 3**

(a) What is the difference between language shift and language death?

(b) When language shift occurs in a diglossia situation H sometimes displaces L, while in other contexts L displaces H. Can you think of examples of each of these processes?

*Answers at end of chapter*

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**Factors contributing to language shift**

**Economic, social and political factors**

What factors lead a community to shift from using one language to using another? Initially, the most obvious factor is that the community sees an important reason for learning the second
language. The reasons are often economic, but they may also be political – as in the case of Israel. Obtaining work is the most obvious economic reason for learning another language. In English-dominated countries, for instance, people learn English in order to get good jobs. This results in bilingualism. Bilingualism is always a necessary precursor of language shift, although, as stable diglossic communities demonstrate, it does not always result in shift.

The second important factor, then, seems to be that the community sees no reason to take active steps to maintain their ethnic language. They may not see it as offering any advantages to their children, for example, or they may not realise that it is in any danger of disappearing. Without active language maintenance, shift is almost inevitable in many contexts. For example, where a migrant minority group moves to a predominantly monolingual society dominated by one majority group language in all the major institutional domains – school, TV, radio, newspapers, government administration, courts, work – language shift will be unavoidable unless the community takes active steps to prevent it. Very often, without consciously deciding to abandon their ethnic language, a community will lose it because they did not perceive any threat. At first it appears very important to learn the majority language in order to achieve social and economic success. The minority language seems safe because ‘we all speak it’. Yet, without conscious maintenance it can and usually does disappear in as few as three generations.

The social and economic goals of individuals in a community are very important in accounting for the speed of shift. Rapid shift occurs when people are anxious to ‘get on’ in a society where knowledge of the second language is a prerequisite for success. Young upwardly mobile people are likely to shift fastest. It has also been noticed that the shift to another language may be led by women or by men depending on where the new jobs lie and the gender roles in the society. Young women in Oberwart, for example, are leading the shift to German there, because they are the ones taking most advantage of the new jobs offered by the industrial changes. Newly arrived immigrant women in New Zealand, on the other hand, often have less education than their husbands. They tend to stay home, at least initially, maintaining the minority language. When they get work it is often in low-paid jobs such as night-cleaning or in bakeries. There they work with others from their own ethnic group and so they can use their ethnic language in the work domain too.

Demographic factors

Demographic factors are also relevant in accounting for the speed of language shift. Resistance to language shift tends to last longer in rural than in urban areas. This is partly because rural groups tend to be isolated from the centres of political power for longer, and they can meet most of their social needs in the ethnic or minority language. So, for example, because of their relative social isolation, Ukrainians in Canada who live out of town on farms have maintained their ethnic language better than those in the towns.

Although some younger urban people now speak Maori as a second language, the communities in New Zealand where Maori survives as a language of everyday communication are relatively inaccessible rural areas, populated almost entirely by Maori people. In these communities, there are older native speakers who still use the language to talk to each other in their homes and in the streets, as well as for formal Maori speech events. In fact, before television became widespread, the school was the only domain where English was regularly used in these communities. Everyday interactions between Maori people were in Maori. Maori was used at church, in the shops, for community meetings and in the pub. Improved roads,
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bus services, television in every home – and even in the pub – has changed all that. Richard Benton, a sociolinguist who has surveyed the use of Maori in New Zealand, sums up the situation by saying that even in these isolated communities Maori is now a language which can only be used between consenting adults!

Example 7

In 1974, a Chilean refugee family went to live in a small provincial New Zealand town where there was work but no opportunity at all to use their mother tongue, Spanish. Their 8-year-old daughter, Crystal, quickly realised that her knowledge of Spanish made her seem odd to her school friends and she rapidly refused to use Spanish even at home. Language shift from Spanish to English for Crystal was almost complete by the age of 13. She retained some understanding of Spanish (i.e. some passive knowledge) but she refused to speak it under any circumstances.

Shift tends to occur faster in some groups than in others. The size of the group is sometimes a critical factor. In Australia, the areas with the largest groups of Maltese speakers (Victoria and New South Wales) had the lowest rates of shift towards English. Spanish has survived well in the USA due partly to the large numbers of speakers. By contrast, members of a migrant family in an urban area where no one else speaks their mother tongue face a much more difficult task. With few opportunities to use their mother tongue, language maintenance is much more difficult.

To maintain a language you must have people you can use it with on a regular basis. Crystal’s family had nowhere they could use Spanish except in the home, and no one they could talk to in Spanish except each other. They were both isolated and ‘odd’ in the eyes of others. Maintaining a language is near impossible under these conditions. Crystal’s solution to her integration problem was to marry a monolingual New Zealander.

Exercise 4

What would you predict as the effect of intermarriage on language maintenance and shift? If, in England, an English-speaking woman marries a Gujerati-speaking man, for instance, which language will they use to their children?

Answer at end of chapter

Interruption between groups can accelerate language shift. Unless multilingualism is normal in a community, one language tends to predominate in the home. German immigrants in Australia are typical. Despite its multicultural composition, Australia is predominantly a monolingual society. When a German-speaking man marries an English-speaking Australian woman, English is usually the dominant language of the home, and the main language used to the children. The same pattern has been observed in many other communities. In Oklahoma in the USA, for instance, in every family where a Cherokee speaker has married outside the Cherokee community, the children speak only English.

A mother whose English is not strong, or who consciously wants to pass on the minority language to her children, may slow down the process of shift to English by using the language to the children. And there are some strongly patriarchal groups where the father’s support for
the use of the minority language in the home proves effective – Greek and Italian fathers in Australia, for example, and Samoan fathers in New Zealand, actively encourage the use of their languages in the home. Maori men have also expressed concern that their sons should learn Maori, since they will need it to speak formally on the marae in later life. But once the children of mixed marriages start school, it takes a very determined parent to succeed in maintaining the minority language in the home – especially if the other parent doesn’t speak the minority language well – or at all.

### Attitudes and values

#### Example 8

Ione is a young Samoan boy living in Australia. His family are very proud of their Samoan identity and culture and they take every opportunity to do things the Samoan way. They are part of an active Samoan community where the language is used regularly for church services and social events. Ione belongs to a Samoan Youth Club attached to the church. They play sport, organise dances, sing and write their own songs, and go on regular trips – all of which he loves. Ione is proud to be Samoan and is pleased his family taught him his language. For him, being Samoan means knowing how to speak Samoan.

Language shift tends to be slower among communities where the minority language is highly valued. When the language is seen as an important symbol of ethnic identity, it is generally maintained longer. Positive attitudes support efforts to use the minority language in a variety of domains, and this helps people resist the pressure from the majority group to switch to their language.

The status of a language internationally can contribute to these positive attitudes. Maintaining French in Canada and the USA is easier because French is a language with international status. It is obvious to French-Americans in Maine, for instance, that French is a good language to know. It has international prestige. Immigrant Greeks are proud of the contribution of Greek to Western philosophy and culture, and this awareness of the importance of their language helps them resist language shift to English. For similar reasons, we would expect a language with the international status of Spanish to have a better chance of resisting shift than languages with few speakers such as Maori or Dyirbal. But even the high status of Spanish as a world language could not offset the attitudes of the local community to Crystal’s family’s ‘oddness’ described in example 7. Pride in their ethnic identity and their language can be important factors which contribute to language maintenance, provided there is a strong community to support and encourage these attitudes.

#### Exercise 5

(a) Why do you think people might want to maintain their minority language when they move to a new country?

(b) Make a list of the factors which seem to contribute to language maintenance as opposed to those which favour language shift.

*Answers at end of chapter*
How can a minority language be maintained?

Example 9

‘...nothing benefits a country more than to treasure the languages and cultures of its various peoples because in doing so, it fosters intergroup understanding and realises greater dividends in the form of originality, creativity and versatility.’

There are certain social factors which seem to retard wholesale language shift for a minority language group, at least for a time. Where language is considered an important symbol of a minority group’s identity, for example, the language is likely to be maintained longer. Polish people have regarded language as very important for preserving their identity in the many countries they have migrated to, and they have consequently maintained Polish for three to four generations. The same is true for Greek migrants in places like Australia, New Zealand and the USA.
If families from a minority group live near each other and see each other frequently, this also helps them maintain their language. Members of the Greek community in Wellington, New Zealand, for instance, belong to a common church, the Greek Orthodox church, where Greek is used. They have established shops where they sell foodstuffs imported from Greece and where they use Greek to each other. There are Indian and Pakistani communities in Britain who have established the same kind of communities within cities, and you can often hear Panjabi or Gujerati spoken in their shops. In the USA, Chinese people who live in the Chinatown areas of big cities are much more likely to maintain a Chinese dialect as their mother tongue through to the third generation than those who move outside the Chinatown area.

Another factor which may contribute to language maintenance for those who emigrate is the degree and frequency of contact with the homeland. A regular stream of new migrants or even visitors will keep the need for using the language alive. Polynesian migrants from the islands of Niue, Tokelau, Tonga and Samoa arrive in New Zealand regularly. New Zealand Polynesians provide them with hospitality, and the new arrivals provide new linguistic input for the New Zealand communities. The prospect of regular trips back ‘home’ provides a similar motivation to maintain fluency for many groups. Samoan men in New Zealand, for instance, often expect to return home to take up family and community responsibilities at a later stage in their lives. Greek migrants also see a trip back to Greece as a high priority for themselves and their children. Most Greek New Zealanders regard a trip back to Greece as essential at some point in their lives, and many young Greek girls take the trip with the express aim of securing a good Greek husband. Clearly this provides a very strong incentive to maintain proficiency in Greek.

Example 10
Josie goes to a Catholic secondary school in Bradford. Her best friend is a Polish girl, Danuta. Josie thinks Danuta has a hard life. Danuta’s father is a dentist and he is very strict and, in Josie’s opinion, very bossy. He insists that everyone speaks Polish in his house. Josie has only been to visit once and even when she was there Danuta’s Dad used Polish to his wife and the rest of the children. Danuta has to go to Polish Saturday School too. Josie doesn’t envy Danuta, but Danuta doesn’t seem to mind. In fact, she is very proud of being Polish and of her bilingualism.

Although the pressures to shift are strong, members of a minority community can take active steps to protect its language. If we consider the influence of social factors such as participants and setting, for instance, on language choice, it is clear that social factors may help resist the influence of economic pressures. Where the normal family organisation for an ethnic group is the extended family with grandparents and unmarried relatives living in the same house as the nuclear family, for example, there is good reason to continue using the minority language at home. Similarly, groups which discourage intermarriage, such as the Greek and the Chinese communities, contribute to language maintenance in this way. Marriage to a majority group member is the quickest way of ensuring shift to the majority group language for the children.

Obviously a group who manage to ensure their language is used in settings such as school or their place of worship will increase the chances of language maintenance. Tongan people in New Zealand attend church services in Tongan. Heritage language programmes in Canada
use the minority language in school for part of each day in order to maintain the languages of
groups such as Canadian Ukrainians and Canadian Germans. In Wales, bilingual education
is available throughout the education system in many areas. In such cases the community has
taken steps to try to maintain their language, though the continued influx of English speakers
to Wales means that Welsh will never be ‘safe’.

Institutional support generally makes the difference between success and failure in main-
taining a minority group language. Education, law and administration, religion and the media
are crucial domains from this point of view. The minority group which can mobilise these
institutions to support language maintenance has some chance of succeeding. When the
government of a country is committed to maintaining or reviving a language, it is possible to
legislate for its use in all these domains, as happened in Israel with Hebrew. When Wales
achieved self-government in 1999, the Welsh National Assembly made Welsh a compulsory
subject in school for children up to the age of 16. (This topic is discussed further in chapter 5
in the section on language planning.) In the final section of this chapter, I discuss just one
area – education – where institutional support can contribute to language maintenance and
even language revival.

**Exercise 6**

List the different kinds of institutional support which can be sought by a community of people
who want to maintain their minority language within a society where English is the language
of the majority. Provide an example of each.

*Answer at end of chapter*

Many of the factors discussed in this section as relevant to language maintenance have
been integrated by Howard Giles and his colleagues, using the concept of ‘ethnolinguistic
vitality’. These social psychologists suggest that we can predict the likelihood that a language
will be maintained by measuring its ethnolinguistic vitality. Three components are involved:
firstly, the status of the language as indicated by attitudes towards it; secondly, the size of
the group who uses the language and their distribution (e.g. concentrated or scattered); and
thirdly, the extent to which the language enjoys institutional support. The concept of ethno-
linguistic vitality is clearly very useful in studying language maintenance and shift, though
devising satisfactory ways to measure the components is often a challenge. The concept of
ethnolinguistic vitality also provides some ideas for those interested in slowing down or
reversing language shift.

**Exercise 7**

Exercise 1(c) introduced the idea of a linguistic landscape.

What kind of information can a study of language in the public domain or the linguistic
landscape provide about the vitality of a minority linguistic community?

*This issue is discussed in the next paragraph.*
Examining linguistic landscapes means looking at public texts in their physical and social context. As mentioned in the answer to exercise 1(c), the linguistic landscape can be a rich source of information about the sociolinguistic complexities of a community. Evidence of the vitality of a minority linguistic group may consist of restaurant signs, shop signs, church signs and advertisements in the minority language. Posters may provide information about public events or activities, also indicating the vibrancy of a particular minority linguistic community.

Public or official bilingual or multilingual signs can be interpreted in many different ways. They could indicate a community where several languages have official status, as in Wales or Luxembourg, for example. Or they could indicate that important information needs to be in several languages because the linguistic repertoires of some individuals may be restricted to just one of those languages. Or they may indicate that the sign writer wishes to convey an impression of sophistication. Though Japan is considered a very homogeneous monolingual society, one researcher reported that almost 20 per cent of the signs in the area of Tokyo that he surveyed were multilingual. The order in which languages occur on signage can also convey a subtle political message, a point relevant to research on language policy as we will see in chapter 5. For a minority group fighting for the survival of its language, official signage is often a political battle well worth engaging in.

**Language revival**

Sometimes a community becomes aware that its language is in danger of disappearing and takes deliberate steps to revitalise it. Attempts have been made in Ireland, Wales and Scotland, for example, to preserve the indigenous languages, and in New Zealand steps are being taken to attempt to reverse language shift and revitalise Maori. It is sometimes argued that the success of such efforts will depend on how far language loss has occurred – that there is a point of no return. But it seems very likely that more important are attitudinal factors such as how strongly people want to revive the language, and their reasons for doing so. Hebrew was revived in Israel after being effectively dead for nearly 1700 years. It had survived only for prayers and reading sacred texts (much as Latin was used in Catholic services until the 1960s) and that was all. Yet strong feelings of nationalism led to determined efforts by Israeli adults to use it to children, and as a result it has been successfully revived.

The story of Welsh is also interesting. Welsh was a flourishing language in the nineteenth century. It had survived well as the L language in a diglossia situation where the ruling elite used English for administration. Even industrialisation in the nineteenth century initially supported the language, since it provided work for the Welsh speakers in the coal-mining valleys. Welsh people used the language for their everyday communication with each other. But the invasion of Wales by English industrialists had in fact begun a process of language erosion. The work available in mines and iron works attracted English immigrants, and as a result the Welsh language was overwhelmed by the flood of English they spoke. The situation was then exacerbated by the fact that many Welsh-speaking miners left their Welsh valleys during the depression of the 1930s. So the number of Welsh speakers in Wales was being reduced by the effects of both in-migration and out-migration. Language shift to English in public domains was also apparent – especially in industrialised South Wales. It has been said that in 1840 over two-thirds of the population of Wales spoke Welsh, and half of them spoke only Welsh. By the 1980s only 20 per cent of the population spoke the language. But the rate of decline has become less rapid. In 2001, for the third time, the census results indicated
an increase in the number of young people speaking Welsh. And a 2004 survey reported that 22 per cent of those sampled could speak Welsh, and 57 per cent of those considered themselves fluent, with 88 per cent reporting that they used Welsh daily.

It has taken a conscious and concerted effort on the part of many Welsh people to slow down the process of language loss. This has included obtaining a Welsh-language television channel and establishing successful bilingual education programmes which extend from pre-school to tertiary level in areas such as Gwynedd. Effective bilingual schooling has generally involved a process known as ‘immersion’. Children are immersed in the language (like a warm bath), and it is used to teach them science, maths and social studies, for instance. They are not ‘taught’ the language. It is rather used as a medium of instruction to teach them the normal school curriculum. This method has proved very successful in many different countries as a means of learning a second language.

Example 11

David is Welsh and he lives in Llandudno in Gwynedd. He is 14 and he goes to a Welsh-medium boys’ secondary school where he is taught maths, physics and chemistry in English, and history, geography and social studies in Welsh. Like most of the boys in his class he went to a Welsh-medium primary school where almost all the teaching and learning was in Welsh. His parents speak some Welsh but they are not fluent, and he reckons he now knows a lot more Welsh vocabulary than they do. His little sister attends the local Welsh primary school and she has been complaining to their parents that there are some ‘foreigners’ from Liverpool in her class who make fun of the sounds of Welsh. David has threatened to come and sort them out but so far his parents have managed to restrain his enthusiasm.
In at least some areas, Welsh–English bilingualism has become a reality for children who are taught in Welsh at school. Now, ironically, it appears the success of these programmes may again be under threat as a result of the economic situation of the English. Poor and unemployed families from areas such as Liverpool have moved to Wales because it is cheaper to live in the countryside than in the towns. At the other end of the social scale, richer people are exchanging small townhouses in the south for much larger houses and land in Wales. The children of these English people are a threat to the success of bilingual programmes since they see no point in learning Welsh. Once again, economic factors are likely to be important in assessing the long-term outcomes of efforts at language maintenance and revival.

**Exercise 8**

The scales introduced in chapter 1 provide a useful framework for considering the different factors which lead to language maintenance or language shift in different contexts. Consider one minority group situation with which you are familiar.

(a) What is the status of the minority group compared to the majority group?
(b) Which is the language of solidarity for the group and which language expresses social distance or formality?
(c) How formal are the different situations each language is used in?
(d) Which language expresses referential meaning most satisfactorily and most frequently and which expresses social or affective meaning most often?
(e) Which patterns are likely to result in language maintenance and which in language shift?

*Answer at end of chapter*

**Exercise 9**

Figure 3.1 provides another useful way of analysing the relationship between linguistic and non-linguistic factors in relation to language maintenance and shift. Consider how each of the factors in the wheel is relevant in favouring or inhibiting language shift in relation to a minority language in your country.

**Exercise 10**

Yoruba, the language of people living in the state of Lagos in Nigeria, West Africa, is increasingly threatened by the spread of English. In November 2006, Chief Olusoji Smith led a group of tribal elders who recommended that Yoruba be made compulsory as an admission criterion into tertiary institutions. How much of a contribution do you think this will make to encouraging parents to use Yoruba in the home?

*Answer at end of chapter*
An introduction to sociolinguistics

There is clearly no magic formula for guaranteeing language maintenance or for predicting language shift or death. Different factors combine in different ways in each social context, and the results are rarely predictable. Similar factors apparently result in a stable bilingual situation in some communities but language shift in others. This account has stressed the importance of economic, social, demographic and attitudinal factors. Economic factors are very influential and rarely work in favour of maintaining small minority group languages. Where new jobs are created by industrialisation, they are often introduced by groups using a majority group language with status – often a world language such as English, Spanish or French. Globalisation also contributes to this trend. Along with the global spread of concepts, artifacts and ways of doing things comes the global language which labels them. The degree of success a group has in resisting the intrusion of such a language into all domains, and especially the family domain, will generally account for the speed of language shift. Successful resistance requires a conscious and determined effort to maintain the minority language. ‘Wishing will not make it so.’

Though economic and political imperatives tend to eliminate minority languages, it is important to remember examples like Welsh and Hebrew which demonstrate that languages can be maintained, and even revived, when a group values their distinct identity highly and regards language as an important symbol of that identity. Finally, it is also important to realise that pressures towards language shift occur mainly in countries where monolingualism is regarded as normal, and bilingualism is considered unusual. For most of the world it is bilingualism and multilingualism which is normal. In countries like Singapore or India, the idea that you should stop speaking one language when you start learning another is inconceivable.

Exercise 11
Can you think of any factors which may contribute to language shift which have not been discussed in detail in this chapter?

*Answer at end of chapter*
Answers to exercises in chapter 3

Answer to exercise 1 (b)
There are many possible ways to research the minority ethnic groups in the area where you live. You could note the range of takeaway bars, restaurants and shops which cater for ethnic minority tastes. (A New Zealand student identified twelve different languages used in sixteen different takeaway bars in Wellington city centre.) The range of non-indigenous names in the telephone directory provides additional information. You could ask at the local community centre, the citizens’ advice bureau, the library, local churches and the local schools and kindergartens. You could look for evidence of provision made for the language needs of minority language groups – notices in minority ethnic languages on community notice boards, for instance, religious services in minority languages, newspapers in minority ethnic languages, and so on.

Answer to exercise 1 (c)
Consider how many different linguistic varieties (languages, dialects, styles) you identified on your walk and what they suggest about the kind of community in which you live. The linguistic varieties observable in public spaces can provide valuable information about the sociolinguistic complexities of a community. Official signs painted professionally in formal script in the dominant language(s) may contrast with unofficial signs in a minority language which may be informally painted or handwritten. Graffiti may illustrate a vernacular linguistic variety. And since graffiti often express subversive messages (from the point of view of those in authority), the linguistic landscape may provide insights into the ongoing linguistic battles underway in a society. As a participant observer, you know how to interpret the social significance of different components of your own linguistic landscape. You can also guess the intended audience of a particular sign. If you tried the same exercise in a city in a foreign country, you would face a much more difficult challenge in knowing the social meaning of what you were observing.

Answer to exercise 2 (a)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Hu</td>
<td>GHu</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
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<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Hu</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A number of alternatives are possible, but your pattern should show only German in column 3 and the spread of German into column 2.

More recent research in this area suggests that though the numbers of people working in agricultural jobs has decreased, attitudes to Hungarian remain positive. This is indicated partly by an increase in the numbers reporting in the 1991 Census that they used Hungarian. Without more detailed research, however, we cannot know how much Hungarian people use in their everyday interactions, and in which domains it is still used.

Answer to exercise 2 (b)
In general, the more domains in which a minority language is used, the more likely it will be maintained. Domain compartmentalisation – keeping the domains of use of the two languages quite separate – also assists resistance to infiltration from the dominant language. Where
minority languages have resisted shift longest, there has been at least one domain in which the minority language is used exclusively. The home is the one most under any family’s control and, especially where there are grandparents and older family members who use the language, language maintenance has sometimes been possible. In larger minority communities the minority language may be maintained in more domains than just the home. Religious services may be held in the minority group language; some education (e.g. out-of-school classes) may take place in the language. There may even be some work available which allows the use of the minority language.

**Answer to exercise 3 (a)**

Language shift generally refers to the process by which one language displaces another in the linguistic repertoire of a community. It also refers to the result of this process.

Language death has occurred when a language is no longer spoken naturally anywhere in the world. Language shift for the Chinese community may result in Cantonese being no longer spoken in New Zealand or Britain, but Cantonese will not suffer language death while there are millions of native speakers in China and South-East Asia. If Welsh was no longer spoken in Wales, however, it would be a dead language.

**Answer to exercise 3 (b)**

In most of the examples given above, a dominant language, which initially serves only H functions for a community, has gradually displaced the minority language in the domains where it served L functions. So English, the H language for many immigrant communities, tends to displace their ethnic language. In Oberwart too, it is the H variety, German, which is displacing the L variety, Hungarian. In Sauris, described in chapter 1, example 7, Italian, the H variety, was displacing the German dialect which served L functions. In cases such as these, where the H variety is a fully developed language used elsewhere by another community, extending it into L domains presents no linguistic problems. The required grammar and vocabulary is already available. Moreover, the high status of the H variety favours such a shift.

It is possible, however, for a vigorous L variety to gradually expand its functions upwards into H domains and take over the functions of H in literature, administration, the law and so on. Examples of this process are provided in the next section and in chapter 5. Indonesian is a well-known example of a language which began as a language of the market-place, but which expanded into all domains, and is now the national language of Indonesia.

The story of Hebrew shows that it is also possible, through hard work, to take a highly codified H variety which is not used for everyday conversation anywhere else and expand its linguistic resources so that it can be used in L domains too. Hebrew expanded from a narrow range of religious (H) functions to become the national language of Israel, and it is now used for all functions by many native speakers.

The reasons for the different directions that language shift may take involve more than just economic factors, such as where the jobs are. The number of speakers of a language, or the extent of a group’s political influence or power, may be crucial. Attitudes and values are important too. Factors such as the status of a language and its importance as an identity marker may be crucial, as the Hebrew example suggests. These factors will be discussed further in the next section.
Chapter 3 Language maintenance and shift

Answer to exercise 4
When marriage partners use different languages, the majority group language almost always displaces the minority language. Most often in such families, parents use the majority language to their children. When the minority language is the mother’s language it may survive longer, but in the end shift to the majority language seems inevitable. This is discussed further in the next section.

Answer to exercise 5 (a)
Language is an important component of identity and culture for many groups. Maintaining their distinct identity and culture is usually important to a minority group member’s self-esteem and this will affect the degree of success achieved in the society.

Answer to exercise 5 (b)
It is possible to make a very long list of factors which in some places seem to contribute to language maintenance, but the same factors may elsewhere have little effect or even be associated with shift. In other words, there are no absolute answers to this exercise.

On the basis of what you have read so far you might have identified some factors which fit into one of the following categories and which could contribute to language maintenance.

1. The patterns of language use: the more domains in which the minority language can be used, the more chance there is of its being maintained. The possibilities will be largely determined by socio-economic factors, such as where the jobs are.

2. Demographic factors: where a group is large enough to provide plenty of speakers and reasonably able to isolate itself from contact with the majority, at least in some domains, there is more chance of language maintenance. Where members of ethnic communities are living in the same area this too helps maintain minority languages longer. The frequency of contact with the homeland can also be important – a large number of new immigrants, visitors or visits to the ‘mother country’ tend to contribute to language maintenance.

3. Attitudes to the minority language: where it is valued and regarded with pride as identifying the minority group and expressing its distinctive culture, there is more chance of it being maintained. Where it has status in the community this will help too.

Support for language maintenance from bilingual peers can contribute to maintenance (just as pressure from monolingual majority group peers can lead to shift).

Answer to exercise 6
Institutional support can be sought in domains such as education, religion, law and administration, and the media.

Examples of this kind of support are:

- the use of the minority language in education, e.g. bilingual education programmes, using or teaching the minority language in school, in pre-school, and in after-school programmes,
- support by the law and administration, e.g. the right to use the language in court, the House of Assembly, in dealing with government officials, etc.,
- the use of the language in places of worship, e.g. for services, sermons, hymns, chants,
- use of and support for the language in the media, e.g. TV programmes, radio programmes, newspapers, magazines.
Bilingual education as a means of minority language support is discussed further in the next section.

**Answer to exercise 8**

The patterns identified will vary according to the minority group selected. Very often the answers will be complicated. Scottish Gaelic in Britain, for instance, has different status in the eyes of different people – even the Scots. For some it is the language of solidarity and the language with which they identify. It is an effective vehicle of referential meaning as well as positive affective meaning for such people. Others regard Scottish Gaelic as irrelevant and useless. For them it has low status, especially compared to English. Whether Scottish Gaelic can be used in formal contexts, such as a school board meeting, depends on which part of Scotland a person lives in, and how many proficient speakers are present.

Where a language is rated as high in status by its users, and yet also regarded as a language of solidarity to be used between minority group members, where it is regarded as appropriate for expressing referential as well as affective or social meaning, and where it is able to be used in a wide range of contexts both formal and informal, it is much more likely to be maintained. Welsh would fit this description in the opinion of those who support Welsh language maintenance. Welsh is used in formal and official contexts, is seen in public signage and is heard in public domains. A language confined to informal contexts and conversations between friends and used for expressing predominantly social functions is vulnerable to replacement by the higher status, more widely used language of the wider society.

**Answer to exercise 10**

Though it may contribute to the prestige of Yoruba and encourage more positive attitudes to its maintenance, it seems unlikely that a requirement of Yoruba for entrance to tertiary institutions will make much difference to the use of Yoruba in the home. To encourage the more widespread use of Yoruba it would probably be more useful to require that it be used more extensively in educational institutions at all levels.

**Answer to exercise 11**

One important factor which may contribute to language shift but which has not been discussed in detail in this chapter is technological change, including the increased accessibility of all kinds of material through the internet, together with very portable ipods and ipads. You may have thought of other factors too, some of which may be discussed in the next two chapters.

**Concepts introduced**

Language shift  
Language death  
Language loss  
Language maintenance  
Bilingual education  
Ethnolinguistic vitality  
Linguistic landscapes  
Language revival
Chapter 3  Language maintenance and shift

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Example 9 is a quotation from Herder cited in Fishman (1978: 49–50).

■ Useful additional reading

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