Seminar in Sociolinguistics

1302749

Lecture (3)

Language Maintenance and Shift
Language shift in different communities

Migrant minorities

Non-migrant communities

SCENARIOS

Migrant majorities
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.
Language shift in different communities

Migrant minorities

➢ 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.
Language shift in different communities

Migrant minorities

Local majority

Immigrant minority
Language shift in different communities

Migrant minorities

- Language shift is expected
- A sign of successful assimilation

Pressure from the host society

Language shift for practical reasons

- Job
- Education
- Business
Language shift in different communities

The language shift of 2nd-generation immigrants

L1 monolingual

L1 and L2 bilingual

L2 monolingual
Language shift in different communities

Migrant minorities

➢ important issues:
  o Migrant families
  o Infiltration of the dominant language
  o Minority language is a threat
  o Minority language is under pressure
  o Assimilation
Language shift in different communities

Migrant minorities

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?
Language shift in different communities

Non-migrant communities

➢ 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.

➢ Closed communities
Language shift in different communities

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 in different communities

Non-migrant communities

Example 3

Before the First World War the town of Oberwart (known then by its Hungarian name, Felsőőr) 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.
Language shift in different communities

Non-migrant communities

➢ 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.
Language shift in different communities

Non-migrant communities

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>
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<td>B</td>
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<td>Hu</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Gal 1979.
Language shift in different communities

Migrant majorities

Immigrant majority
Language shift in different communities

Migrant majorities

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.
Language shift in different communities

Migrant majorities

- language shift often indicates the influence of political factors and economic factors, such as the need for work.

- 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.
Language shift in different communities

Migrant majorities

Immigrants -> Local population
Language shift in different communities

Migrant majorities

- Colonization
  - The colonial powers impose their languages on the colonies.
Colonization

- 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’.
Language shift in different communities

Migrant majorities

➢ 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 minority.

➢ The dominant language is associated with status, prestige, and social success.

The dominant language 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.
Language shift in different communities

Factors contributing to language shift

- Economic, social, and political factors
  - Job opportunities
  - See no reason to maintain L1
Language shift in different communities

Migrant majority

Language shift does not necessarily occur when multilingualism is widespread.

Language shift could occur when one primary indigenous language is used.

many indigenous vernacular languages
Language shift in different communities

Non-migrant communities

- Language shift due to political, economical and social changes
Language death and language loss

➢ Language death: occurs when a language is no longer spoken naturally anywhere in the world.

➢ Language loss: 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.
  o The functions of the language are taken over in one domain after another by another language.
  o As the domains in which speakers use the language shrink, the speaker of the dying language become gradually less proficient in it.
Language death and language loss

- Forced language shift
- Voluntary language shift
Language death and language loss

Language Hotspots
Hotspots are areas with many languages near extinction.
Click on a hotspot to learn more.
Language death and language loss

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.
The process of language death for the language comes about through a kind of *gradual loss of fluency and competence* by its speakers.
Aspects of language loss

➢ 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.
Language death and language loss

1. Potentially endangered
2. Endangered
3. Seriously endangered
4. Moribund
5. Extinct

(Wurm 1998)
Language death and language loss

Potentially Endangered

- Socially and economically disadvantaged
- Under heavy pressure from a larger language
- Beginning to lose child speakers
Endangered Languages

- Few or no children learning the language
- The youngest good speakers are young adults.
Language death and language loss

**Toward Extinction**

- **Seriously endangered:** The youngest good speakers age 50 or older
- **Moribund:** Only a handful of good speakers
- **Extinct:** No speaker
Language death and language loss

Factors leading to language loss

1. Death of speakers
2. Demographic
3. Social
4. Cultural
5. Economic
6. Political
7. Attitudes
Language death and language loss

Death of Speakers

➢ Natural disasters
➢ Famine and drought
➢ Diseases
➢ Genocides

There are only a few women (5) in this area who speak N/u.
Demographic factors

➢ Where people live
  o Rural areas vs. urban areas.

➢ The size of the group
  o Spanish in the US.
  o Chinatowns.
Language death and language loss

Social Factors

➢ Young men moving to urban center
➢ Intermarriage
➢ Aging population in the community
Language death and language loss

Cultural Factors

➢ Cultural contact affects language attitude
➢ Culturally more aggressive dominant language
  ◦ Religion
  ◦ Modern metropolitan culture
  ◦ Technology
Language death and language loss

Economic Factors

➢ Economic advantage associated with dominant language
  ◦ Job opportunity
  ◦ Material wealth
Language death and language loss

Political Factors

- Political influences
- Conquest
- Language policy: official language
- Recommendations and laws
- Assimilatory education
Language death and language loss

Attitudes and values

- 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.
How a minority language can be maintained

- It is a symbol of **group identity**.
- The degree and **frequency of contact** with the home group.
- Social factor may help.
  - Extended family vs. nuclear family
- **Institutional support**
  - Domains: education, law, religion, government, media
We can predict the likelihood that a language will be maintained by measuring its ethnolinguistic vitality.

Components

- The status of the language
- The size of the group
- The extent of institutional support
Language revival

➢ Attitude
  ◦ How strongly the speakers want to revive the language
  ◦ Their reasons for doing so
Six factors which may help a language to progress (Crystal, 2000)

- An endangered language will progress if its speakers:
  - increase their prestige within the dominant community
  - increase their wealth
  - increase their legitimate power in the eyes of the dominant community
  - have a strong presence in the education system
  - can write down the language
  - can make use of electronic technology
Examples of language revival

- Puyuma Language Revival
  - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qHh_P72_fxA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qHh_P72_fxA)

- Bunun Language Revival
  - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZklCYG2LNwA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZklCYG2LNwA)

- Hebrew
  - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pgjq8uqQ79E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pgjq8uqQ79E)

- Maori
  - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WG2Abfglzq4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WG2Abfglzq4)
End of class 03