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Indigenous Language Revitalisation and Globalization

Language shift and revitalisation

Language loss or language shift involves a situation where speech communities witness the gradual displacement of one language by another in their lives (Dorian, 1982). This situation nearly always entails a languages-in-contact situation and a power differential between two or more speech communities.¹ The factors that contribute to language shift or language endangerment are varied and complex, rendering an accurate prediction of the nature of the shift elusive and indefinable.² While different typologies have been proposed in documenting language shift, generally we can state that the following holds true. Where language shift occurs in languages in contact situations, it usually reflects socio-political and socio-economic competitive tensions, conflicts and the struggle to establish a dominant cultural status between the different speech communities. Where there is a sustained socio-political power differential, the disadvantaged speech community is left with the choice of assimilation or resistance. Nelde reminds us that when numerically weak or psychologically weakened speech communities tend towards assimilation, a sustained or a relatively rapid language shift occurs. Language revitalisation and language maintenance are seen as the converse trajectory of, and an antidote to sustained language shift.³

Language revitalisation involves a reversal of language shift where people start using a language that has been moribund or threatened by extinction, so that its vitality is

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gradually restored.⁴ Revitalization can be studied in a range of contexts where conditions vary considerably, e.g. contexts of nation-states, indigenous linguistic minorities in nation-states, indigenous groups in post-colonial countries and immigrant language groups. In all these cases, however, language revitalization involves the following defining characteristics or hallmarks:⁵

1. Adding new sets of speakers to the language crucially involving the home domain and intergenerational transmission. (Spolsky, 1996; King, 2001.)
2. Adding new functions by introducing the language into new domains, where it was previously unused or relatively underused.
3. The revalorisation of the language to be revived by the speakers and neo-speakers (Huss et al, 2003).
4. Involvement and activity on behalf of the individual and speech community and awareness that positive attitudes, action, commitment, strong acts of will and sacrifice may be necessary to save and revitalize.

In all language revitalisation, efforts and policies represent a critical arena in which a speech community's expectations for the success of its efforts in securing the language for its future members are simultaneously expressed, enabled and often constrained. Language revitalisation policies and efforts at language planning are not formed in isolation of course; but must engage with important social forces: migration, change in the structures of local economies and globalisation. In this context it has become commonplace to locate language endangerment within the metaphor of ecology and to refer to an ecological model of language planning,⁶ where careful and caring management is needed to offset catastrophe and damage in the linguistic environment. But the threats posed to languages often come from afar and if unshielded, may gradually erode the linguistic environment itself. One such threat is globalisation. The purpose of this chapter is to look outward beyond the speech community to explore the important connections between minority language communities where language shift has occurred or is

occurring and the broader geopolitical and socio-political issues of globalisation, as well as to point towards a pathway of progression for speech communities in this context.

Language endangerment and globalisation

We have already seen that language shift tends historically to occur in languages in contact situations where the dominant cultural status of one speech community seems to override or supplant the status of another. In the 21st century, globalisation has become one of the most powerful contact realities for minority languages everywhere.

Globalisation not only represents significant change in economics, technology and politics for nations and continents, but it also represents fast-changing sets of beliefs, values and attitudes. In world economy and the world markets terms, it is characterised by a shrinkage and contraction of space and time wherein trade, marketing, communication and information flow are efficiently and speedily facilitated. The growing interdependence of countries world-wide through the increasing volume and variety of cross-border transactions in goods and services, and also through the more rapid and widespread diffusion of technology is not just an economic phenomenon, but a social, cultural and physiological one as well. In sociolinguistic terms it has come to be associated with the global spread and acceptance of English as a world lingua franca and minority or lesser-used language endangerment.

Much has been written over the previous two decades on the area of language endangerment. Emphasis was placed firmly on the protection of cultural diversity, ahead of the sweeping homogenising tidal wave of globalisation.⁷ Linguists have been saddened by the vast amount of cultural and linguistic knowledge that is disappearing in an increasingly globalised world. Dividing the world's languages into three categories, moribund, endangered and safe, Krauss⁸ established parity between language endangerment and the endangerment of biological species in the natural world, referring to languages that are not spoken as mother tongues as being beyond mere endangerment and '... doomed to

extinction like species lacking reproductive capacity'.⁹ In discussing the circumstances that have led to language mortality, he singles out one of the corollaries and effective agencies of globalisation, i.e. the electronic media, referring to television as '... an incalculably lethal new weapon (which I call cultural nerve gas)'.¹⁰ Scholarly attention has grown into an almost frantic concern since the publication of Krauss' article, with a special urgency to mobilise remedial action underpinning a lot of the research.

The call for an engaged, politically active linguist rather than the disengaged academic, involved only in description and documentation, became the hallmark of the new approach and engendered a lively hot debate during the 1990s¹¹. The debate continued on this matter¹² and the issues of language death¹³ and language genocide¹⁴ continue and will continue to be central to future language discussion.¹⁵ With concerns arising from a general consensus that at least half the world's 6,000-7,000 languages will disappear in the next century,¹⁶ linguists' research work in the area takes them into what Edwards terms '... heavily mined territories of emotion'.¹⁷

Two recently evolving developments in linguistics research reflect the new reality of a changing global sociolinguistic landscape. The first of these developments is critical linguistics, which focuses on language within its social, political and historical contexts, with a primary concern for language discrimination, language equality and language rights.¹⁸ The second has been the expansion in language revitalisation research in the 1990s in tandem with the growing concern that an alarming proportion of the world's languages are in danger.¹⁹ In language revitalisation studies, the focus has shifted slightly from language revival²⁰ as Hornberger²¹ points out:

Language revitalization, renewal or reversing language shift goes one step further than language maintenance in that it implies recuperating and reconstructing something that is at least partially lost rather than maintaining and strengthening what already exists. The change in emphasis is at least in part a reflection of the changing and increasingly threatened circumstances of the world's languages in the last years of the twentieth century.

As the debate on language endangerment continues, English has emerged as the strongest global language,²² although Spanish and Chinese are also considered as the other 'spreading languages'.²³ English is the third most widely spoken after Mandarin and Spanish. However, when combining native and non-native speakers, English is probably the most commonly spoken language in the world. However, what makes a language a global language has little to do with numbers of speakers.²⁴ In developing a special role that is increasingly recognised in continents, English has achieved an international and global status. The relationship between the hegemonic spread of English and its impact on other languages has really been the catalyst in the new directions and thrust in critical linguistics, language revitalisation and language planning studies.

While a causal link between the phenomenon of the global adoption of English and the demise of many minoritised languages has been well established by research, its emergence as a global language has stimulated and mobilised a greater response in support of local languages. The emergence of vigorous movements in support of linguistic minorities testifies to a strong need for indigenous or differing identities. Threatened speech communities are becoming more and more like refugees, fleeing the hegemony of global standardisation and asserting the authenticity of indigenous and differing identities. Some researchers and members of speech communities engaged in language planning for language revitalisation are working now to contribute to the rise of a linguistic ethic, or a set of attitudes in favour of the protection of linguistic diversity.²⁵ Chrystal states for example:²⁶

Language is a major means (some would say the chief means) of showing where we belong and of distinguishing one social group from another, and all over the world we can see evidence of linguistic divergence rather than convergence.

What should be the trajectory of language revitalisation efforts, therefore, in the context of globalisation? Some of the issues that impact future policy and planning directions will be explored in the remainder of this chapter.

Education and language revitalisation

Traditionally, education was seen as being pivotal in the survival of minority languages. The debate on the role of the school in language revitalization has centered typically on schools as agents of language revival, examining the concept of language planning and language education policy²⁷ and discussing the potential of schools in community or in national efforts to contribute to language knowledge and language use.

However, Fishman²⁸ has pointed out that schools have only limited value in language revival, in that the restoration and successful survival of a threatened language essentially require reinstating and relocating the language firmly in the home domain in parent-child transmission. Unless schools directly feed into and facilitate the reinstatement of home and family transmission, then they will always occupy a secondary role in language restoration. This does not always happen, however. It is a feature of many language revitalization movements that they overlook the crucial stage of family transmission (Fishman's 1991 Stage 6 in the Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale) in an effort to move with undue alacrity to minority language education. Mindful of the shortcomings of school-based language revitalization efforts, Hornberger and King,²⁹ maintain, however, that school initiatives in some contexts may promote the instruction and use of unified native languages and standardized native language literacies as well as facilitate the very kernel of the spirit of language revival. Of course, schools are also the central arena for the promotion of prescriptive norms. The tools that schools utilise of course are of critical importance in the era of globalisation, as will be discussed later.

Schools on their own, therefore, may be ineffective in saving threatened languages.³⁰ Links with the speech community are critical. McCarty,³¹ for example, argues that schools must adopt a prominent position in language revitalization and maintenance efforts since schools have had destructive effects on indigenous languages in the past. Education is also the site where larger political, social, ideological values are transmitted and reflected, the very

values which fuel language revival struggle. Schools can thus become awareness-raising agents, sensitising students to language use or lack of language use in community domains and influencing linguistic beliefs, practices and management of the language community. Skutnabb-Kangas³² here refers to the potential of the school in this context as agent of change. The school may also be one of the chief agents of legitimation and institutionalisation in the public domain of the language being revitalised, a counterforce of language discrimination accruing after centuries of proscription, derogation and neglect.³³ The school may also be the site of engagement with the forces of globalisation. But what is the positioning of educationalists vis-à-vis globalising forces and influences on local and minority languages? This will be explored further in the next section.

Possible responses to globalisation

There have been two opposing reactions to globalisation emerging in recent years among scholars and activists in language revitalisation. One view has been to oppose globalisation as a predator on smaller cultures, languages and traditional ways of behaviour. This view has been represented for example in the work of Nettle & Romaine, Grenoble & Whaley. Another point of view adopts a more benign attitude to globalisation, viewing it as a necessary step in the evolution of humankind and bearing the potential for growth, preservation of identities, fostering interdependence and forging new cultural hybridities. This work finds representation in the views of Crystal 1997. Crystal recognises the legacy of colonialism, cultural imperialism and power asymmetries between former colonial nations and developing nations. Spolsky, for example, favours an alternative reading of language revitalisation to the conventional postcolonial interpretation, moving more towards acceptable negotiation of languages in contact, i.e. two languages or more sharing common space. '... each taking an active role in negotiating the way in which that sharing should be instantiated as regards language choice.' This view, which posits traditional

uniqueness in dialogue with global realities, appears to offer more potential for the future. Rather than decrying the overwhelming realities of the postcolonial legacy and current mobilizing hegemonic realities, it might be more energising for minority language communities to engage and dialogue meaningfully with the forces of ongoing change. Cronin reminds us, for example:

The casual despair or easy cynicism that all is lost in the face of the overwhelming fact of standardization of experience and expression is contradicted by the evidence of a world that is certainly becoming similar in certain respects but is constantly fragmenting in many others.

The counter-move to globalising uniformity, therefore, should avoid cultural fragmentation but should move towards 'relatedness', and be about sharing space and about being networked to a world of different histories. This move embraces the tools of globalisation, i.e. media, information and communication technologies.³⁴

Media, information and communication technologies

The minority language must gain access to domains related to socio-economic advancement. Media and information technologies may play a crucial role in respect of such advancement. Media technologies entail channels of mass and long-distance communication like newspapers, radio, television, telephone, text messaging, email, websites, blogging etc., that enable us to receive, produce, reproduce and manipulate messages of our own. The upsurge of interactivity made possible by the global 'democratisation' of media, including broadcasting and live television and internet media, has witnessed a proliferation of new types of reciprocal communications. The media also have become the 'indispensable carriers of popular culture'³⁵ and offer almost limitless possibilities to bring cultural messages (reciprocal and non-reciprocal) to world audiences. With the proliferation of interactive systems, the media will impinge more rather than less on our lives.³⁶ This has two important implications for language revitalisation efforts both in the present and in

the future. Firstly, it means that minority language communities must fully embrace the media technologies as a way of dialoging with a globalised world and with itself. Secondly, it means that media and media technologies can be exploited fully in language teaching and learning.

Minority languages and media technologies

Minority language communities must fully embrace the media technologies as a way of dialoging with a globalised world. Television has already made considerable impact in the case of minority languages, not only on the minority language community, but also on the wider community of the 'other' and 'other' languages.³⁷ Walden, for example stated in an inaugural address for the new Māori language television station in 2004:

The impact of television on our every day society is undeniable. A key role of Māori Television is to normalise the use of te reo Māori, to make it relevant to people from all walks of life, and show it in use in everyday settings that are relevant to them. From now on, every person in this country will have more access to programmes and information about Māori than they have ever had before – our history and culture, our old people, our young people and our dreams for the future.... This is another key role for Māori Television: To become the leader in increasing knowledge and understanding of the Māori world for all New Zealanders.³⁸

Television is a medium that points clearly to the potential of minority languages for survival in an increasingly globalised market. As well as serving the needs of the speech community, media must reach a wider audience if the language is to survive and compete with global languages. In doing this of course, care must be taken not to short-change native, near native or neo-speakers. Television and media can change attitudes in that they bring another language into the home, thus changing its linguistic constitution.³⁹ Yet, if the essential work of language revitalisation is not attended to, there may be little point ultimately in dialoguing with a wider world. Media technologies bring new opportunities and challenges for

the minority language community in its efforts to secure language revitalisation in a globalised world.

Media technologies in language education

Questions arise around the teaching of language in revitalisation contexts. These questions focus on the optimal context and conditions for effecting revitalisation, involving the type of school programme, the curriculum and classroom language use and activities, the space and relationship between the language to be revitalised and other languages, language materials and teacher education. Given the variety and complexity of possible contexts around the world, education policy makers and teachers need to construct the best answer to these questions in their own local contexts. King⁴⁰ points to one oversight in the general debate on language education for language revival, in that it tends to exclude reference to the specific pedagogical activities that take place in language programmes.

The potential of media and media technologies needs to be exploited fully in language teaching and learning. Over the past fifteen to twenty years, much has already been researched and published in the general area of CALL, alerting teachers and learners to the advantages of using information and media technologies in language learning. Information and media technologies give learners immediate and ongoing access to the linguistically mediated culture of the target language, opening new channels of communication both synchronous (chat rooms, blogging) as well as asynchronous (emailing, discussion lists, SMS messaging) to the learner. The traditional concern of language teaching with speaking and listening in face-to-face encounters and with reading and writing overlaps with only a miniscule part of communicative realities in the 21st century. If language learning of the minority language does not fully embrace and exploit media technologies, it is likely to lose much of its interest and authenticity for learners. Education is still a critical domain in language revitalisation, but it must be linked to, and networked fully with technological advancements, since

schools also operate in global as well as in national and local contexts, involving varying standards and norms, new outlooks and advancement, language attitudes, multilingualism and language prestige.

Final considerations

Language loss or language shift involves a situation where communities witness the gradual displacement of one language by another in their lives. The factors that contribute to language loss or language endangerment are varied and complex. Indigenous and minority language appear to be more endangered than ever in the 21st century. While language death is not new, there is a certain urgency about invigorating threatened languages to ensure survival and global linguistic diversity. In the growing context of globalisation, the causal link between the phenomenon of the global adoption of English and the demise of many minoritised languages has been well established by research. Yet the emergence of a global language has stimulated and mobilised a greater response in support of local minority languages. Rather than suppressing indigenous and linguistic differences, minority and indigenous groups have resisted and re-asserted identity and have been emboldened to pursue cultural and language rights.

One of the hallmarks of language revitalisation is the revalorisation of the language to be revived by the speakers and neo-speakers. To enable this revalorisation, the minority or indigenous speech community can adopt a new outlook on its position in a globalised world. Rather than acting out of a conventional post-colonial paradigm, deriving ultimately fatigable energies from fighting the asymmetries of given post-colonial and post-imperial realities, indigenous and minority speech communities engaged in language revitalisation might move towards a situation of acceptable negotiation with the language(s) of contact. This view posits a creative dialogue with global realities and appears to offer more potential for future development and evolution. Minority and indigenous

speech communities must fully embrace the media technologies as a way of dialoguing with a globalised world.

While language education has a pivotal role to play in language revitalisation, schools on their own, however, may be ineffective in saving threatened languages. Since schools operate in global as well as in local contexts, their learners must see themselves and their language as part of the wider world if they are to engage in meaningful learning. The minority or indigenous language curriculum also needs a fundamental alignment with the global context and with the tools of globalisation. The traditional concern of language teaching with speaking and listening in face-to-face encounters and with reading and writing still dominate our language classroom at the expense of ignoring synchronous and asynchronous media communication realities. If language learning of the minority language does not fully embrace and exploit media technologies, it is likely to lose much of its interest and authenticity for learners. In teaching learners and equipping them with skills in how to learn the language, using the tools of media technologies, we still need to infuse a love of the language in them as well as motivating them to seek out opportunities to use the language outside the classroom, i.e. at home and with each other in an environment where the language is no longer perceived to be under threat but has its legitimate place with the other stronger languages. Such an approach can imbue teachers and learners alike with a new creative enthusiasm for language in general and create a language awareness that will ensure the survival of the language into the 21st century.

Notes

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- ¹ N. Hornberger, 'Language shift and language revitalization', in R. Kaplan (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Applied Linguistics*, Oxford, 2002, pp. 365-373.
 - ² Ibid., p. 366.
 - ³ H. P. Nelde, 'Language contact', in R. Kaplan (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Applied Linguistics*, Oxford, 2002, p. 329.
 - ⁴ B. Spolsky, 'Conditions for language revitalization: A comparison of the cases of Hebrew and Maori', in S. Wright (ed.), *Language and the State*, Clevedon, 1996, p. 6.

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- ⁵ M. Ó Laoire, 'Language education for language revival', in K. Brown (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics*, Volume 6, Oxford, 2006, p. 407.
- ⁶ See S. A. Wurm, 'Language death and disappearance: Causes and circumstances', in R. Robins and E. Uhenblick (eds.) *Endangered Languages*, Oxford, 1991; D. Nettle and S. Romaine, *Vanishing Voices*, Oxford, 2000.
- ⁷ K. Hale, 'On endangered languages and the safeguarding of diversity', in *Language*, vol. 68, 1991, pp. 1-3.
- ⁸ M. Krauss, 'The world's languages in crisis', in *Language*, vol. 68, no. 2, 1992, pp. 4-10.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 6.
- ¹¹ See for example P. Ladefoged, 'Another view of endangered languages', in *Language*, vol. 68, no. 4, 1992, pp. 809-811; N. Dorian, *Language Death: The Life Cycle of a Scottish Gaelic Dialect*, Philadelphia, 1981; M. Brenzinger (ed.), 1992. *Language Death: Factual and Theoretical Explorations with Special Reference to East Africa*. Berlin, 1992; M. Brenzinger, *Endangered Languages in Africa*. Köln, 1998.
- ¹² e.g. J. Edwards, 'What can (or should) linguists do in the face of language decline?', in M. Harry (ed.) *Papers from the Seventeenth Meeting of the Atlantic Provinces Linguistic Association*, Halifax, 1994, pp. 25-32.
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- ¹⁶ D. Crystal, *English as a Global Language*.
- ¹⁷ J. Edwards, 'Language and the future: Choices and constraints', in H. Tonkin and T. Reagan (eds.) *Language in the 21st Century*, Amsterdam, 2003, p. 45.
- ¹⁸ e.g. J. W. Tollefon (ed.), *Power and Inequality in Language Education*, Cambridge, 1995; A. Pennycook, *The Cultural Politics of English as an International Language*, London, 1994; A. Pennycook, *English and the Discourses of Colonialism*, London, 1998; R. Phillipson (ed.), *Rights to Language: Equity Power and Education*, Mahway New Jersey, 2000; T. Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000.
- ¹⁹ N. Hornberger, 2002, p. 366.
- ²⁰ e.g. J. Edwards, 'Language revival: Specifics and generalities', in *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, vol. 15, 1993, pp. 107-113; J. Fellman, 'The role of Eliezer Ben Yehuda in the revival of the Hebrew language', in J. A. Fishman, (ed.) *Advances in Language Planning*, The Hague, 1974, pp. 427-455.
- ²¹ N. Hornberger, 2002, p. 366.
- ²² D. Crystal, 1997.
- ²³ D. Nettle and S. Romaine, p. 48].
- ²⁴ D. Chrystal, 1997, p. 7.
- ²⁵ F. Marti, et al, *Words and Worlds*. *World Languages Review*, Clevedon, 2005.
- ²⁶ D. Crystal, p. 22.
- ²⁷ B. Spolsky and E. Shohamy, 'Language practice, language ideology, and language policy', in R. D. Lambert, E. Shohamy, (eds.), *Language Policy and Pedagogy*, Philadelphia/Amsterdam, 2000, pp. 1-42.

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- ³³ M. Ó Laoire, 'Language education for language revival', in K. Brown (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics*, Volume 6, Oxford: 2006.
- ³⁴ M. Cronin, *Irish in the New Century*, Dublin, 2005, p. 53.
- ³⁵ D. Little, and B. Ó Meadhra, (eds.), *Media Technologies and Language Learning*. Dublin, 1991, p. 6.
- ³⁶ Op. cit.
- ³⁷ c.f. H. Kelly-Holmes, *Minority Language Broadcasting: Breton and Irish*, Clevedon, 2001.
- ³⁸ Māori Television Newsletter No 5, 29 March 2004, <http://www.maoritelevision.com/newsletter/issue5/index.htm>
- ³⁹ M. Ó Laoire 2001.
- ⁴⁰ M. King, *Te Ao Hurihuri: Aspects of Maoritanga*, Auckland, 1992.