Language Maintenance and Language Shift with Particular Reference to the Spread of English

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"The fortunes of language are bound up with those of its users, and if the languages decline or 'die' it is simply because the circumstances of their speakers have altered"
(Edwards, 1985:49).

1. Introduction

In 1964 Fishman introduced in his study of the languages of the minority immigrants in the US the concepts of language maintenance and language shift (LMLS) as a separate field of inquiry. However, it was only after a number of years later that extensive studies were devoted to the investigation of these notions. Various scholars working in the field of linguistics, sociolinguistics, anthropological linguistics, and even social psychology began to examine from their own respective points of view these phenomena together with aspects associated with them. Many scholarly attempts have since then flourished to study LMLS not only in developed countries but also --to a varying degree--in developing countries. As a result of these extensive studies, the concepts of LMLS have also undergone development and modification, partly also because of the varied methods employed. Whereas anthropologists and anthropological linguists commonly prefer the method of participant-observation, for example, sociologists are content with making use of survey data in their efforts to investigate the phenomena (Fasold, 1984:214-216). The use of these different methods lead to different results, which in fact should be treated not as distinct from, but as complementary to, each other. This is

what leads Fishman (1972) to suggest an interdisciplinary approach to the study of LMLS. He says in his 1977 article: "A new look at LMLS reveals several promising developments and changes in this field, not only since 1964 but even since 1972" (Fishman, 1977:125).

As for the focus of the study of LMLS, Fishman (1972) maintains that attention should be paid particularly to bilingualism without diglossia, which occurs in situations where there is no clear functional separation between the languages in use. He further suggests that the study deal basically with the relationship between degree of change or stability both in language usage patterns and ongoing psychological, social or cultural processes in populations that employ more than one language for intragroup or intergroup purposes (Fishman, 1972:109). He proposes three major subdivisions: (a) habitual language use at more than one point in time or space, (b) antecedent, concurrent or consequent psychological, social or cultural processes and their relationship to stability or change in habitual language use, and (c) behaviour towards language including directed maintenance or shift efforts. Of these three topical subdivisions, Fishman (1977) argues, most progress has been made in conjunction with the measurement of habitual language use and the least in conjunction with sociocultural

change processes, whereas the progress made in conjunction with behaviour towards language is intermediate between these two.

This implies that further attempts at uncovering the phenomena of LMLS are necessary for the development of this rapidly growing field of inquiry. It is not the aim of the present essay, however, to assume any contribution to the study of LMLS. It attempts instead to provide a brief account of the basic concepts of LMLS. In particular it deals with the meaning of the terms *language maintenance* and *language shift*, the conditions or factors that may lead to LMLS, and the signs we can observe that indicate LM or LS is taking place. To illustrate the points made in the discussion, some examples of cases of LMLS will be given, and a separate, brief section is devoted to the discussion of LMLS in particular relation to the spread of English. It is worth noting at the outset that first, scholars in their studies seem to have paid more attention to LS rather than LM, and second, the notions of LMLS are closely related to other concepts such as language attitudes and language choice, as the attitudes of members of a bilingual community certainly have effects on the choice of a language or languages they use, and in turn "the choices made by members of a particular community, reflecting their cultural values, add up to shift or maintenance in that community" (Fasold, 1984:214). This will be obvious in the course of the discussion. Finally, this essay will be concerned not with the linguistic aspect but with the sociolinguistic aspect of LMLS.

2. Language Maintenance and Language Shift

Before embarking on the main discussion, we should make clear first what we mean by the terms *language maintenance* and *language shift*. According to Fasold (1984:211), LM means that a community "collectively decides to continue using the language or languages it has traditionally used." This happens particularly in a monolingual community where the people speak only one language, and are not collectively acquiring a new language. However, LM sometimes also happens in bilingual or multilingual communities where people speak two or more languages, but with specific functions assigned to each of the languages. In other words, the communities "reserve each language for certain domains with very little encroachment of one language on the domains of the others" (Fasold, 1984:211).

On the other hand, LS according to Fasold (1984:211) means that "a community gives up a language *completely* in favor of another one" (italic mine). This statement implies a *total shift* from one language to another, which to a large extent resembles *language death*. Moreover, it looks at LS as the end product of a long process of people shifting from one language to another one. What we should note, however, is the fact that LS is a long, gradual process, which may take a number of generations to complete, most commonly through what Lieberson (1981; see also Fasold, 1984) calls *intergenerational language switching*, ie. one bilingual generation transmits to the next only one of the languages they use. Another thing to note is that a speech community may not *completely* give up its old language in favour of another one. That is, although a large proportion of the community has given up the old language, there may still be members of the community—however small the number is—who are using and maintaining the language. This we can call *transitional shift*, as is nicely illustrated by the well-known Canadian case of LMLS reported in Lieberson (1981) and Downes (1984). From 1921 to 1961 there was a substanstial language shift from French and other languages of the minority groups to English in Canada as a whole, even though in certain parts in Canada, especially in Quebec and adjacent New Brunswick, people still maintain French as their mother tongue.

This transitional shift is by no means stable in the sense that various other

factors may change the direction of the shift, as in the case of German in Sauris, a small village in Northeast Italy (Denison, 1977). German was once widely spoken in the village along with the local dialect Friulian which was declining. However, since the introduction of Italian as an official language, the villagers began to shift from German to Italian for pragmatic reasons. German is now dying in the village, as is Friulian. Thus we have two kinds of LS: total and transitional. From this we can reformulate the above statement to read as follows: language shift means that a community adopts a new language or variety into its repertoires, whether or not at the same time it also gives up a language or variety it has previously used (cf. Fishman, 1972). We can thus conceive of LMLS as a continum. At one end we have language maintenance, and at the other end language death, ie. in the sense of language death because of language shift, not because the community dies out, in which case "the language-identity link might have remained undisturbed" (Edwards, 1985:49; see also Aitchison, 1981; and Fasold, 1984, for further details). Intermediate between these two extreme (language maintenance and language death) is transitional language shift.

Now, what are the conditions that may conduce to LMLS? Scholars have identified a number of factors. They commonly agree (see eg. Fishman, 1972; Fasold, 1984; Edwards, 1985; and Downes, 1984) that a prerequisite for LS to happen is societal bilingualism. Yet, bilingualism alone is not enough, since there are many stable bilingual communities, as, for example, those found in communities where both diglossia and bilingualism occur (Fishman, 1972). In such communities, each language is assigned specific functions, and each is used in certain non-overlapping domains. Fishman (1972, 1977) suggests that it is the degree (ie. how much each language is used) and location (ie. in what social contexts each language is used) of bilingualism that may lead to LMLS. Thus a ba-

lanced degree of bilingualism with no domain encroachment may result in LM. On the other hand, LS is likely to happen when a bilingual community is undergoing a process of intergenerational language switching resulting in the lack of transmission of an original language from parents to children, and when one language spreads and encroaches upon the domains of the traditional language.

Nevertheless, societal bilingualism alone is not a sufficient condition for LS. Studies have shown that the factors in the decline of languages are many and varied. A 'chain of events' is involved in it (Denison, 1977). From various studies carried out by other scholars, Fasold (1984:215) notes a number of causes: migration (either by members of small groups who migrate to an area where their language no longer serves them, or by large groups who 'swamp' the local population with a new language, as in the case of the inmigration of Spanish speakers seeking employment in the Basque heartland (Williams, in Edwards, 1985:50; see also Lewis, 1978)), industrialization and other economic changes, school language and other government pressures, higher prestige for the language being shifted to, and a smaller proportion of speakers of the language being shifted from.

In addition to these factors, language attitudes, as reflected in language choice, also play an important role in LMLS. Saville-Troike (1989:205) says in relation to this:

"Especially in culture contact situa-tions, the possible outcomes for the multiple languages or language varieties involved include their maintenance as separate entities, changes in one or both language systems under influence from the other, or the abandonment of one in favor of the other: ie. one of the counterforces prevails. Of central interest is how different attitudes toward language may determine linguistic fate."

She further offers three major categories of factors that contribute to LMLS. They include (a) the instrumental v. affective functions which a language is felt to serve in the community, (b) the social

organization and ecology of the community or communities involved, including the nature of their boundary mechanisms and political organization, and attitudes related to these factors, (c) values and world view including attitudes toward borrowing foreign words, and the value placed on uniqueness and homogeneity.

Included in the first category is the fact that favourable attitudes towards the use of a language in religion contribute to the maintenance of the language, as in the case of the maintenance of the Armenian language in the US and Syria, which co-exists with English and Arabic respectively (Saville-Troike, 1989:205-206). On the other hand, the selection of Hebrew as the national and official language of Israel, which serves religious functions, has resulted in the decline of Yiddish and Ladino both in the US and in Israel. Harris (in Saville-Troike, 1989:205) reports that more than 95% of his Ladino subjects in New York and Israel were unable to give valid reasons for passing on the language, even though they themselves continued to have a strong attachment to the language.

The second category includes such factors as acceptability of assimilation, patterns of marriage and kinship, and change in the nature and identity of the entire speech community. Negative attitudes from the dominant group toward the minorities' effort to assimilate to the dominant group are likely to bring about the maintenance of the language and cultural identity of the minority group. Attempts at forced assimilation may also support language maintenance. Patterns of marriage and kinship may lead to LMLS. Exogamous marriage patterns constitute a condition which has conduced to the rapid shift among Eastern Pomo speakers, whereas extended family residence and child care are a strong force for language maintenance (McLendon in Saville-Troike, 1989:208). The change in the nature and identity of the entire speech community may entail language shift. Similarly, a decline in the existence and attractions of traditional life style also entails a decline in languages

associated with them (Edwards, 1985: 85).

Included in the third category is, among others, the fact that school programmes cannot guarantee the development and maintenance of minority language use among children if the language is not needed in the community and is not supported by the children's peers, as is illustrated by the shift from Irish to English. Harrison (in Edwards, 1985:57) says: "Irish, except as an arcane minority rite, is on its way out. Don't blame the teachers for its demise." In addition, Kleifgen et.al. (in Saville-Troike, 1989:212-213) report in their longitudinal study of over 300 children of foreign graduate students and visiting faculty in the US that even though support was given for native language maintenance at both home and school, there was a dramatic shift to English dominance. They found that children arriving in the country at age five or less were typically prone to shift, whereas those arriving at age seven or more generally maintained their native language.

Those are the factors that may lead to LMLS. The presence of each of these factors or a combination of them in a given community does not necessarily imply that LM or LS is taking place. However, Fasold (1984) poses the question whether it is possible to predict LS. He attempts to answer the question, saying that "LS will occur only if, and to the extent that, a community desires to give up its identity as an identifiable sociocultural group in favor of an identity as part of some other community" (Fasold, 1984: 240). His statement implies that there is a close link between traditional language and identity. This is not necessarily so, as the case of Yiddish and Ladino mentioned above has shown. Trudgill (1983) reports that although current attitudes towards Arvanitika (an Albanian dialect) are unfavourable--and it is not taught to children--97% of his respondents felt pride in their Arvanite traditions. Furthermore, Edwards (1985:64) says:

"...the Irish experience indicates that the link between original language and identity is not essential. There exists, today, a strong

Irish identity which does not involve Irish, in a communicative sense, for the vast majority. At the same time, the language continues to serve a symbolic function for many."

We can further add to this Hymes' observation that "some languages do not enjoy the status of a symbol crucial to group identity" (Hymes, 1968:115). In other words, LS does not necessarily imply loss of group identity.

Nevertheless, we can at least observe some indications that a speech community is in the process of either maintaining its traditional language or shifting to a new language. We will deal with some of them below.

Fasold (1984) suggests that the most obvious sign of LM is the existence of a distinct separation of 'us' and 'them', ie. the ingroup and a particular outgroup. It is this wilful continuation of the 'us-and-them' distinction that the voluntary condition to shift can be denied (Edwards, 1985:71). Another indication is the existence of a stable bilingualism in a speech community in which each language is assigned certain functions without any domain encroachment.

Bilingualism, however, is often only a temporary phenomenon, to be replaced with dominant-language monolingualism. The absence of monoglots in a community, according to Edwards (1985) indicates that the process of shift has begun. Domains that are previously reserved to the old language are often encroached upon and eventually taken over by the new language. The reasons behind all this, Edwards argues, are quite often pragmatic: "people do not maintain two languages for ever, when one is sufficient in all contexts" (Edwards, 1985:72).

Despite the caution Fasold (1984) gives, it seems to be true that a good sign of LS is when middle-aged or elderly native speakers are predominant in a speech community. The traditional language is spoken more by older people than by younger ones. This may reflect a lack of transmission of the language to the younger generation. That is, parents do not transmit the old language to their children and may even consider it as hampering their children's education and advancement (Fasold, 1984; Edwards, 1985; and Saville-Troike, 1989). This does not mean, however, that the older generation repudiates the old language and that their attitudes towards it are unfavourable, but rather their choice is based on a pragmatic decision in which the new language is viewed as important for their future.

Another indication of LS, Fasold suggests, is when a speech community feels that its language is inferior as compared with the new language. Again this should be taken with caution, as it does not necessarily imply that the existence of a superior language in a community will always indicate LS. There are numerous instances (eg. those cited in Fishman, 1972:135-136) which show shifts from prestigious languages to the less prestigious.

3. The Spread of English

This section discusses very briefly LMLS in particular relation to the spread of English. Fishman (1972) notes five major instances of LS in modern history, two of which are (a) the adoption of English and French as languages of elitist wider communication throughout much of the world, but particularly in Africa and Asia, and (b) the growing displacement of imported languages of wider communication and the parallel vernacularization of governmental, technical, educational, and cultural efforts in many parts of Africa and Asia. Taking these instances as a cue, Fishman (1977:125) examines LMLS from the viewpoint of English as a language of wider communication. He says:

"Certainly, a new look at LMLS from the point of view of spreading LWCs [languages of wider communication] in general, and from the point of view of the spread of English as an additional language in particular, prompts a number of hypotheses or emphases that might not otherwise come to the fore."

Furthermore, in their attempt to identify the factors that account for the world-wide spread of English, Fishman, Cooper & Rosenbaum (1977) maintain that if we are to construct a satisfactory explanation of LMLS in general and of the expansion and decline of languages of wider communication in particular, we must look for primary data of great contextual specificity.

In the last fifty years or so the use of English has greatly increased. It is now becoming a world-wide language. About 300 million people speak it as their mother tongue and there are as many—if not more—for whom it is an additional language (see, eg., Fishman et.al., 1977; Greenbaum, 1985; and Crystal, 1988). English has spread and will continue to spread throughout the world.

This substanstial and growing use of English throughout the world partly results from the image of the language itself. It differs, for example, from French in that English is ethnically and ideological more neutral than French. "The English language," Mazrui (1973:67) observes, "by the very fact of being emotionally more neutral than French, was less of a hindrance to the emergence of national consciousness in British Africa." It is this neutral nature of English that makes it possible to be *related much more to appreciably generalized, de-ethnicized, and de-ideologized process variables (modernization, urbanization, technological know-how, consumerism, and a higher standard of living in general) than to any ethnicity or ideology viewed as particularly English or American"* (Fishman, 1977:119).

In addition to this, other factors such as British and American colonial, commercial, industrial, scientific, and fiscal power as well as the possible benefits of learning and using English, have facilitated the wider spread and more acceptance of English as an additional language. More and more countries accept English as a language of wider communication either for intergroup use or intra-group use, as a medium of instruction in schools or as a school subject.

This wide spread of English seems to have some bearing on LMLS. The Spread of English through diffusion, ie. from top to bottom, for example, have to a varying degree resulted in mother-tongue displacement and mother-tongue replacement; hence the Anglification of indigenous European, African and Asian elites in the modern world (Fishman, 1977). This, however, does not imply a threat to indigenous languages, and does not entail substantial language shifts, as "English is considered to be more acceptable for technology and natural science use than for political and social science use, and that it is least acceptable of all for local humanistic and religious purposes" (Fishman, 1977:124). Furthermore, the spread of English is likely to establish stable diglossia or triglossia patterns with distinct domain separation. As an additional language, English is "more learned than used, and more used than liked" (Fishman, 1977:126).

4. Conclusion

We can conclude from the foregoing discussion that LMLS are social as well as linguistic phenomena worthy of further study and refinement in measurement. Any change in sociopolitical structures may entail LS on the one hand and LM on the other. Urbanisation, modernisation and social mobility are processes usually desired which have caused people to shift from one language to another and will seem to continue to do so in the future.

As a marker of identity, language is certainly of great importance. Yet, it is not, we may argue, the centre of identity, for again pragmatic reasons for survival and advancement in life quite often override affective attachment to language. In its communicative sense, then, language as an element of identity is very susceptible to change (Edwards, 1985).

With respect to the spread of English, we can see that the use of English, especially in non-English-mother-tongue

countries, have increased and is still growing, either for intergroup contacts or for intragroup communication, or for both. In multilingual countries where English is used as an official or co-official language, it often serves as a lingua franca for intragroup contacts. This seems to have some impacts on mother-tongue displacement, though not necessarily leading to its replacement. Indeed, in such countries English enjoys a prestigious status, chosen to reduce ethnic antagonisms. On the other hand, this has opened up the possibility for it to become indigenised; thus the emergence of local Englishes.

On the whole, however, despite its growing use internationally, English is not, as Fishman (1977) suggests, likely to cause any mother-tongue replacement. It may have displaced the use of local languages, but to replace them is a remote possibility. Fishman's study (1977) of the use of English in Singapore, India, and Indonesia has shown that it is more learned than used, and more used than liked. This confirms our expectation that even though more and more people are learning and using English, and its impacts on local languages are inevitable, it is not and will not be a threat to indigenous languages, at least in the near future. This is partly also due to the control governments have given to the spread of English within their own respective borders. The upsurge of national consciousness and nationalism has stemmed to a certain extent the spread of English; hence its impacts on local languages.

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