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ABSTRACT

Language shift (shift away from use of one language to use of another) and resulting language death are increasing throughout the world, and this trend can be attributed not simply to the spread of English and other world languages, but to a larger phenomenon, a "new world order." Because of rapid change in language use and because the phenomenon of language loss is complex, linguists find it difficult to predict when a language will die. The model proposed here posits that industrialized countries are placing pressure on developing countries to accept the former's political and social values, and that this pressure is being manifested in patterns of migration, industrialization, school language use, urbanization, and population decline, all of which affect language use patterns. Until recently, it was feasible for a small speech community to survive in relative isolation, preserve its own language, and use a language of wider currency for communication with the outside world when necessary. However, centralization of life in the twentieth century makes this kind of situation increasingly rare, accelerating the decline of less commonly used languages. Specific examples of small language communities in this situation are offered. Contains 28 references. (MSE)

ACCELERATED LANGUAGE DEATHS IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD: A CONSEQUENCE OF THE NEW WORLD ORDER

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ABSTRACT

Scholars have predicted that ninety percent of human languages (an overwhelming majority of which is spoken in the developing world) may die by the mid-21st century, pushed to oblivion's edge by the spread of English and other "world" languages via media, trade and migration, and by the pressure of dominant vernaculars in their homelands. The theoretical framework proffered in this paper is that these sociological factors are outcomes of a larger phenomenon--i.e. the *world order*.

INTRODUCTION

Two aspects of language death--when a community shifts to a new language so totally that the old language is no longer used--have interested linguists: the linguistic aspect and the sociolinguistic aspect. The linguistic aspect focuses on the last stage of languages that are in use in a community and that undergo interesting alterations in their pronunciation and grammar systems, in some respects reminiscent of pidginization (Dressler 1972). The sociolinguistic aspect, the focus of this paper, is the search for the set of factors that cause people to give up a language in favor of another (Fasold 1984).

As journalist Charles Hanley (1996:15-16) points out, scholars have predicted that ninety percent of human languages (an overwhelming majority of which is spoken in the developing world) may die by the mid-21st century, pushed to oblivion's edge by the spread of English and other "world" languages via media, trade and migration, and by the pressure of dominant vernaculars in their own homelands. Although language sociologist Joshua Fishman (1964) called attention to language death as a phenomenon worthy of study more than three decades ago, the topic has inspired a relatively small number of studies. Linguists Susan Gal (1979) and Nancy Dorian (1981) are the first to provide widely available monograph-length investigations of language death in a specific community. A number of shorter reports on language death have appeared, but European and North American cases have received most of the attention. While linguist Ralph Fasold (1984) suggests that for the time being we have to be content with these available in-depth studies from Europe and North America, it is suggested in this paper that it would be of great interest to have in-depth studies of the phenomenon which is accelerating in developing countries to see what similarities and differences there are compared with the Western nation cases.

A major question here, then, is the following: Why should anyone care about language death? The answer to this question is quite obvious. While most of the threatened languages come up short in computer jargon, they nevertheless make up for it with a wealth of words for nature's works, for myths and age old rites and magic, and a complexity rich enough to turn a linguist's inquiry into a lifetime endeavor. Unfortunately, as Hanley (1996:16) points out, only a thin, underfinanced line of linguists around the world is trying to hold back the tide--or at least document--many of these dying languages.

There is a strong tendency for language death to be attributed to the same causes in study after study. The following are the most frequently cited 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 (Tabouret-Keller 1968, 1972; Lewis 1972, 1978; Dressler and Wodak-Leodolter 1977; Lieberson and McCabe 1978; Gal 1979; Dorian 1980; Timm 1980); *industrialization* and other economic changes (Tabouret-Keller 1968, 1972; Dressler and Wodak-Leodolter 1977; Gal 1979; Huffines 1980; Timm 1980; Dorian 1981); *school language* and other government pressures (Dressler and Wodak-Leodolter 1977; Gal 1979; Kahane and Kahane 1979; Dorian 1980; Huffines 1980; Timm 1980); *urbanization* (Tabouret-Keller 1968; Gal 1979; Timm 1980; Dorian 1981); higher *prestige* for the language being shifted to (Denison 1977; Gal 1979; Kahane and Kahane 1979; Dorian 1981); and a *smaller population* of speakers of the language being shifted from (Lieberson and McCabe 1978; Kahane and Kahane 1979; Dorian 1981; Huffines 1980). However, there has been very little success in using any combination of these sociological factors to predict when language death will occur. In fact, a number of linguists have reached considerable consensus that we do not know how to predict language death (Kloss 1966; Denison 1977; Gal 1979; Dorian 1981; to name only a few). Although many of the most often-cited sociological factors are present when language death takes place, it is all too easy to find cases in which some speech community is exposed to the very same factors, but has maintained its language.

Thus, it is suggested in this essay that the aforementioned sociological factors for language death are outcomes of a larger phenomenon--i.e. the *world order*. Therefore, a major objective of this essay is to offer a theoretical model which will demonstrate the relationship between the aforementioned sociological factors, the new world order, and accelerated language deaths in the developing world.

A THEOREM OF ACCELERATED LANGUAGE DEATHS

Since the significance of accelerated language deaths in developing countries is doubly contextual in being both *context shaped* (its contribution to ongoing sequence of linguistic actions cannot adequately be understood except by reference to the context in which it occurs) and *context renewing* (the character of linguistic actions is directly related to the fact that they are context shaped--the context of a next linguistic activity is repeatedly renewed with every current action), *context* then helps an analyst to rule out unintended activities and suppress misunderstandings of certain activities that take place in a linguistic community. In essence, those factors identified as contextual must be those that determine accelerated language deaths in developing countries in actual global activities. In order to explain the concept of accelerated language deaths, the following theoretical framework outlines a model with three different levels of structure. The subsequent discussion explicates these structures.

	Sociological Factors		
	Migration		
	Industrialization		
New World Order ➜	School Language	➜	**Accelerated Language**
	Urbanization		**Deaths**
	Prestige		
	Smaller Population		

Figure 1: Accelerated Language Deaths: A Theoretical Framework

Proposition:

> Linguistic domains involve conceptually distinct local contexts for each linguistic transaction. It is these contexts to which linguistics provides a pathway--and thus, these contexts are the ones a language analyst can discover through analyzing the uses of languages.

NEW WORLD ORDER

According to foreign policy scholars James Blight and Aaron Belkin (1993:715), the popularity of the concept "New World Order" can be traced to President George Bush's proclamation in his 1991 State of the Union address when he stated that "we have before us the long-held promise of a New World Order." Blight and Belkin point out that like Presidents Woodrow Wilson and Harry S. Truman before him, Bush sought to build a stable, lawful peace on the foundation of military victory. However, as Blight and Belkin also argue, far short of a New World Order, the new orderliness has been salutary in the chaotic, unipolar confusion of the immediate post-Cold War era. Thus, for them, the demise of the Soviet Union has led certain developing countries to export domestic chaos and engage in violent activities at home.

For economist Harder Khan (1997:1), the so-called "Washington Consensus" ("a complex array of policy reforms underway in the developing countries"), which emerged at the end of the Cold War, seems to be dictating much of the current policy gestures towards Third World countries. These indebted countries are forced to swallow the bitter medicine of structural adjustment regardless of their economic and human conditions. The direct and indirect costs of these policies on the vulnerable groups are already evident, according to Khan.

In the area of foreign language study, for example, the effects are certainly evident. As linguist Omar Ka (1995:92-93) observes, foreign language study, which has traditionally depended greatly on funding from the United States Department of Education through Title VI Foreign Language and Area Studies programs and from the United States Agency for International Development, is increasingly threatened in the new political order represented by the Republican majority in the United States Congress. In the name of "leaner" government, federal programs, agencies, and even entire departments (such as the Department of Education

itself) are either experiencing painful budget cuts or are in the danger of being simply abolished.

As international relations professor Richard Falk (1993) also notes,

> the ending of the Cold war both ended an era of ideological rivalry and stripped away the illusion of consensus about the shape and direction of world order. Beyond the domain of Cold War truisms that have prevailed between 1945 and 1989, there were increasingly evident analytic and explanatory difficulties. First, how to take conceptual account of the globalization of capital and communications. Second, whether to treat the porousness of state boundaries with regard to drugs, illegal immigration, environmental degradation, unwanted ideas and threats, financial flows and banking operations as posing a fundamentally new series of questions about the nature and effectiveness of sovereignty as the basic approach to the distribution of authority on a global basis. And third, the extent to which generalized descriptive narratives about the economic/political/legal conditions of the people of the world homogenized crucial differences or illuminated vital affinities (p.627).

Thus, Falk asserts, "the main statist/market project of the North is to sustain geopolitical stability, which in turn calls for the continuous expansion of world trade, on economic growth, and on the suppression of nationalist and regionalist challenges emanating from the South, by force if necessary" (1993:628). In this regard, Falk adds, "the internationalization of the state, assuredly a strong tendency, can either be a vehicle for promoting emancipatory or oppressive results" (1993:628). Consequently, "domestic and transnational forces--from society to market activity--will exert various kinds of pressure on the state, often at cross-purposes" (1993:628).

It is therefore suggested in this paper that various kinds of pressure on developing countries have been felt in the area of language usage. The frequently cited factors for this pressure, as mentioned earlier, include migration, industrialization, school language, urbanization, prestige, and smaller population.

SOCIOLOGICAL FACTORS AND LANGUAGE DEATHS

In this section, instead of discussing each social factor accelerating language deaths in developing countries individually, evidence is provided that highlight these factors together. This is necessary to avoid extensive repetitiveness in citing the sources of the evidence.

Until recently, it was feasible for a small speech community to survive in reasonable isolation, to preserve its own language, and to use a language of wider currency for communication with the outside world where necessary. But the growing centralization of life in the twentieth century makes this kind of situation increasingly rare. The extent of language death, in

particular, is undergoing rapid acceleration in the modern world (Comrie et al. 1996:14).

The speed with which a language can die in developing societies is truly remarkable. Within a generation, all traces of a language can become obsolete. Political decisions can force ethnic groups to move or split up; economic prospects can attract younger members away from the villages; and new diseases can take their toll. As Crystal recounts,

> In 1962, Trumai, spoken in a single village on the lower Culuene River in Venezuela, was reduced by an influenza epidemic to a population of fewer than 10 speakers. In the 19th century, there were thought to be over 1,000 Indian languages in Brazil; today, there are only 200. A quarter of the world's languages have fewer than 1,000 speakers; half have fewer than 10,000. It is likely that most of these languages will die out in the next 50 years (1997:47).

In Tanzania, younger people are increasingly abandoning their mother tongues in favor of Swahili, the dominant language of the country (Comrie 1996:14). Swahili has become so prominent in Tanzania that no other language (including English, an official/colonial language of the country) can compete with it in terms of usage.

An assessment of continuity and change in the last stage of the moribund dialect called "Negerhollands" in the Dutch West Indies sketches the demise of a language in contact. The last speaker's language history and vowel system and an assessment of the variation in a Negerhollands corpus show how rapid changes in the modern world can accelerate sociological factors that lead to the death of a language (Sabino 1996).

Field data collected from the last remaining speaker of Hukumina and from the last four speakers of Kayeli spoken on the Indonesia island of Buru reveal a series of social factors contributing to the death of the two languages. A significant historical event set in motion changing social dynamics that forced the relocation by the Dutch in 1656 of a number of coastal communities on the island of Buru and other surrounding islands. This severed the ties between Hukumina speakers and their place of origin (with its access to ancestors and associated power). The same event brought a large number of outsiders to reside around the Dutch fort near the traditional village of Kayeli, leading to the creation of a multiethnic and multilingual community that gradually resulted in a shift to Malay for both Hukumina and Kayeli language communities. Supporting evidence from other languages in the area also shows that traditional notions of place and power are tightly linked to language ecology in the region (Grimes 1995).

A sociocultural profile of the Ormuri and Paraci language speakers in South-East Iran shows how accelerated global pressures are impinging upon the two languages. Information concerning their past, present and future indicates the disappearance on the dialectological level (Kieffer 1977).

Large numbers of Spanish words are used by speakers of Tlaxcalan Nahuatl, an indigenous language of Mexico. As speakers of these languages think it is more advantageous to improve their Spanish, their increasing use of relexification is contributing to the death of the language (Hill 1977).

CONCLUSION

It is evident from the preceding discussion that language users are interactionally related in a linguistic framework, and their sociological predisposition to language usage is organized and managed in a global domain. All of these structures provide a framework within which any single language choice is produced. Although integrated in a global arena, these structures are conceptually distinct local contexts for each linguistic transaction; that is, local linguistic domains in which a transaction is situated. It is these contexts to which linguistics provides a pathway--and thus, these contexts are the ones which a language analyst can discover through analyzing language usage.

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