LINGUISTIC GENOCIDE OR SUPERDIVERSITY?

NEW AND OLD LANGUAGE DIVERSITIES

Edited by

Reetta Toivanen and Janne Saarikivi

MULTILINGUAL
MATTERS

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LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY AND LANGUAGE RIGHTS

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Reetta Toivanen and Janne Saarikivi

Language Endangerment and New Linguistic and Cultural Diversities

This volume is about linguistic variation and language endangerment, as well as the sociopolitical and cultural contexts in which people use languages in the present-day world. The authors of the book discuss the different multicultural and multilingual realms currently emerging in various minority language and culture communities and ask whether we are facing the perspective of an immense wave of language death, new remarkable linguistic variation, or both simultaneously. In particular, they investigate the new types of ethnic and linguistic variation that are emerging around the globe in connection with urbanisation, spreading literacy and media use, raising standards of education and the centralised attempts to standardise ethnic and linguistic identities as well as language use.

In the chapters of this book, the perspectives of language endangerment and death combine with those of linguistic variation and change, revitalisation and diversity and attempts to regulate diversity. The point of departure for the authors is the idea that the circumstances in which the speakers of minority languages of the world live today are different from those in which these languages emerged. The living conditions of languages have dramatically changed through literacy, formal education, standardisation of languages, mass media, social media, urbanisation, changes in livelihoods, increased mobilisation, centralised states and nationalist identities uniting people living hundreds or thousands of kilometres apart. Consequently, the linguistic and cultural variation in (post)modern societies is also likely to be different from the kinds of

linguistic variation most described in the history of linguistic science, i.e. areal and social variation.

The ways that people today use languages and think about languages are notably different from how they were used and conceived of in communities that existed only a couple of generations ago. The new language situation often leads to the death of languages that are not considered suitable for use in new social networks and domains. On the other hand, it also produces new kinds of language varieties, cultural identities and diversities of language use. Accelerated language extinction can be considered a result of colonisation, modernisation and globalisation, but so can many new creoles, intertwined and mixed languages, new ethnic identities, new groups of urban dwellers or migrant groups, all with their own distinct cultural traits.

In the history of linguistic sciences, speech communities have often been described as if they existed in isolation. This is reflected in the disciplinary division of linguistics into English, Germanic, Romance, Indo-European or Finno-Ugrian studies, to name just a few examples of traditional scientific branches. Simultaneously, scholars have always been aware of bi- and multilingual individuals, communities characterised by multilingual and multicultural networks, intensive borrowing, code-switching and fluctuation of ethnic and linguistic identities. This has been especially obvious in historical linguistics, which is methodologically based on the identification of waves of interlingual influences following one after the other. The study of linguistic diversity, or language variation and change, is thus nothing new. However, the kinds of diversities in societies characterised by schooling, linguistic standards and language-related professions are different from the predominantly oral societies with mostly local identities and physical work as a main form of labour. Whereas language variation in traditional communities is caused predominantly by areal distance or language contact, in the new linguistic communities, it also exists alongside factors caused by different types of standards, for instance, models of language use transmitted by schooling and media, often over long distances.

Without a doubt, the phenomenon of language death has become much more common in the 20th century than it was in the previous centuries, and the pace of language demise is only increasing, probably threatening some 50% to 90% of the world's languages, according to different estimates. In linguistic and social sciences, language death and language endangerment have become a centre of attention and concern, especially from the perspectives of diversity and human rights (cf. Crystal, 2003; Grenoble & Whaley, 1998). Many scales of language endangerment, such as the Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS; Fishman, 1991), the Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS; Lewis & Simons, 2010), the UNESCO Framework (2003) and, most recently, the European Language Vitality Barometer (EuLaViBar; Laakso et al., 2016), have been

proposed to assess and measure the exact nature of language endangerment in the case of individual languages and to identify which measures are needed for the revitalisation of a language. The mere fact that so many different tools have been proposed for measuring language endangerment demonstrates the complex nature of the phenomenon of language loss. As language is a socially transmitted and learned system of symbols, multiple social forces affect its fate, among these different types of power relations, fashions, cultural values, changing economic frameworks and livelihood patterns, community structures, ecology of the language environment, family models and patterns of marriage. This is also the reason that despite the multiple tools for assessing language endangerment, there would still seem to be relatively little room for generalisations in predicting the fates of languages (see also Laakso *et al.*, 2016).

Modern societal developments, most notably, centralised states with schooling infrastructure, have resulted in a dichotomous and hierarchical understanding of languages. There are languages used by minorities and languages used by majorities. The power imbalance resurfaces in the idea of the protection of the human rights of minorities, stipulating that speakers of smaller languages should enjoy added protection against the hegemony of majority languages. Some authors speak about killer languages that occupy space in mass media, global economy and politics, pointing out that even languages with a hegemonic majority status, such as the languages of nation states, may eventually become endangered (cf. Phillipson, 2003; Rapatahana & Bunce, 2012). Even more obviously, languages spoken by small-numbered peoples without any established societal position are in need of special protection.

Without a doubt, the emergence of these new forms of linguistic diversity is also influenced by the increased mobility of people, both in the physical, as well as the social and virtual senses. Mobility has a twofold effect in that it disperses the old language communities and creates new ones. In many communities, traditional multilingual and dialectal diversity disappears due to urbanisation, standardisation of language use, increased educational standards and changing forms of media use.

In the research concerning language extinction, one can observe some contradictions that prove to be crucial for the chapters in this book. Some scholars stress the urgency of taking action in order to preserve the linguistic heritage of the world and express concern about the perceived shift to uniform models of linguistic behaviour (Crystal, 2003; Nettle & Romaine, 2002; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). Others consider the ongoing linguistic changes to be an inevitable development and diversification of the language situation of the world based on many local linguistic resources (Mufwene, 2005). The extreme forms of the deconstructive school of language variation even question the existence of languages as systems and stress the fluid character of language practices and use, postulating that

all languages are 'invented', i.e. social constructs (Makoni & Pennycook, 2007). Self-evidently, in such a framework, language death is also not too relevant for linguistics.

Those communities labelled as linguistically 'superdiverse' by some scholars (Blommaert & Rampton, 2011) resemble the traditional multilingual communities of hunter-gatherers in the sense that they represent multiple voices, but are simultaneously dissimilar in that much of the language use happens not in oral conversation but in virtual media. Although there is vast variation in the language use of such communities, they exist within a social sphere dominated by formal education and elaborated media, and much of the variation is likely developing towards the standard variants of state and global languages.

Thus, there seem to be grounds to suggest that the linguistic heritage of the present world is simultaneously more endangered and more diverse than earlier. It may well be that much of the current diversity is likely to be short-lived, but some of it may be attached to social meanings and turn out to be long-lasting. Many languages disappear in the wake of the rapid modernisation processes around the globe whereas other language forms find a new social niche in seemingly similar circumstances, for instance, as an ethnic emblem of a marginal group. Such language forms survive in the new conditions of community life, albeit as vehicles for new kinds of linguistically expressed identities and in new functions, such as literary use in modern professions.

Sources of New Variation: Borrowing, Mixing and Standardisation

It is thus important to put both language endangerment and new forms of plurilingualism in their historical contexts. The weakening and disappearance of minority languages is, in many respects, an expression of the changing 'language ecology' that is also conveyed through new forms of linguistic variation. In traditional communities, language variation was overwhelmingly areal and dependent on livelihoods and natural ecological boundaries, such as river basins, mountain ridges or vegetation zones functioning as a basis for different types of livelihoods (for instance, [primordial] trade centre vs. agricultural community vs. nomadism and hunter-gathering). Alongside this kind of variation there was also social variation, often represented by different social classes using different languages, or different languages being used for speaking and writing (if writing was known in the communities under consideration). There are, indeed, many recorded cases of plurilingualism in such communities (cf. Lüpke & Storch [2013] on some extreme forms of variation in Africa).

In modern societies, languages are used as instruments for communication in expert professions, popular culture and social networking, and new language varieties arise constantly for the purposes of communities that are not necessarily geographically confined. These include different types of professional jargons, youth slangs, mixed codes used in popular entertainment and also world Englishes used in international communities. The newness of the situation is not that people are coming into contact with multilingual spheres, but that the linguistic sources of the variation are different: media, standard languages and education. Also, there is much more room for individual identity creation than in traditional communities. Elaborate language skills are required for working life, which is both central to modern identity as well as largely conducted with language instead of physical force.

Another important difference is that in the new multilingual situation, monolingualism in the dominant state language is promoted at school attended by almost everyone, and alongside this, multilingualism in a few dominant global languages, most notably, English, is encouraged at the expense of the multilingual resources that exist in the local communities. Despite much rhetoric regarding the benefits of multilingualism, countries do not seem to be openly promoting multilingualism, even though minority languages are protected by almost all countries in some form (cf. Laakso *et al.*, 2016).

In mainstream sociolinguistics, a recent attempt has been made to create a typology for the linguistic changes that make a language more or less complex based on parameters such as the characteristics of the language learning situation (childhood vs. adult), the size of a community (small languages tend to be more complex) and the number of non-native speakers (Trudgill, 2011). However, such a typology largely leaves aside those language forms that are the most likely to emerge in the present contact situations: mixed and intertwined codes characteristic of most of the plurilingual communities across the globe. Such new linguistic forms have been investigated linguistically in the frameworks of creole and code-switching studies (Matras & Bakker, 2003; Mufwene, 2000; Thomason & Kaufman, 1988).

The authors of this book also describe the sources of new language diversities, i.e. intensive borrowing, code-mixing of different languages and different variants of a single language, or the employment of linguistic resources of multiple origins. As already mentioned briefly, in the study of plurilingual communities, some scholars have replaced homogeneous entities of studies of historical and social variation, such as languages and speech communities, with more dynamic concepts such as multilingualism, 'plurilingualism' or 'linguistic resources'. For instance, Blommaert and Rampton (2011) question the existence of languages, speech communities and ethnolinguistic groups. Some other scholars working on linguistic variation have proposed that people do not speak 'languages' but instead

'are languaging', i.e. using pieces of languages or linguistic resources to construct social identities (Jørgensen *et al.*, 2016).

However, one should note that many contact languages, i.e. different types of pidgins, creoles, intertwined and mixed codes that emerge in a multilingual situation on the basis of such influential lexifier languages as English, French or Spanish, typically develop towards the standard variety of the corresponding lexifier language. For instance, Paunonen (2006) has described the evolution of *stadin slangi*, a Helsinki working-class-related vernacular consisting of Finnish mixed with multiple Swedish and Russian elements, from a variety that was almost completely unintelligible to the speakers of traditional varieties of Finnish at the time of its emergence, into a modern variety of Finnish, through the gradual loss of most of its characteristic borrowed lexicon. At the same time, there are examples of creoles which have gained new social functions as languages emblematic of particular communities and even countries, such as Tok Pisin in Papua New Guinea (cf. Romaine, 1994) or Jamaican creole in Jamaica, which would seem to have gained more ground at the expense of standard English (Sand, 1999: 73–74).

Many of the chapters of this book also note that attempts to promote minority protection by standardising minority identities and creating language planning and education regimes for them can result in increased linguistic variation. Minority languages that have been predominantly used as languages of local communities typically lack much of the vocabulary or stylistic resources characteristic of languages used in education, mass media and administration. Insecurity among speakers of many minority languages regarding language norms, as well as the feeling of inferiority regarding the resources of the minority language in comparison with the majority tongue, lead to attempts to use minority tongues in a new way, by imitating styles and genres of the majority tongue, or by using intensive code-switching with it. The incomplete learning of many small languages by community members due to changing social networks and intergenerational ties, and the attempts to replace their social meaning with the resources of the majority language, create situations where there is more variation in an endangered language community than there would be in a stable and primordial community. To use a metaphor, linguistic variation turns into a red giant star that shines its brightest just before it burns out.

An even more insidious danger to the linguistic diversity of the world may be the fact that international communication, increased translation and copying of forms of cultural expression brings the conceptual realms associated with different languages ever closer (cf. Cronin, 1998). Many of the unique conceptualisations and metaphors of the world's languages related to areally confined, endangered cultural traditions are currently under threat (Idström & Piirainen, 2012). They are being replaced by

widespread conceptions of communities and individuals, emotions and human relations. In the absence of great cultural differences and with the need for communication over language boundaries, a few global or important regional languages are easily favoured in communication in different contexts. This creates additional challenges for smaller national languages and especially for those thousands of minority languages which are traditionally associated with predominantly oral forms of culture.

However, one should also stress the fact that in those contexts where minority languages have undergone a successful revitalisation process and continue to function in the new circumstances, this development often takes place through a change in the linguistic environment of the language community, typically a conscious creation of new functional domains for the use of the minority language (cf. the modernisation of the Inari Sámi language [Olthuis *et al.*, 2012; Pasanen, 2015]; a number of similar cases have also been described by Hinton and Hale [2001]). It remains to be seen how much of the cultural knowledge and identities embedded in a particular language form will survive these processes, yet it is clear that only those language forms that are conclusively dead are immune to evolution and change.

Changing Language Communities: Progress or Decay?

While linguists and social scientists agree in principle that the disappearance of languages is both an ongoing as well as a regrettable process, they disagree somewhat about whether the many social changes related to language death are desirable, unavoidable or harmful (Mufwene, 2005). The question of whether one is inclined to consider the present linguistic situation of the world in negative or positive terms from the point of view of diversity would seem to be related to attitudes towards modernisation and globalisation of societies. Those scholars who have an overwhelmingly positive attitude towards different types of social changes and modernisation of human communities view the change in the language situation of the world as inevitable and stress the richness of the new variation emerging in new types of contemporary societies. Other scholars, in turn, who are more sceptical, remark that those communities disappearing due to globalisation successfully guaranteed social well-being, solid identities and protection for their members, and that the loss of languages may mean loss of cultural and human diversity.

The authors of the book argue that many of those forces behind language endangerment are related to the changing role of language and linguistic identities in the modern world. Thus, it is not so much the question of languages being endangered, but rather languages being used for new purposes in a new social reality that requires different language skills than were needed in the old communities. If the languages in

primordial agricultural and hunter-gatherer communities were primarily the means of everyday communication and secondarily the cultural emblems of corresponding groups, in a (post)modern, literary culture they become tools of work, learning and habitus creation (cf. also Saarikivi & Toivanen, 2015). The social networks of an individual, based on literary language use, electronic and social media, now reach far beyond the local communities that function as the social base for the world's old linguistic diversity. At the same time as the new networks weaken the old areally-based diversity by introducing new identity choices, linguistic repertoires and entire languages that replace the old diversities, they also bring in novel sources for new variation.

Probably the most important single factor causing change in the modern language environment of the world is that schooling and education can only be acquired using a relatively small number of the world's languages (cf. Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). This seriously affects the cultural and social frameworks that have previously supported the smaller languages. Formal state-controlled education, in principle, is often about the standardisation of world views, conceptual realms and also language use. However, many chapters of this volume (cf. Edgarova, Partanen & Saarikivi, Pischlöger) also demonstrate the confusing role of language norms, which create new variation, especially when the learning of the standard has not been successful. Self-evidently, schooling in majority languages causes language shift to these dominant tongues, especially when combined with increased mobility and urbanisation, but it also accelerates language change and increases variation within the minority languages through code-copying and translation.

Obviously, schooling also has a role as a vehicle transmitting knowledge and values, which may have a positive effect on language skills and maintenance. Schooling is often considered a key objective of development aid projects, for instance, while considerably less attention is paid to the fact that such a complex process as acquiring elaborate skills in symbolic systems such as language use often also means a profound cultural change in the conceptual and value systems of traditional communities. This threatens their cultural heritage while simultaneously offering possibilities for development, integration and self-protection. Obviously, no simple solution is available for this contradiction, but a wide array of context-sensitive means has to be developed around the globe to foster valuable cultural traditions and diversity of world views while simultaneously providing everyone with opportunities to receive education.

Changes in linguistic identities are related to changes in economic and ecological frameworks for language use. In the First World, nationalism united large swathes of people under the symbolic concepts of shared nationhood and language as early as the second half of the 19th century (Anderson, 1983). These nation states blurred and uprooted much of