Language Diversity and Language Contact

Essays by Stanley Lieberson

Selected and Introduced by
Anwar S. Dil

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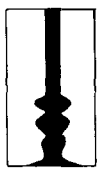

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EDITOR'S NOTE

These essays have been reprinted from the originals with only minor changes made in the interest of uniformity of style and appearance. In cases where substantive revisions have been made, proper notation has been added. Misprints and mistakes appearing in the originals have been corrected in consultation with the author. In some cases references, notes, and bibliographical entries have been updated. Footnotes marked by asterisks have been added by the Editor.

Introduction

Stanley Lieberson was born on April 20, 1933, in Montreal. He grew up in Brooklyn, New York, in a multilingual family and early in life became aware of the reality of language as an ethnic and social marker. After his early education in the New York public schools and two years at Brooklyn College, he transferred to the University of Chicago, where he earned his Master's degree in Sociology in 1958 and his Ph. D. in 1960. In 1959 he joined the University of Iowa as Instructor in Sociology and became actively involved in research at the Iowa Urban Community Research Center. Two years later he moved to the University of Wisconsin, where in 1966 he became Professor of Sociology. In 1967 he transferred to the University of Washington, where he also served as Director of the Center for Studies in Demography and Ecology (1968-71); and from 1971 to 1974 he was Professor of Sociology at the University of Chicago, serving also as Associate Director of the Population Research Center. Since 1974 he has been Professor of Sociology at the University of Arizona at Tucson.

Lieberson spent the summer of 1970 as Visiting Professor at Stanford University, and the year 1979-80 as Claude Bissell Distinguished Visiting Professor at the University of Toronto. He has served actively in editorial and advisory positions for a number of professional journals, notably Social Problems (1965-67), Sociological Inquiry (1965-67), American Journal of Sociology (1969-74), Sociological Methods and Research (1971—), Language in Society (1972-74), International Journal of the Sociology of Language (1974—), Canadian Journal of Sociology (1975—), Language Problems and Language Planning (1977—), and Social Forces (1980—). He received a Guggenheim fellowship in 1972-73. He has served on the Committee on Sociolinguistics of the Social Science Research Council (1964-70), the Board

of Directors of the Population Association of America (1969-72), the Government Statistics Committee of the American Sociological Association (1968-73), and the Advisory Committee on Sociology of the National Science Foundation (1978-81). He was elected to serve as President of the Sociological Research Association for 1980-81.

Lieberson's first publication, a paper on ethnic groups and the practice of medicine published in 1958, was followed in 1959 by a paper on ethnic segregation and assimilation written in collaboration with his dissertation director and mentor, Otis Dudley Duncan. The following year saw the publication of Metropolis and Region, a monumental study by Duncan and four of his associates, including Lieberson, whose main contributions were to the sections dealing with economic functions and the interregional flow of funds. Some years later Lieberson followed up his work on the project by collaborating with Beverly Duncan on Metropolis and Region in Transition (1970). This volume aimed at measuring changes in the ecological system and the role of cities in the national economy, and the relation of metropolitan growth to regional differentiation of the economy. Lieberson was particularly interested in the financial system of the United States and the changing role of various cities in that system.

An earlier book of Lieberson's, Ethnic Patterns in American Cities (1963), the revised version of his dissertation, is a study of ethnic segregation in ten American cities based on data from the censuses of 1910 to 1950. Praised by reviewers for its useful discussion of the contact mechanism in diffusion and for its careful statistical analysis of demographic material, it remains to this day a standard work on sociocultural assimilation and integration.

In 1964 a seminar on sociolinguistics held at Indiana University brought Lieberson into contact with linguists and other scholars concerned with developing the interdisciplinary area of sociolinguistics. The problems raised by these scholars interested him, and stimulated his work in this area. In 1966 he edited a special issue of Sociological Inquiry entitled Explorations in Sociolinguistics, which was reprinted the following year as a special number of the International Journal of American Linguistics and also published as a book by Indiana University Press. A collection of thirteen major papers by leading sociolinguists that constituted a pioneering effort to build a

bridge between linguists and social scientists in general, Explorations proved to be a landmark in the development of sociolinguistics. Lieberson's paper, on "Language Questions in Censuses" (chapter 14 in this volume), proposed new ways of evaluating the accuracy of census returns on bilingualism and using them to make sociolinguistic inferences.

Another opportunity that helped deepen Lieberson's understanding of the role of language in sociocultural identity was his experience as an invited observer of the five-nation language survey of East Africa in 1968. This survey gave him a firsthand insight into the use of sociolinguistic resources in planning for better national development, and led to suggestions for improving the methods and procedures of sociolinguistic surveys (chapter 13).

Lieberson's paper "Bilingualism in Montreal: A Demographic Analysis" (chapter 8), a pilot study for a project on societal bilingualism and ethnic identity maintenance and shift in Canada, attracted the attention of the newly appointed Canadian Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, which gave him a research assignment and supplied him with invaluable statistical cross-tabulations from the 1961 census. His book Language and Ethnic Relations in Canada (1970) offers a wide-ranging ecological perspective on Canadian society, with its visible interplay of language, ethnic relations, and demographic processes. Inevitably, because of the sensitive political nature of the language problem in Canada, the book has had its detractors. But Language recommended it as required reading for social scientists and educators concerned with bilingualism, and it has since proved helpful to the study of language and ethnic problems in many another nation.

The essays selected for this volume represent Lieberson's most significant work on bilingualism and its social causes, on language and ethnic relations in their sociocultural context, and on methods and models of sociolinguistic research. Although he has succeeded better than perhaps any other scholar of our time in dealing quantitatively with the societal context of bilingualism, and in particular with mother-tongue maintenance and shift, a proper recognition of his accomplishment must also take into account his theoretical

insights, especially those involving the role of ethnicity in language diversity. Lieberson holds that language contact between ethnic groups is a major source of linguistic diversity, and that the sociolinguistic consequences typically reflect the nature of the ethnic relations involved (chapter 4). Among his other notable contributions to sociolinguistic theory are his expansion of Joseph Greenberg's concept of language diversity measurement, and his formulation of formal models of the role of language in the integration and differentiation of the various regions of a nation-state. Few indeed are the language scientists who can match the sociolinguistic achievements of this gifted sociologist.

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Contents

Part I. Ethnic Diversity and National Language

1 | Language and Ethnic Relations: A Neglected Problem

Multilingual societies are found in all parts of the world, in older nations as well as the newly created states, in both the present and in man's past. Currently there is more than one viable language spoken in such countries as Belgium, Switzerland, and the Soviet Union in Europe, Canada, Bolivia, and Guatemala in the new world, India, the Philippines, and Cyprus in Asia, and South Africa, Nigeria, and the Congo in Africa. Diverse populations gave up their mother tongues in the course of a few generations in the United States, but ethnic groups in many nations have kept their distinctive languages for centuries. Even in the United States, the Pennsylvania Dutch, the Mexicans, and the French maintain linguistic enclaves which survive to the present day.

The political and social situation created by linguistic diversity ranges from the harmony of Switzerland, a nation created before the days of modern nationalism (Mayer 1956; McRae 1964), to India, where the entire political fabric is torn with linguistic conflict. Although both represent extremes, there is usually at least some conflict and dissent within multilingual nations. Linguistic inequality occurs in areas such as Belgium where only two tongues are significant as well as in nations which are so diverse that some tongue must be favored as a lingua franca (Kloss 1966a). Although equality between linguistic groups is sometimes achieved in official political terms, it is rare either socially or economically. Moreover language differences are usually accompanied by racial or ethnic differences, thereby often becoming hopelessly entangled in broader issues.

When peoples with different languages are brought together under a common political entity, whether it be through voluntary

migration or by means of conquest and invasion, generally one group is in a more favorable position than others, and likewise one language enjoys a stronger position in schools and the government, in the economy, and socially. Where populations have migrated into a situation of linguistic and ethnic subordination, there normally is much less difficulty since the option of migration back to their home country provides a safety valve. Conflict is often both longer and of greater severity in multilingual societies containing peoples who were overrun by an expanding group, in colonies, and in new nations whose boundaries were carved by European empire builders (Lieberson 1961). In the latter instance, although the flag of imperialism is down, groups find they are incorporated into a nation where some other group is dominant.

Three broad solutions are possible in a multilingual society for those whose native tongue is subordinate. One is to evolve toward the dominant group, to give up the native language and reduce—if not completely eliminate—the ethnic identity it often symbolizes. Immigrants to Canada after the British conquest are following this path in varying degrees. Another solution is to reduce the handicaps facing speakers of a given language by reforming the societal institutions. This may take place through changes in the educational system, political provisions, substates, economic reform, and the like. After the adoption of Hindi as the language of India's national unity, the central government has repeatedly been forced to acknowledge the demands of other groups for linguistic self-determination, beginning with the creation of a Telegu-speaking state in Madras in 1953 (Bram 1955: 54). The third solution is most explosive of all, namely, abandoning the existing nation through outmigration, revolution, separatism, or expulsion of the dominant language group. The disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian empire was facilitated by the diverse peoples within its boundaries who had maintained their languages despite political conquest (Delgado de Carvalho 1962: 77). The French in Canada, a conquered people who are subordinate in virtually all respects except their official political status of linquistic equality, are veering in recent years toward institutional reforms if not complete separation.

Recognizing the wide range of sociological problems involved in the contact between racial and ethnic groups with different mother

tongues, this volume* develops a set of ecological propositions about the nature of linguistic pluralism, the forces which maintain such societies, and those which work toward unilingualism. The framework is then applied to the Canadian setting, focusing on two related but conceptually distinct events: first, the forces which determine how groups will adapt to the presence of others who speak different tongues; second, the long-run factors which determine whether pluralism will be maintained or evolve into a unilingual society.

Language, Race, and Ethnic Relations

> Much bad anthropology has been made by thus carelessly taking language and race as though they went always and exactly together. Yet they do go together to a great extent. Although what a man's language really proves is not his parentage but his bringing-up, yet most children are in fact brought up by their own parents, and inherit their language as well as their features.
>
> —Sir Edward B. Tylor, 1881

An association does exist in the world between ethnic groups and languages, although some scholars have gone too far by suggesting that speakers of language are members of a common race (see the discussion by Thompson 1961: 228). Very likely the forces of isolation in the period prior to widespread literacy and mass communication helped to create the conditions necessary for both new peoples and new tongues. As Znaniecki (1952: 7-8) observes, the maintenance of a cultural complex such as a language requires prolonged direct contacts among those who use it. In many instances, the word for an ethnic group is either identical to or has the same root as the word for their language, for example French, German, Polish. Thus the Germanic tongue once used by Jews in many parts of Europe is sometimes popularly referred to as "Jewish" rather than "Yiddish."

This tendency in an earlier period to associate language and pronunciation with specific ethnic and racial groups led to some

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*Stanley Lieberson, Language and Ethnic Relations in Canada (New York: Wiley, 1970).

extreme positions such as the assumption that Jews were incapable of acquiring the spoken language of any European country because of physical differences in the anatomy of their speech and hearing organs (Fishberg 1911: 388-90). The German word "mauscheln" referred to both the peculiar pronunciation of Jews as well as vulgar speech. Fishberg himself advances the more plausible position that these differences in pronunciation were due to the isolation of Jews after the development of ghettoes and the perpetuation of these differences by the absence of non-Jewish teachers.

Since so many instances come to mind where ethnic groups in contact are linguistically distinct and, likewise, where a common tongue is shared by different ethnic groups, debate over this issue is foolhardy. The solution is very simple, but most important: while ethnic differences are sometimes not accompanied by linguistic differences, it is rare to find two or more mutually unintelligible languages used in a society without the speakers belonging to different ethnic groups. "In a great majority of contacts between groups speaking different mother tongues, the groups constitute, at the same time, distinct ethnic or cultural communities" (Weinreich 1953: 91). Indeed the overlap between ethnic and linguistic boundaries, viewed more realistically as a dynamic relationship, is often only partial but never random. In societies where a population has begun its shift to another group's mother tongue, an ethnic group may not be fully distinguishable on the basis of mother tongue. English was the mother tongue of nearly half the second-generation Norwegians in the United States in 1940, for example, but the use of Norwegian as a first language was still far more common in this ethnic group than in any other second-generation subpopulation.

Although linguists pay considerable attention to language contact as a major factor in altering languages through interference and borrowing (Mackey 1965: 239), the sociological setting in which language contact and bilingual behavior occurs has not received sufficient study. There are some important exceptions, such as the contributions of Weinreich, Haugen, and Deutsch (curiously, all were published in 1953), and, more recently, the work of Fishman and associates (1966), but the processes affecting racial and ethnic maintenance of language are far from fully understood. Language is of importance for a wide array of problems, ranging from its significance in assim-

ilation to the potential for nationalism and separatism inherent in any country where groups maintain distinctive languages. Perhaps because of the remarkable speed and relative ease with which ethnic groups in the United States shifted to English, the linguistic dimension to race and ethnic relations has not received the attention from American sociologists which it merits.

The surrender of distinctive mother tongues is a necessary step in the assimilation of ethnic groups in contact. Although it is true that groups may retain their identity without a unique tongue, it is difficult to visualize complete assimilation in other areas if their native languages are maintained. In this sense language provides an important shield against assimilation. Provision for adequate education in the group's language as well as the opportunity to use their native tongue in the government are two of the special rights which groups tend to seek in order to prevent their assimilation (United Nations Commission on Human Rights, 1950, pp. 2-3). Some immigrant groups in the United States, to no avail, sought to maintain their tongues by establishing voluntary schools for their children. Understandably, from the perspective of the politically dominant ethnic group, linguistic change has been viewed as one of the prime targets for breaking down old loyalties and inducing ethnic assimilation.

Linguistic assimilation is normally an irreversible process since it is unlikely that a dead language will later be revised to the point of actually replacing its successor unless there is large-scale migration of new speakers or selective emigration. The restoration of Gaelic has been a basic part of the national policy in the Irish Free State since the nation was formed, yet the percentage speaking the tongue has "remained more or less constant since 1936 despite intensive efforts during the past quarter century" (O'Brien 1964: 4). Israel provides an exception in that Hebrew was revived from an almost exclusively religious function into a national language (Bachi 1956: 184).

Linguistic similarities can support both in-group unity and out-group distance since language serves both as a symbol of other differences and as a restriction on the communication possible between ethnic groups. Populations which differ in their native tongues often see themselves distinctive in other respects. The symbolic element to language has carried over even into major subclasses of