WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE MAINTENANCE OF HERITAGE LANGUAGES?

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1. Introduction

Globalization has entailed economic, technological and consuming growth in an era of rapidly changing political-economic systems. Unfortunately, it has also led to language shift and language loss. As the number of immigrants increases every year, the phenomena of language shift and language loss have come into focus in the last decades in countries such as the United States, Canada, Australia and several others. A spin-off effect of this has been that attention is now given to the use of minority languages as a valuable resource and this creates an interest in the maintenance and development of heritage languages. During the last decades, various Heritage Language (HL) programmes have been established in Canada and the evaluation of these programmes has proven positive (Cummins, 1983, 1993; Cummins & Danesi, 1990; Swain & Lapkin, 1991).

Although official Canadian policy, at least in recent years, has been supportive of "multiculturalism", it has been more contentious to extend multiculturalism to encompass other heritage languages (HL) than English and French (Cummins, 1993), especially when it comes to using public funding to support heritage language education. On the one hand, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) recently decided to eliminate heritage and international languages integrated programmes, because of lack of funding (2001, Toronto Observer, www.bccc.com/Observer.online/). On the other hand, the province of British Columbia has increased its funding for the provincial heritage language programmes (April 2001, www. gov.bc.ca) so that "the heritage language programmes [can] give young British Columbians a chance to gain

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marketable language skills that will keep B.C. competitive in the global economy" (Hammell, Minister of Multiculturalism and Immigration of B.C., 2001). Different funding policies for heritage language programmes have generated extensive debate about whose responsibility it is to maintain and develop heritage languages. In this article, the roles that government, ethno-cultural communities and parents play in heritage language maintenance and development will be discussed.

2. Factors that influence heritage language maintenance and development

How to support language maintenance and encourage the growth of heritage languages is a controversial topic in the fields of linguistics, anthropology and educational psychology. Factors that support language maintenance and promote language vitality involve various aspects of political, social, cultural and linguistic contexts. Giles, Bourhis & Taylor (1977) proposed a three-factor model of ethno-linguistic vitality including status factors, demographic factors, and institutional factors. Bourhis (2001) has expanded on this model, adding several sub-factors in each category. Figure 1 presents the three dimensions of the structural variables pertaining to heritage language maintenance and development.

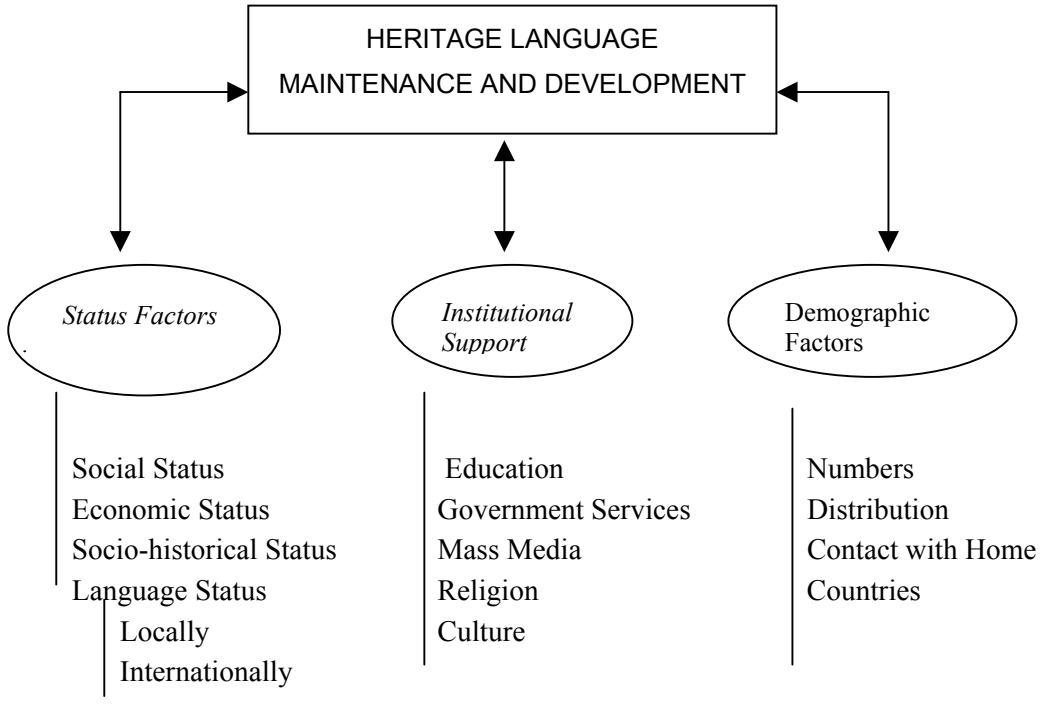


Figure 1. Factors affecting heritage language maintenance and development (adapted from Bourhis, 2001).

A key issue in language maintenance and development concerns *Status factors* which involve a configuration of prestige variables related to a speech community's social prestige, its socio-historical status, economic status, and the prestige of its language and culture locally and internationally (Bourhis, 2001). The higher the status of a language, the more likely it is to be maintained and developed. High status of a heritage language can contribute to a more positive collective social identity of the language speakers who, in turn, mobilize the interest among intergroup and public to use the language.

A minority language has many more chances of survival if it enjoys historical or cultural influence in the world, such as is the case of the French language in North America and many European countries. In comparison with a less influential minority language such as Chinese in North America, the French language benefits from more vitality on the "status profile". The economic status of a minority language is a key element in language maintenance and development. For instance, if a minority language group has experienced unemployment or is a low-income group such as guest workers in some European countries and immigrants in North America, then a language shift is likely to occur. The opposite may occur when a minority language enjoys a high economic status, as is the case with Japanese; then the opportunity of utilising it is no longer restricted to its own language group, but is expanded to the international territory.

Institutional support factors refers to the extent to which an ethno-linguistic group receives formal and informal representation in the various institutes of a nation, region or community. Whether a language can be maintained and developed is largely dependent on the use of the language in a wide variety of institutions in a region. Examples of this are the use of the language as lingua franca in national, regional and local organisations, mass media, commerce and industry, religion and not least education. Informal support refers to the extent to which speakers of a minority language have gained access to and positions in various state and private activities including private education, mass media, culture and religion. Formal support refers to the degree to which members of ethno-linguistic minorities have obtained positions at decision-making levels not only in the private sector but also within the government apparatus, including the education sector, the police, the judiciary system, and the civil administration (Bourhis, 2001).

The *Demographic factors* are those related to the number of group members and their distribution. According to Giles, Bourhis & Taylor (1977), there are three elements that determine the survival of a minority language when it is surrounded by a majority language. The first element is regular contact and interaction among the members of the minority group. The second element relates to the religious aspects of a minority group's language use; examples of this are Hebrew and Yiddish among Jews, Arabic among Islamic believers and German among the Amish people in Pennsylvania. The third element is the ease and frequency with which minority language speakers can travel to their homeland, thus invigorating and strengthening their language.

The Status, Institutional and Demographic factors are not mutually independent. The various elements of these factors often influence each other, interact or are inter-related with each other. In different social, political, economic and cultural contexts, the individual factors may carry more or less weight. Even so, this model of language vitality has direct implications for policymaking and provides a strong framework for language planning. I use this framework as an analytical tool to discuss the different roles that government, institutions and parents have in heritage language maintenance and development.

3. Responsibility of government

The Government is primarily responsible for creating the legal framework and establishing the regulatory policies that are conducive to building a healthy and prosperous society inhabited by happy and accomplished citizens. In terms of language, theoretically speaking, the responsibility of the government is to give all citizens the same linguistic rights including full and equal access to linguistic resources, enforced through constitutional provisions and bilingualism or multilingualism laws (Bourhis & Marshall, 1999).

According to Giles, Bourhis & Taylor (1977) and Conklin & Lourie (1983), the most important factor for language maintenance and vitality is the status of a language. While a government cannot provide a strong economic status for a minority language, it can increase the social value of a minority language by supporting its linguistic legitimacy through legislation. In doing so, efficient language laws should be established to enhance the preservation of the heritage languages and their culture. Such

laws can be found in Canada where the official English-French bilingualism serves to recognise the Francophone part of the population as a national minority and Bill 101 in Quebec protects the French language. Actually Bill 101, which obligates new immigrants arriving in Quebec to send their children to French schools, has created trilingualism in Quebec. Allophones[2] normally send their children to a heritage language school to maintain the knowledge of their mother tongue, while they learn French at a public school and adopt English as the language of Anglo-American culture and upward mobility in North America. When Canada adopted a multiculturalism law in 1971 to preserve and promote the distinctive languages and cultures of its immigrant minorities (Cummins, 1981), it legitimately increased the *social status* of the various minority languages. Enforcing this law through various HL programmes, Canada has efficiently enabled minority language students to appreciate their respective heritage languages and cultures and thus prevented mother tongues from disappearing through language shift. Instead, Canada has created a foundation for the development of additive bilingualism or multilingualism through its heritage language policy.

In contrast, the US policy has aimed at assimilation. By its stance and attitude in favour of integrating minorities into the mainstream, the English Language Amendment movement has inevitably devalued the status of minority languages as well as the cultures to which they relate. Under the pressure of assimilation, language shifts occur easily. James Crawford maintains that the power of English and "its hegemony in American economic and cultural life, along with its high social status, make it irresistible to younger generations" (Crawford, 1999: 2). This is why, even as members of the largest linguistic minority in the United States, Spanish speakers are caught in the battleground of language shift and language maintenance. As Carreira (2000) puts forth, one of the most serious obstacles to preserving Spanish in the United States is its low social status. Carreira claims that the prevalence of negative attitudes about U.S. Spanish in the general media, in educational settings, and often even in the home, presents a serious obstacle to the promotion of Spanish among young Hispanics. Therefore, she calls for an educational campaign to teach Spanish as heritage language to Hispanic students. She believes that only when the students recognise the linguistic

[2] Within the province of Quebec in Canada, the term Allophone is commonly used to refer to people whose mother tongue is other than English and French.

legitimacy of their home language will they be motivated to protect U.S. Spanish as a crucial marker of group identity.

In summary, the roles and responsibilities of government for heritage language maintenance are to establish a policy supported by law that protects the minority languages, and to facilitate an increase of their social value and an enhancement of their social status. Such policymaking and legislation, when implemented and appropriately enforced, together with adequate support from families and communities, may significantly increase the chances for heritage languages being maintained and even further developed.

4. Responsibility of educational and cultural communities

Maintenance of a minority language is affected by the extent and nature of the use of the language in a wide range of institutions, such as cultural organisations and educational settings. Whether a minority language can be seen in mass media such as TV, the radio, and the newspapers, affects to a great degree its status. Therefore, when a minority language is used in religious rituals and administrative services (in schools and work places), there is a considerable possibility for language survival and maintenance. Consequently, schools have been the preferred vehicle to promote both minority values and assimilation in that the school has been the epitome of linguistic socialization (Ely & Gleason, 1995). It provides an environment for social and verbal interaction that continues home culture and language use (Heath, 1983). If schooling in a minority language does not exist, the chances of long-term survival of the language can be severely diminished.

While the use of a language within an educational setting is an essential condition for its maintenance, it is not always a sufficient one. According to Gardner (1985), language attitudes and motivations can be crucial not only for the desire to learn a language, but also for predicting an individual's language retention and language loss over time. A formal environment such as the classroom with various materials and resources is a precondition for language maintenance to occur. Therefore, to motivate language maintenance, a well-designed curriculum, rich material resources, implicit and explicit emphasising of values by the teacher, and appropriate teacher education are all of them necessary. An institution as a primary or secondary school has as one of its

primary responsibilities to provide encouraging and meaningful environments that promote the maintenance of heritage languages. Recent studies have shown that the effectiveness of heritage language maintenance is closely related to access to material resources or interest in heritage language materials (McQuillan, 1998), to a positive attitude towards identifying with ethnic groups (Tse, 1998) and to favourable attitudes to ethno-linguistic vitality (Feuerverger, 1989a, 1989b). In her four-stage developmental model of ethnic identity formation, Tse (1998) suggests that school supported heritage language programmes can foster positive attitudes towards heritage language learning and ethnic culture. However, if the experience of minority language education in childhood is unpleasant, if a heritage language school is perceived as a boring and unattractive place to be, the heritage language is unlikely to be maintained and valued (Curdt-Christiansen, 1999; Feuerverger, 1997). Such perceptions of heritage language schools are not unusual owing to inadequate teacher education, insufficient professional development, and the lack of material resources. To illustrate this perception, Feuerverger reflects on her own experience from attending a heritage language school as a child of Polish/Jewish immigrants and provides her own cultural narrative (Feuerverger, 1997: 44).

> My minority language educational experiences in childhood were a very dismal affair. I was sent to a Yiddish language programme after regular school hours, which took place in the basement of a dilapidated community centre. The teacher didn't know how to engage her pupils and so our main activity in class was to gaze out the window at the other children who were playing in the street. There might as well have been bars on those windows. It was clear: nobody wanted to be in that classroom. The books were old, torn and grey. That is what I remember. No pretty pictures. The stories held no meaning and certainly no excitement. The only fun in class was when the more "creative" boys would "slingshot" erasers through the air.
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> (Feuerverger, 1997: 44)

Feuerverger's reflection on her heritage language school experience evidences that schools are crucial environmental contexts in that the quality of heritage language programmes they offer can make a significant difference in heritage language maintenance. She also points out another crucial issue which a cultural community plays in heritage language maintenance. While offering a comfortable and inviting place for the heritage language school is essential, culturally organised activities are also indispensable for heritage language maintenance to occur. According to Wenger (1998), educational settings are formative sites for identity construction and education is transformative. Educational designs that offer opportunities for engagement in

community practices both inside school and outside school are powerful factors to shape the outcome of heritage language education. Therefore, the cultural community is responsible for providing the heritage language students with meaningful and fulfilling socially and culturally defined activities to encourage them to be engaged in "communities of practice" (Wenger, 1998).

In short, teachers, communities, heritage language programmes and schools constitute learning resources through their cultural, pedagogical or institutional roles. Both schools and cultural communities are essential vehicles for maintenance of the minority language. The choice of whether to include heritage language instruction as part of the educational programme is not the only challenge that educational policy makers have to meet. Educational institutions must also decide what it is that can enhance heritage language use, how it should be included in the curriculum, how much heritage language instruction is optimal, and what constitutes the best quality of subject instruction (Snow, 1990). Educational institutions and cultural communities cannot alone be responsible for heritage language maintenance; parents, policies and social conditions are all essential "intertextual resources" for the production of heritage language.

5. Responsibilities of parents

As the primary resource for language socialisation, parents have an important role to play in heritage language maintenance by providing children with interactions in their mother tongue. This socialisation process encompasses both the ways in which the language is used, i.e. the function and social distribution of the language, and the ways in which world views and culture related to that language are embedded in it (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986).

When a heritage language is used at home, the probability is high that the language will be developed and maintained. Using a heritage language at home has both psychological and social impact on the younger generation of heritage language speakers. Although children may face the challenges of assimilation and the pressure to use only the mainstream language at school, insistence on using the heritage language at home could reassure children of its usefulness. This is especially the case when the heritage language use is reinforced by visits to the home country, accompanied by

culture exposure in an ethno-community, including exposure to mass media and pop culture. In literacy studies, it has been evidenced that parental influence is a significant indicator of their children's literacy development (Heath, 1983; Gadsden, 1998; Curdt-Christiansen, 2001). Such influence reveals the parents' values and beliefs about literacy. This influence applies also to heritage language development. One of the crucial issues with heritage language use at home is that it reflects parents' attitudes towards their own heritage. Such attitudes have great impact on the children in that children often develop values corresponding to those of their parents. In their studies of immigrant children and their families, Curdt-Christiansen (2001), Maguire (1999) and Dagenais & Day (1999) found that children's value systems are similar to those of their parents.

For many parents, the heritage language has various symbolic representations and values. In her study of Chinese parents' attitude to and involvement in their children's triliteracy practices, Curdt-Christiansen (2001) found that there are four reasons for parents to maintain heritage language (Chinese) use at home: 1) Chinese language is viewed as an ethnic marker; 2) Chinese language is viewed as a communication tool for maintaining ties with family members in and outside China; 3) Chinese language is perceived as a cultural tool required for accessing knowledge and culture; and 4) Chinese language is seen as a tool for social advancement. A survey conducted by Noro (1997) in Canada finds similar results. Noro finds six reasons for the first generation of Japanese to teach their heritage language to their children: a) to communicate with their children, b) to preserve parental authority, c) to have pride in their Japanese ethnicity, d) to understand both cultures, e) to have an advantage for a future career, and f) to communicate with relatives and people in Japan. In a recent study, Shibata (2000) addresses the problem of how immigrant parents from Japan can pass on their heritage language to their children in a location where ethno-linguistic vitality is low as in the United States. Shibata found that parents' effort in heritage language maintenance is limited in terms of their ability, patience, time and resources. She concludes that community support is indispensable for heritage language development.

In addition to the positive attitudes of parents toward their heritage language, parents should also foster the children's inner motivation to learn the heritage language. In doing so, they can participate in their children's study by providing them with the

cultural knowledge they possess, thus exerting influence on their children's heritage language development. According to Fishman (1991), minority languages in print have higher status and image. Parents will do well by providing their children with a HL literacy-rich environment in which the communication between them can go beyond the oral level to literacy. Literacy in the minority language is a solid foundation for its maintenance. In addition, being literate in a minority language means not being subject to majority language print media only. Moreover, HL literacy allows the heritage culture, political viewpoints and ideological outlook to be presented, all of which may increase the likelihood of the heritage language being maintained and even further developed.

6. Conclusion

While reasons of heritage language loss can be complex and multiple, factors that influence heritage language maintenance and development can also be complicated. A powerful language policy alone cannot achieve the goal, neither can parents or educational settings on their own. Programmes that are implemented without sufficient resources are likely to fail and set back the goals and objectives of heritage education. For attempts at heritage language maintenance to be successful, a heritage language community must be motivated and supportive of heritage language programmes. They can provide indispensable resources for language learning. So can the family, as it is responsible for the initial heritage language development by establishing the foundation for heritage language and culture acquisition. Therefore, all of these three agencies must complement each other to ensure success, continuity, and valuing of heritage language.

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