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Preserving Dialects of an Endangered Language

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Abstract

Language planning research and practice have largely ignored, or considered problematic, the diversity within endangered languages. Such a stance, though, conflicts with speakers' attitudes and desires, which often place high value on specific dialects. As grassroots, bottom-up approaches move to the forefront, so do concerns about the maintenance of distinct dialects of endangered languages. Dialect preservation has emerged (implicitly or explicitly) as a concurrent, complementary goal. Based on descriptions of dialect death and maintenance in the literature, this article suggests that "micro" approaches to language planning favour the preservation of dialectal diversity within the broader pursuit of promoting endangered languages. (Keywords: dialect; endangered languages; indigenous languages; language planning; language shift; standardization)

Introduction

Within language preservation activities, what place is there for the preservation of dialects? Dialects are being lost alongside languages. Although dialects may be highly valued by their speakers, macro approaches to language planning, and more specifically endangered language revitalization, have traditionally either ignored or undermined dialectal variation, favouring the pursuit of a common, shared speech form as the natural target of interventions (cf. Haugen, 1959; Ferguson, 1968; Fishman, 1974). While top-down approaches pursue standardization as a milestone in achieving linguistic vitality, local reactions and initiatives show preserving dialects is a salient goal for speakers. This article examines descriptions of dialect death and maintenance in the literature, and shows how micro approaches to language planning can favour the preservation of dialects of endangered languages.

Micro Language Planning

Micro level language planning is locally driven, for and in specific contexts (Baldauf, 2005), where speakers are primary agents of the planning (Nahir, 1998). It reflects efforts by

local groups (indigenous people, linguistic minorities, etc.) to determine and shape language situations based on their own needs and priorities. Such approaches contrast with top-down policies, or local implementation thereof (Baldauf, 2005), although micro and macro planning may influence each other, for example where grassroots resistance comes in reaction to a top-down policy, or where governmental funding is provided to support local initiatives. Such grassroots solutions to local problems are increasingly observed (cf. Tollefson, 2002), and efforts to preserve dialectal diversity as a local priority within language revitalization is just one example. Although explicit cases of efforts to preserve dialects are rare in the literature (perhaps because they are indeed being pursued at the micro level without academic or governmental support or interference), the few documented cases are illuminating as to the possibilities for context-specific and locally-driven planning to preserve dialectal diversity while preserving and promoting the indigenous language.

“Dialect” as a Target of Language Planning

Despite relatively little mention of it in endangered language research, all languages have some degree of variation, often on multiple levels, even if discrete varieties are difficult to objectively delimit. Preserving dialects, then, while a salient goal for speakersⁱ, faces the initial dilemma of identifying precisely what the object of preservation initiatives will be. This paper focuses on regional varieties of languages, or dialects, but acknowledges social varieties (or sociolects: speech forms characteristic of specific age groups, genders, or socioeconomic status) and contextual varieties (or registers: variation in language use depending on the specific speech situation) as equally worthy of attention in efforts to revitalize threatened languages in their

fullest state. These speech varieties have characteristic pronunciations, vocabulary and expressions; they may also have different grammatical structures, as well as corresponding social rules or norms for interacting and interpreting speech (cf. Wolfram *et al.*, 1999a). Some features are shared across dialects; some are used more frequently in one area, but understood everywhere, while others are geographically limited. Even within a given individual, speech forms vary. For this reason, while researchers can identify large dialect areas based on shared features, it is harder to nail down a specific number of dialects for any given language, and to establish where their boundaries objectively lie.

Furthermore, because dialects exist on a continuum, with adjacent varieties most easily intercomprehensible and more distant varieties increasingly less so, it becomes difficult even to objectively establish where a “language” begins and ends. In any case, the linguistic criteria by which all mutually intelligible speech varieties (dialects) are grouped together as a “language” are often overridden by social, cultural and political factors. There are numerous examples of “dialects” classified as separate languages (e.g. community identification of Achi as a language distinct from K’ichee [cf. England, 1996]; or Swedish legislation of Meänkieli [Finnish “dialect”] as a minority language [Winsa, 2000]). The reverse is also common, where mutually unintelligible varieties are classified as a single language, by speakers (e.g. Iroquoian self-identification [cf. Hickerson *et al.*, 1952; Hickerson, 2000]), policy-makers (e.g. Mayan official policy of “linguistic unification” [England, 1996]), and/or linguists (e.g. Dorais’ [1990; 1996] grouping of all Inuit speech varieties as a single language). Speakers, linguists and policy-makers may also disagree as to where such boundaries lie. Following a grassroots approach to language planning, classification will ultimately be up to the speech communities: “neither linguistic

distance nor intercommunicability are as relevant to RLS [reversing language shift]-efforts as the inside ('emic') view of what constitutes the 'natural [or feasible] language boundaries' to be defended" (Fishman, 1997: 183). Identification of speech varieties as dialects or separate languages will, evidently, affect priorities, strategies and methods in dialectal preservation. The micro approach is fitting for dialect preservation efforts as it allows communities' and speakers' intuitions regarding the substance of their dialects to guide planning.ⁱⁱ

Speakers' Attachment to Dialects

Local speakers' goals in language preservation often assume the recognition and continuation of their unique ways of speaking. Reasons speakers hold for valuing a dialect are many. Dialects are, at a most basic level, a communicative resource: an individual can most comfortably and effectively communicate with those who share common speech forms, and norms for using them. Conservative dialects in particular are valued as a link to the past, both at the symbolic and practical level. Knowledge of conservative dialects also allows speakers to access and understand recorded stories or oral traditions. Probably the strongest factor in valuing dialects, though, is their identity function. Mutual use of particular dialects allows speakers to show that they share similarities, and that they belong to the same group. Among outsiders, it may also display one's separateness, for identity or political recognition.

Studies have shown in some endangered language contexts that speakers' loyalty is directed more to a specific variety than to the language overall. Dorian's (1981: 89) study of the

decline of East Sutherland Gaelic [ESG] documents such dialect loyalty, when speakers resist learning and using another, even a more prestigious, form:

[...] Solidarity within the community requires that the local speech form be maintained by community members. To abandon the local speech form is an act of linguistic disloyalty with general dissociative socioeconomic overtones. Such behaviour does occur, rather frequently, in fact, but it takes the form of abandoning Gaelic for English rather than abandoning ESG for some more prestigious form of Gaelic.

Kuter (1989) reports similar loyalty to Breton dialects (see below). Such attachment may be positive for a dialect's short term vitality, but detrimental for the language over the long-term, if speakers shift to the dominant language altogether to avoid being criticized for speaking an incorrect form of the endangered language or to emphasize cultural distinctiveness from other dialect groups.

A further caution is warranted: the observed link between dialects and regional identities has led some to suggest that a focus on dialects can lead to political fragmentation, whereas a common language leads to greater unity and equality. For example, in Mussolini's Italy, dialectal preservation was interpreted as a politically divisive and disempowering strategy: "emphasis was on the promotion of local Italian dialects as an expression of Italian identity (and as a means to rule the country by maintaining diversity)" (Pennycook, 2000: 59). A standard Basque language, in contrast, was promoted for the purposes of 'national' unity as well as language preservation (Fishman, 1997). Micro level planning, which uses the local variety as a matter of course, may help avoid the potential "divisive" interpretation of dialectal promotion.

The speakers' attachment to their dialects provides an impetus for preserving them. Understanding the value attached to specific dialects will help determine effective ways to promote and preserve them. Where a dialect is valued purely for the information it contains, and for gaining access to stories from the past, recording and documenting the dialect may be a sufficient goal. However, where the dialect is valued for its function as the preferred speech form of the community, favouring intergenerational transmission (thus expanding the speech community) and expanding the dialect's public space may also be priorities. Increasing use of and exposure to a specific dialect may also be pursued in contexts where the dialect is being promoted as an identity symbol.

Processes of Dialect Endangerment

In 1989, in his commentary on a collection of articles on language death, Hoenigswald (1989: 348) asked:

What about dialects? Which do we believe or expect: that dialect death is an unspectacular, endemic, everyday occurrence, taking place pervasively and beneath the threshold of awareness; or, contrariwise, that there can be no such thing as dialect death by definition? Or does it matter? It is probably no accident that none of the papers assembled here deals with such a situation however remotely...

Expressions of attachment to local dialects, and concerns over their potential demise, coming from speakers around the globe, as well as studies documenting the decline and death of certain dialects (cf. Leopold, 1970; Ryon 2005, Wolfram, 1997) suggest that neither is true. Dialect research and studies of endangered languages show not just the presence of dialects and their

saliency for speakers, but also the reality of their life cycle – i.e. the possibility for dialects to “die”.

Dialects become endangered by many of the same social processes as lead to the loss of languages overall. Distinct dialects emerge and are perpetuated when groups are kept separated, by geographical, social, political, cultural, or economic boundaries (cf. Cotter, 2001; Dorian, 1981; Wolfram *et al.*, 1999b). As the boundaries break down, through industrialization, urbanization, establishment of heterogeneous neighbourhoods, intermarriage, expanded opportunities for higher education, spread of mass media, improved transportation leading to increased travel, etc., so too may the characteristic dialectal forms (for case studies, see among others Dorian, 1981; Mougeon & Beniak, 1989).ⁱⁱⁱ Regional variation in a language can be diminished when speakers abandon their dialect, shifting to another variety of the same language, or to another language altogether, or when dialects in contact merge, thus losing their distinctive features. In this way, dialect death can occur through changes to the dialect itself or through changes to its status and use. Studies of language obsolescence (cf. articles in Dorian, 1989) have shown that when languages die, both levels of change often occur at the same time, and the same may be true of dialects.

One possibility when dialects are in contact is that they will undergo levelling (cf. Kerswill & Williams, 2000). In some contact situations, the most “marked”, or distinctive, or regionally limited, or difficult features fall out of use, whereas the more commonly shared or understood or simple features are maintained (for one example, see Campbell & Munzell’s [1989] discussion of levelling in Pipil). The evidence for this occurring, though, is mixed. In

other cases, little or no mixture is observed (cf. Cotter, 2001; Leopold, 1970; Wolfram, 1997). Contact may even reinforce dialectal distinctiveness, when speakers exaggerate or favour differences in their speech forms to mark in-group identification and solidarity (cf. Labov, 1963; Schilling-Estes, 1997; Wolfram, 1997). Thomason (2001) calls language attitudes the “wild card”; they shape speakers’ linguistic behaviour, and thus the outcomes of language contact.

Contact between mutually intelligible varieties of an endangered language can, further, provide support for remaining speakers and secure increased opportunities for the dialects’ use. Galloway (1992), for example, confirms that reinforcement from mutually intelligible varieties was a factor in the survival of the Samish dialect of Straits Salish. Even where convergence occurs, it can be seen as a positive sign for the language, overall, even if dialectal richness is lost. Cook’s (1995: 228) analysis of Chipewyan and Stoney concludes that “convergence is a symptom of vitality rather than decay.” If speakers are concerned primarily with the survival of their *language*, and dialect maintenance is only a secondary concern, convergence may be accepted as a natural part of their language’s continued evolution.^{iv}

In other contexts where speakers of different dialects have come into contact, the dialect has been threatened by shift to a shared speech variety that reflects neither group’s original language or dialect. Where a standard and/or more prestigious form of the language exists (e.g. English or German [see among others Leopold, 1970; Wolfram *et al.*, 1999b]), speakers may increasingly adopt that variety, to the detriment of their original dialect. In the case of minority languages, though, the speakers shift more frequently to the dominant language (which may also be a shared speech form between speakers of mutually unintelligible dialects).

One factor influencing speakers' shift to a new language or dialect is the relative prestige of the speech forms and their users. Some dialects have been stigmatized for linguistic reasons (e.g. being perceived as a less "pure" form of the language, due to innovation, borrowing, or attrition) or for social reasons, based on the status of its speakers. For example, Mougeon and Beniak (1989) report that the shift from Ontario French to English is partly precipitated by that dialect's lack of prestige next to other varieties of French (Quebecois or European), due to changes in the language. Another factor is the minority status of the dialect and its speakers. Similarly, the Valencian variety of Catalán is denigrated due to its extensive borrowing from (Castilian) Spanish; it is judged "corrupted" by contact (Pradilla, 2001). Oklahoman Cayuga speakers (Iroquoian) reportedly look down on their own dialect, which has undergone attrition and has few remaining speakers, preferring the Ontario dialect as a "better" or "more correct" form, both because it has more speakers and because it has been more conservative (Mithun, 1989). Dorian (1981) suggests that the "double-minority" status of East Sutherland Gaelic speakers (subordinate to English and to other Gaelic dialects) led to their shift to English. No one factor on its own threatens a dialect, though, and speakers do not abandon their dialects overnight. Further, even if shift is sudden, Dorian (1981) suggests that the build up to it will have been long. Speakers may have suffered a "long period of cultural and psychological disfavour which paved the way for that surrender" (Hamp, 1989: 208). In other words, ongoing circumstances may predispose speakers to adopt a speech form that carries greater benefits once boundaries break down and they have access to it. Adoption of a new speech form of course does not necessarily mean "surrender" of the first language/dialect, but studies such as Dorian's (1981) show that such replacement is a possibility and can result in dialect death.

The potential of dialect death has received little deliberate attention in endangered language research. Studies of dialect preservation or loss have generally taken place in contexts where the language itself is secure. In 1995, the American Dialect Society's annual meeting focussed on dialect death, showing interest in the issue, but discussion was primarily of English and European languages/dialects (Wolfram, 1997). Findings of such studies can be useful in understanding some of the possibilities, processes, and contributing factors in dialect death (for example, Leopold's [1970] and Wolfram *et al.*'s [1999b] studies make evident the effect of the socio-economic/political status of the speakers on the vitality of their dialect) and applied work (cf. Wolfram *et al.* 1999a) provides some strategies and concrete steps to promote endangered dialects. The applications of such research to the preservation of dialects of endangered languages can only be partial, though. Rarely in endangered language contexts are dialects threatened by speakers' shift to a more prestigious or widely spoken variety of the same language. Rather, the dialects' endangerment occurs in a broader context of shift to another language altogether.^v The question then remains: when *all* varieties of a language are threatened, how can efforts to preserve the *language* take into account the variation within it?

Standardization and Dialect Preservation as Complementary Goals

A particular challenge to the maintenance of dialects in endangered language contexts is that language diversity has sometimes been treated by macro-level planners as a problem to be overcome rather than as a resource to be valued (cf. Turell, 2001).^{vi} Wherever a language is perceived as threatened, standardization has generally been presumed as a means toward

language maintenance. Standardization has evident advantages in terms of mutual comprehension between regions, which increases opportunities to use the language. Furthermore, in order to implement the language in domains previously dominated by another (e.g. colonial) language, there is a perception that a standard variety (or standard varieties) must be chosen. A standardised language has further been perceived as a political strength, increasing the unity of the population (cf. Hinton's [2001b] discussion of the Campa, an Amazonian tribe in Peru and England's [1996] description of Mayan language policies). Dorian (1981) suggests that that having a standard literary model to relate spoken forms to can also improve speakers' ability to understand other dialects. Canagarajah (2005a [analyzing planning for local and standard English varieties in India]), points out how ambivalent communities and speakers can be, with desires both for a recognized "right" form of the language *and* acceptance of dialectal diversity, advocating a localized, bottom-up approach.

Standardization is one area in which the conflict between macro and micro level goals, and between intended and unintended results of language planning (cf. Canagarajah, 2005a), can most clearly be seen. Standardization is a thorny issue in language revitalization because people hold to their dialects (which is positive in terms of dialect preservation), and internal strife is detrimental to language preservation activities. Standardization may set one dialect (and its speakers) up over another, with corresponding social, political, economic, cultural implications. It may alienate speakers if they do not like the standard and refuse to speak it (e.g. if it is perceived as artificial, or a language that they cannot relate to). Standardization may also have negative effects if speakers faced with a differing standard feel that their own variety is substandard or incorrect and become insecure speaking it. Introduction of a standard is not

necessarily opposed to dialect maintenance; however, when standardization is pursued as a goal *without* concurrent acknowledgement of dialects, speakers perceive it as antagonistic to their dialect, and resist (cf. Fishman, 1997). Micro level initiatives may favour the preservation of distinctive dialects alongside, or in spite of, top-down efforts at standardization. Standardization and dialectal preservation can potentially be pursued as complementary and concurrent goals, to which both macro and micro level language planning can contribute.

The lack of a shared form raises concerns for dialect vitality in terms of speakers' every day use of the language, as well as for governments' attempts to promote it. Dorian's (1981) study of the decline of East Sutherland Gaelic [ESG] identifies some of the ways in which the lack of a shared speech form hinders a dialect's continuation. Most obviously, the size of the speech community is seriously reduced, limiting opportunities to hear and use the language outside one's immediate community. Along the same lines, speakers sometimes resort to English rather than making the effort to decipher an unfamiliar dialect, further reducing their use of the endangered dialect/language. Finally, dialectal differences to the extent that they impede communication can be a factor in stigmatizing the dialect. Attempts by Innu and Irish language planners, discussed below, show how the need for speakers of different dialects to be able to communicate with each other in the endangered language may be addressed through means other than standardization. Increased mobility, contact with speakers of other dialects, and exposure to their speech forms may have positive effects on mutual dialect intelligibility.

Common wisdom in language planning holds that as a language gains prestige and access to the "higher" societal domains (e.g. government, education, workplace), it will enjoy better

chances of survival. However, such inroads require specific uses of the language (e.g. literacy, curriculum development), creating the need (or perception of a need) for a standard form.

Language planners are faced with a complex interplay of aspirations and practical realities: how can they go about using (and thus promoting) a standard variety of *the language*, while preserving its dialectal diversity, where such is prized at the grassroots level? Very basically, planners have three options: 1/ accommodate all dialects; 2/ insist on the standard only; 3/ find middle ground (cf. Wolfram *et al.*, 1999a). The third option is the most commonly adopted, and ways of doing so are discussed below. Some cases can be found where strict adherence to the standard is required, but these are the exception. Navajo language education, for instance, sets high standards for accurate use of the written language. Although some speakers resist, saying that their “way of speaking” or their dialect is being disrespected if they achieve low grades, the outcome of this rigour is highly literate workers, where such skills are required (Slate, 2001).

The first position, accommodation of all dialects, is ideologically attractive as it recognizes and allows for the fundamental equality of all speakers. In Nunavut, for instance, the government’s mandate is to promote “Inuktitut, in all its forms” (Nunavut, 1999; 2004). In New Zealand, too, the Maori Affairs Act (1974) recognizes and allows for the “encouragement of the learning and use of the Maori language (in its recognized dialects and variants)...” (cited in Fishman, 1997: 233). However, neither government has fleshed out strategies for practically achieving such equality of all dialects.^{vii} In the contexts for which a standard is generally developed (school, literacy, government), such accommodation is difficult because it makes it impossible to judge any use of the language as “correct” or “incorrect”, as no speaker will be fluent in all dialects. It is not uncommon for a language to have no “correct” variety, but this may

be viewed as detrimental to its long-term survival, in terms of practical use of the language and speakers' attitudes. Ultra-orthodox Yiddish, Romansch, Ladin and Friulian are examples of languages that approach language use community by community. However, Fishman (1997: 345) reports that speakers seem to negatively view this ad hoc approach in terms of the "respectability" of their languages and that the absence of a standard can become "the excuse for apathy and defeatism vis-à-vis RLS [Reversing Language Shift] efforts."

If speakers accept standardization in principle, implementation can be achieved in ways that are more or less tolerant and encouraging of diversity. If an existing dialect is chosen, top-down planners can counteract the advantages such status confers on the group whose dialect is chosen by bestowing other kinds of advantages (economic, political...) on the regions whose dialect was not selected (cf. Fishman, 1997; Joseph, 1984). Another possibility is to deliberately "standardize", creating an artificial variety based on elements from various dialects, as occurred for Basque, Irish, and Breton. Mayan linguists are pursuing this kind of deliberate standardization and have adopted strategies to respect various dialectal forms (England, 1996). In theory, this approach has the advantage of incorporating and reflecting all dialect groups. In practice, it still can "disadvantage some people whose local variety is more different from the emerging norm than others, which may well set up a prestige hierarchy among spoken dialects where almost none has existed" (England, 1996: 191). Such a hierarchy could lead to disparagement of one's own dialect, or to rejection of the standard in a show of local dialect loyalty. Avoiding actions or statements that would denigrate existing dialects may help protect against such outcomes.

Dialect loyalty may be positive for the preservation of dialects alongside a standard variety if speakers see the standard as an addition to their linguistic repertoire, rather than as a replacement of their dialect. For example, a focus on local approaches to teaching English varieties is advocating teaching and valuing heterogeneity in the classroom: "...traditional English-speaking communities have to now be proficient in negotiating multiple dialects, registers, discourses and, if possible, languages, to function effectively in a context of postmodern globalization" (Canagarajah, 2005b: xxv). In some cases (e.g. indigenous languages in the Americas), the domains for which a standard is being developed are new (e.g. publication of government documents), so dialect use has never been well-established in them: "the standard comes not to displace or replace the dialects, but to complement them in functions which they do not generally discharge and, therefore, in functions that do not compete with their own" (Fishman, 1997: 344). On the other hand, for oral interactions, where the dialect has always been used, it can continue to be promoted. Basque dialects in Spain, for instance, remain viable alongside "Euskara Batua" (unified Basque), partly because the most prevalent and prestigious uses of the language are oral (theatre, poetry, etc.). Regional dialects thus maintain a privileged context for use and are perpetuated, regardless of standardization (Fishman, 1997). The standard remains one dialect among others; all are linguistically equal and each has particular roles.

Emphasizing complementarity of domains is one way of balancing the establishment of a standard and preservation of dialects. Another approach is to have a flexible standard, which would be constantly expanding and reflect dialectal diversity. Hinton (2001a: 15) takes the position that "tolerance of variation is essential", partly because variation *exists* (for cultural and historic reasons), and also because, linguistically speaking, there really is not one "right" way to

say things, and it is discouraging to speakers to say that there is.^{viii} This second point is particularly important in contexts of language shift, where numerous cases have documented speakers' preference to switch to the dominant language rather than be told they are speaking a poor or incorrect form of their mother tongue (see among others Hinton, 2001a; Thomason, 2001; Tulloch, 2004).

Another “flexible” approach is to develop or recognize multiple standards. American and British English, for example, are easily recognized as “equal but different” regional varieties. Canagarajah (2005b) argues for the pluralization of norms, including teaching of dialects and registers, as part of a localized approach to language planning. Although Canagarajah does not talk about preserving and teaching dialects of endangered languages specifically, the shift in approach that he reports and advocates could naturally progress to extend to such variation. Major languages such as English or French or Spanish, with recognized varieties, have resources not available to smaller speech communities, but the emergence of regional standardized systems of writing the Inuit language (cf. Dorais, 1996; Harper, 2000), and the promotion of Aranese as the “official variety of Occitan in Catalonia” (Suils & Huguet, 2001: 145) are indicative of the possibility of implementing regional standards even of lesser-spoken languages.

Finally, the establishment of a standard written variety of a language – i.e. common spelling, vocabulary and grammatical structures for all written uses of the language – does not need to affect the oral language, especially not the pronunciation. Many languages preserve a high degree of variability in pronunciation, which is perhaps the most difficult, and the least necessary, aspect of language to standardize. Pronunciations are also part of what gives dialects

their most distinctive flavour (Nunavut Inuit joke, “do you speak ‘*hi hu ha*’ or ‘*si su sa*’?” alluding to a major phonological distinction between the dialects); the benefits of standardization can be realized without affecting this aspect of dialectal variation.

Even those who push most strongly for standardization as a requisite for language preservation acknowledge that attempts to impose a standard from the top down without community assent can have negative repercussions (cf. Fishman, 1997). Standardization has identity implications, and can be divisive despite unifying intentions. Arguing about a standard form can distract the community from discussing and promoting increased knowledge and use of the language in all its forms. At the same time, implementation of a standard can have long term benefits on the language even if it is originally resisted (Basque speakers, for instance, originally rejected Euskara Batua, but its use is now established in formal, literary domains; the standardisation of Breton, originally opposed, is also considered a factor in its ongoing vitality [Press, 2004]). Standardization and dialect preservation are not mutually exclusive goals. Making room for both to take place concurrently, and finding the appropriate place for macro and micro initiatives, may enhance chances of success of such efforts.

Case Studies: Maintenance of Dialects of Endangered Languages

Although little research on endangered languages has explicitly taken dialects into account, descriptions of attempts at language planning show how the desires and loyalties of the speakers play a key role in shaping dialect preservation along with, or in spite of, standardization. While the push to standardize remains at the forefront of macro-level

endangered language promotion, a few micro-level initiatives, such as those outlined below, are explicitly incorporating dialectal preservation.

Breton (France)

Breton speakers have reportedly maintained “authentic” dialectal diversity alongside an artificial, imposed standard. The local dialects of Breton are valued over the standard, in part because they are used for solidarity purposes, a function that standard Breton is impotent to fill:

...those learners [i.e. L2 non-immersion learners of another dialect or the standard] may acquire a “perfect” Breton, but it will be foreign to the native speakers of their home area. Those who learn a standard Breton find themselves in a no-man’s land, speaking a colorless language which to many native speakers might as well be French for all the relation it bears to their own “real” Breton. (Kuter, 1989: 85)

Even native speakers who move to a different region may feel alienated by the different speech forms. This is particularly problematic for the Breton teachers, who do not necessarily find jobs in their home dialect area, and end up teaching in a different region. Language planners and educators have attempted to negotiate a place for both the dialects and the standard: teachers are trained to “have an ear” for dialects, although they obviously cannot speak all of them fluently. In their classrooms, one approach is to teach in the standard, as a base form of Breton from which other dialects can be learned, or to “sample” all dialects in courses and materials.

A flexible standard has now emerged for Breton (Press, 2004). Although there is ongoing debate (taken as a sign of the vitality of the language), the concept of a standard that was resisted

in the 1980s is increasingly accepted in this “post-standard” period, with speakers feeling more at ease with variation in the language. Breton provides one example of micro level language planning (in the schools), negotiating a place for dialectal preservation alongside top-down introduction of a standard.

Innu (Canada)

Standardization and the preservation of dialects have sometimes appeared to be conflicting goals among the Innu/Montagnais of Quebec and Labrador (Canada). When the standardization process began, speakers strongly identified with their reserve or village, with local speech an identifying and defining factor of that group (despite loose recognition of a common, shared language). In the aim of preserving Innu-aimun, linguists proposed a standard orthography to promote written mutual comprehensibility. This system was not intended to affect the spoken language; students would still read/pronounce words as they always had, even if the spelling reflected a more conservative form (Drapeau 1985). Further, the standard was proposed for specific functions, but did not preclude using other systems for creative or expressive purposes. Nonetheless, planners met with reluctance among speakers to adapt to a system that did not reflect their own dialect. Negative public opinion and lack of a central means of diffusion and implementing the standard hindered its adoption.

The prevalence of micro level planning in Innu communities seems to have encouraged dialectal maintenance in the face of attempts to standardize. At the time, Mailhot lamented (1985: 24), “everything takes place at the local level and everything is left to individual

initiative,” considering this decentralization of initiatives as detrimental to standardization and thus to language development. Fishman (1997: 239) brings a similar critique to Maori language nest programs:

[...] the grass-roots nature of the staffing, the day-to-day management and the program-definition of the rural Kohanga Reos sometimes leads to the preservation or even intensification of the rural dialectal diversity of Maori. This tends to counteract the emergence of a national standard Maori (needed later for Maori literacy) and even competes with the emergence of a more inclusive, unified, supra-local Maori self-concept and identity...

Although dialect maintenance was not the Kohanga Reo’s goal, it was a side effect of a grassroots movement which transmitted the language in an informal, family-like environment. Other grassroots, oral initiatives such as Hinton’s (1997) master-apprentice program may have similar results, maintaining dialectal diversity while promoting the language overall.

Today, standard Innu-aimun is relatively well established in Quebec (where it was developed), but it is still resisted in the two Labrador communities. Johns and Mazurkewich (2001), working on Aboriginal teacher training in Labrador, advocate an approach which favours mutual comprehensibility while valuing unique dialects. They recommend training future teachers in knowledge and respect of dialects, which they can then pass on in the classroom: “Each speaker should know that his or her own dialect is legitimate [and] [e]ach speaker should be exposed to the value of other dialects” (Johns & Mazurkewich, 2001: 363). Teachers adapt materials to their own dialect, and make sure that no speakers are left feeling that they speak an incorrect or inadequate form of their language. Beyond this, they recommend increased participation of trained language professionals from the various dialect groups in the language

planning process. Once again, micro level planning in teacher training is pursued to further the local priority of dialect preservation.

Overall, the experiences of linguists working with Innu-aimun in Labrador suggest that pursuing dialect comprehension may be a more effective strategy than attempting to diffuse a standard. Where dialects are mutually comprehensible, language survival is more likely because broader communication and sense of community are possible. Encouraging/teaching bidialectalism (active or passive) is pursued as one way of enhancing communication between dialect groups.

Irish (Ireland)

A final case in the literature where promotion of an endangered language has explicitly incorporated dialectal diversity is in Ireland. Preservation activities have included both the elaboration and implementation of a ‘synthetic’ standard Irish *and* the deliberate promotion of the three main dialect regions – Ulster, Connacht, and Munster – as reflected in modern literature and radio. Standard Irish, An Caighdeán, is a melded, artificial standard – a “compromise dialect” – made up of historical and modern features from all three dialect areas. It was created for official functions such as government and education, and is the variety learned and used by non-native speakers. However, the prestige forms of the language remain the local dialects: “Interestingly, while An Caighdeán is used and ratified by the society’s institutions, the prestige targets for speakers remain the various dialects of the Gaeltacht [...]” (Cotter, 2001: 303). Speakers’ strong loyalty to their regional dialects was, in some ways, perceived as detrimental to

preservation efforts when those unfamiliar with the other dialects tended to use English “rather than making the effort to continue to struggle with one another’s comparatively unfamiliar native speech forms” (Watson, 1989: 46). Speakers would judge learners as “good” speakers if they acquired the local dialect, and as “poor” speakers if they learned another. Improving mutual intelligibility and dialectal awareness, then, were goals to be pursued (alongside standardization) in order to encourage use of Irish. Expanding literacy and knowledge of the written norm was one way in which greater dialectal awareness was achieved. Increasing exposure to the other dialects, particularly on the radio, was another.

Raidió na Gaeltachta (RnaG) broadcasts entirely in Irish from the three dialect regions. It has an overt policy of conservation and dialect integrity. Even if people listen primarily in their own dialect, the radio is helping them to get used to hearing the pronunciations of the other regions, thus improving mutually intelligibility. Unity between the dialect groups is promoted through shared cultural content: “the result is a sense of the importance of one’s own dialect and its connection to the language overall” (Cotter, 2001: 308). In these ways, RnaG is helping to preserve Irish and its dialects. Even as exposure to other dialects increases, there is no evidence of levelling or convergence.

Another radio station, RnaL, pursues preservation of the language while deliberately allowing for linguistic innovation. In other words, it aims to encourage any use of Irish, regardless of the form. This different perspective entails distinct priorities and methods, including broadcasting in the language variety commonly used by its (Dublin) listenership, even if this “new”, urban Irish is not as prestigious as the traditional dialects. The contrast between

RnaG's and RnaL's approach is also relevant to efforts at endangered dialect/language preservation, as it can be tempting for a nation to focus on *conserving* (i.e. fossilizing) a language, especially when this language is valued as a link to one's culture and traditions and is put forth as a symbol of national or ethnic identity. However, for the dialects to thrive, they must have speakers who are comfortable using them in a wide variety of settings. In this way, the functional approach of RnaL is as relevant and promising for the preservation of dialects as the explicitly preservationist approach of RnaG. Both the policies and actions of RnaG and RnaL show how planning in specific contexts (i.e. micro level planning) can have wide reaching implications for the preservation of dialects, and with them, endangered languages.

How Can Preserving Dialects Succeed?

The three cases described above are exceptional in endangered language research in their explicit accommodation of dialectal diversity. Although the argument for recognition of the intrinsic value of linguistic diversity is now widespread in terms *language* preservation (cf. Nettle & Romaine 2000, among others), it has yet to extend to a concern for the preservation of diversity *within* languages. Still, dialect studies (most of which have occurred in non-endangered language contexts), show that loss of dialect diversity *can* occur. Furthermore, voices from within endangered language communities express the concern that it *is* occurring. In contexts around the globe, speakers show evidence of attachment to local ways of speaking and are planning and acting to preserve their regional dialects.

Micro level approaches to language preservation, as seen above, seem to best suited to the preservation of dialectal diversity. Based on the principles and possibilities of dialect endangerment and maintenance extrapolated from earlier studies, the following suggestions address how planners can intentionally make room for dialectal diversity while preserving, protecting and promoting endangered languages.

1. Establish goals and strategies locally, based on speakers' values

As a first step, planners can identify the values, beliefs and desires speakers hold with regard to their language and their dialect, and allow these to drive planning. Goals, strategies and actions can build on the practical and symbolic values speakers already attach to these speech varieties. These affective factors are possibly the strongest point in favour of the survival of the dialects: if people value them they will continue to speak them. Promotion requires, at the same time, that the language is allowed to evolve and fill new functions.

2. Promote the *language*, while embracing dialectal diversity

Where dialect prestige is strong, grassroots efforts to promote a language will naturally lead to continued use of local speech forms. Preserving a language in its full dialectal diversity may best be achieved when it is undertaken in such a way so as to not diminish pride in or use of dialects, while not emphasizing their uniqueness either. Where a standard is being promoted, concurrently adopting strategies to incorporate and/or respect dialectal diversity may reassure speakers and protect dialects. Initiatives in dialectal preservation will be similar to those aiming

at the preservation of a language altogether. The overriding goals of *conservation*, *knowledge*, and *use* are as applicable to specific dialects as they are to an endangered language overall.

3. Focus on grassroots, oral initiatives

Certain types of language promotion activities (e.g. grassroots, oral initiatives) seem to favour dialect maintenance, even if this is not their explicit goal. Characteristic regional forms of a language have established areas of use, which preservation initiatives can target. For example, the home is one place that dialect speakers have to go back to (cf. Dorian, 1981). Participation in ‘traditional’ activities and community events also provides occasions for use and reinforcement of the dialect. Emphasizing and enhancing opportunities for oral use (including the above, but also specialized functions such as theatre, song lyrics, and storytelling) maintains a “natural” context for dialect use. In sum, dialectal preservation alongside language promotion may be pursued through development of community-based strategies and activities which promote informal use of the language in all its forms, on a local level.

4. Encourage dialectal awareness and mutual intelligibility

Finally, pursuing mutual intelligibility and dialectal awareness can enhance the vitality of dialects of an endangered language. An endangered language overall will be stronger if a maximal number of people can use it in their daily interactions. Use of multiple dialects in radio, literature, and other productions can be a way of increasing mutual understanding, encouraging language use, and preserving the dialects all at the same time. Schools can also reinforce

dialectal awareness and encourage tolerance of dialect forms (although formal language use there may eventually have more of a standardizing influence). As a bottom line, planners may aim for an environment in which all varieties of the language may be used and respected (including innovative ones) and speakers are proud of the variety of the language that they speak. Positive language attitudes, as well as the vitality of the contexts in which the varieties are used, are key factors in dialect viability.

Conclusion

Although academics and fieldworkers have studied issues of endangered language preservation extensively, there is still no set framework for understanding how a language can be preserved, let alone its dialects. This article outlines some of the possibilities of languages and dialects in contact and outlines studies of endangered languages, showing how micro level approaches are best suited to take dialect into account. Relevant suggestions for the preservation and promotion of distinct dialects of an endangered language have been derived from prior research. Still, as this article advocates and is responding to grassroots desires as the impetus for language preservation activities, it also acknowledges that goals will vary from community to community and from dialect to dialect.

Ideas for dialect preservation can be drawn from what has happened elsewhere, but it is the desires and needs of each local population that will prevail. Also, linguistic issues, and their solutions, are tightly intertwined with broader social, political, cultural, and economic issues, and it may well be that action on these latter fronts is needed along with language planning in order

to counteract language shift and dialect loss. The preservation of dialects is seen as part of a bigger picture of the preservation of a particular language, which is itself often part of a wider strategy to negotiate greater group autonomy and empowerment. While acknowledging the multiple layers of complexity in making room for dialects in endangered language preservation, this article suggests that micro level approaches to language planning may effectively address speakers' desires to preserve dialectal diversity concurrently with endangered language revitalization.

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Notes

ⁱ If speakers are unaware or indifferent that they use distinct speech forms, preserving those forms may be irrelevant. Pucket (2003), for instance, argues that “Appalachian English” is a purely academic designation; it holds no resonance among users of that variety.

ⁱⁱ A focus on establishing lines between languages and dialects may distract from, rather than contribute to, efforts to preserve and promote knowledge and use of the dialect/language. Pradilla (2001: 69) challenges, for example, that a focus on recognising the Valencian dialect as a language distinct from Catalán masks the real issue of speakers shifting to Castillian Spanish.

ⁱⁱⁱ Language contact does not necessarily entail loss of dialectal features; in fact, such contact may *lead* to dialect diversification. Bradley (1989), for instance, reports the rapid dialect diversification of Ugong in contact with Thai. Certainly, cultural contact between Europeans and Inuit has led to lexical innovations for new technologies, which were developed independently in the various communities as long as they remained isolated from each other (cf. Dorais, 1996).

^{iv} In any case, languages and dialects are dynamic, and attempting to fossilize dialects as they exist today is unlikely to contribute to a vital, thriving language.

^v Of course, shift to a more prestigious dialect is also a possibility, as is a concurrent threat from both a more prestigious dialect and a dominant language. Ash, fermino and Hale (2001) report on a dialect hierarchy in Nicaragua, where the Tuahka dialect of Mayanga was particularly endangered because it was subordinate to Panamahka (another Mayangna dialect) on top of being subordinate to Miskitu (the regional lingua franca) and then Spanish. The local bilingual education program only taught in the dominant dialect (Panamahka) and left out Tuahka. In this case, Tuahka speakers had to become bidialectal in Panamahka (as well as multilingual in Miskitu and Spanish), although the reverse was not also true.

^{vi} The reality and richness of linguistic heterogeneity in English-speaking communities worldwide is just now being recognized (cf. Canagarajah 2005c), with the potential that this valuation of diversity will carry over to diversity within endangered language contexts.

^{vii} The Government of Nunavut commissioned a study in 2004 which made recommendations for the preservation of distinct dialects in Nunavut. Its language legislation was under review at the time this article was written.

^{viii} Tollefson (2002) also says, in regard to English language instruction, that policies which pursue uniformity are unrealistic.

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