THREE ISSUES IN LANGUAGES IN CONTACT

P. H. Nelde

University of Brussels

0. *Introduction*

In the past ten years a marked change of emphasis has been noticeable in linguistics. The illusion of a completely homogeneous, Chomskyan language community has given way to one which takes into account social, psychological and individual components. Purely formalistic, descriptive features were forced temporarily into the background in favour of a diachronic, socio-cultural, political science of language; in short, one which includes non-linguistics factors as well.

Consequently, multi-dimensional strategies were to replace the (frequent) uni-dimensional systemic linguistics. Instead of the technical difficulties in describing the field of semantics, for example, new problems arose: namely those of variation and model-diversification.

The inclusion of numerous related disciplines such as sociology and psychology, as well as the discussion of speech act theories, areal linguistics and the problems of language barriers pertaining to social-political issues, all led to a spectrum of methods whose variational possibilities were both their strengths and weaknesses.

Soon one of the central themes of variational linguistics included that of contact research or contact-linguistics whose historical tradition goes back to the fifties. This area depending on one's point of view, uses methods of sociolinguistics or the sociology of language. It originated in the U.S.A., just as did the beginnings of systemic linguistics, where Weinreich's, Fishman's and later Labov's work revived what had been frowned upon for a long time: field research of an empirical nature which, in particular, was to be found amongst the areal linguists of Europe.

At the same time, language-contact research is indebted to the socio-po-

litically oriented language-barrier research in the sense of Bernstein's and Oevermann's numerous endeavours. Completely new areas of socially-dependent, semi-, bi-, and multilingualism were discovered in addition to previous analyses of bilingual contacts in conflict zones (for example, French and English in Quebec).

With the aid of the diglossia concept, developed and expanded by Fishman which replaced to a certain extent the idea of bilingualism as having paedagogical-historical significance, attention was now paid to the socio-politically motivated difficulties of dialect speakers, socially under-privileged city-dwellers and mono- or multi-linguals in language-conflict zones who were handicapped in their chances of professional advancement.

In this way, creole and pidgin languages in the Third World became the centre of interest among linguists and ful-fledged means of communication. In the United States, sub-stratum- and semi-languages of members of different classes were sociolinguistically described, (usually as a Black/White contrast), and numerous forms of double diglossia were discovered in Europe: thus, not only are all European countries with the exception of Iceland multilingual, but also predominantly dialectal.

1. *Contact linguistics*

Contact linguistics in its narrow sense goes back to the early fifties (U. Weinreich). During the previous decades, cultural-linguistic contacts such as lexical borrowing stood at the forefront of research. In Europe, the analysis of Latin linguistic contacts and their effects prevailed for a long time. Sociological or psychological aspects were first introduced by Weinreich, Fishman and Haugen who especially emphasized the internal and external linguistic factors. In this way, the originally interlingual character of research shifted towards interethnic contacts, so that, besides interference and transference analyses, social and situational elements of language configurations, areas of language use (domains), attitudes and stereotypes were brought to the forefront.

1.1 Present Topics of Contact Linguistics

Language planning and language politics have repeatedly called upon the results of contact linguists during the last few years, since the assumption was made, for example, that multilingualism, as well as second and third language acquisition, could be of use to peace and cooperation between nations.

Intensity, vitality, (Haarmann 1980 I), and dynamics, (Auburger 1979), of language-contacts currently dominate discussions on the one hand, and phenomena such as multilingualism and language shift are being analysed on the other.

In this way, the rapidly developing linguistics of the seventies opened up new dimensions. The recourse to diachronic aspects besides the predominantly synchronic features, the inter-dependency with numerous related disciplines, the compulsion of group-work and the obviously close relationship with political, historically-developed and ideological situations and contexts create more difficulties within the research of language contact and conflict. At the same time, they make the field of contact linguistics a challenging task which is worth dedication and effort. This was, above all, to the advantage of linguistic minorities and developed, in fact, in conjunction with linguistic, psychological and sociological implications of contrastive linguistics or language interferences.

1.2 Contact Linguistics and Multilingualism

Surprisingly enough, contact-linguistic ventures in countries with linguistic minorities tend to be seldom, (in Europe: France, Switzerland). However, linguistic investigations in multilingual countries are indispensable since political decisions are frequently based on regional linguistic situations. Above all, the language must often remain the decisive criterion for judgement since the population of multilingual areas is not able, in many cases, to differentiate itself from its neighbours by other means — a challenge for the contact-linguist, since he is forced to confront his models and theories with linguistic reality.

2. *Three issues in language-contact research*

Completely different values, on the national as well as regional level, are attributed to each individual language — which makes any unidimensional, linear investigation more difficult — due to cultural, historical, social and politico-economic developments. In this way, the communicative variants in use comprise native and foreign monolingualism, diglossia and multilingualism, along with additional linguistic transitional zones and mixed forms with which contact linguists are trying to come to terms by mono- or inter-disciplinary means.

2.1 Problems of Language Census in Multilingual Areas

It is astonishing how the results of state-run censuses are taken for granted, even in the literature of meritorious language-contact researchers, and are used as a decisive argument for language-planning strategies. In language-contact zones which have no sense of conflict, the quotation of official results may appear meaningful — in those areas in which political or socio-economic factors

tors are clearly to the disadvantage of the minority, such counts can only serve to show a tendency and not the exact affiliation of the linguistic group.

On the one hand, a type of bi- and multilingualism, which has recently become situationally and contextually, relevant for European minority areas, cannot be associated with any specific mother-tongue, since the diglossic linguistic behaviour usually shows, a *complementary distribution*; this means that particular, every-day speech situations and conditions constantly require the same linguistic variants, so that, frequently, the use of foreign and native languages already appears institutionalised. Due to economic reasons, only a few linguistic areas permit the constant, free exchange within different variants. The results of a poll and the difference between foreign and native speakers lose their relevance for this reason.

On the other hand, any answer to a question concerning the every-day language use is subject, today more than ever, to a sociological framework of requirements which, above all in conflict zones, appears so complicated that even an inquiry by trained interviewers can lead to distorted results. In his reply, the informant will by no means be considering the problems of linguistic variety within his language use in the same way as the interviewer, rather, he will — consciously or unconsciously — identify himself with a group and give more importance to the group loyalty which he aspires to.[1]

Neither linguistics nor sociology have models and methods at their disposal which come to terms with these extra-linguistic features. Such results concerning individual linguistic behaviour therefore reveal more information about social consciousness than the real language use of the informant. Thus, the social pressure, which brands a particular linguistic variant as a prestige variant, must constantly be taken into consideration in conflict zones. A broad area of work in this direction is opened up to researchers of prejudices and stereotypes.

The function of determining a trend, which is incorporated into an inquiry in the form of a count, can only be meaningful if comparative investigations are under consideration. Consequently, the historic as well as the psychological dimension increases in importance.

It can easily be shown with examples of official language counts that:

1 Socio-economic factors often influence the answers in a direction towards the majority, or stronger group (élite group).

2 In cases of doubt, the informant settles for the socially dominant language variant.

3 Language statistics distort linguistic reality in conflict zones, due to individual and social subjectivity, in favour of the élite group.

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[1] P. H. Nelde 1978:24.

4 Interpretation and one-sided selection of statistical results falsify statements further.

5 Intentions in language-planning or political tension can reverse the statements of informants.

The above issues do not consider the extensive *incomparability of language statistics*, since their value depends on a uniform structure of questions, (questions about the most commonly spoken variety or all spoken varieties, as the case may be).

This critical attitude towards language statistics is in no way based, however, on a rejection of linguistic inquires, but feels the need to draw attention to the danger of biased interpretation and the necessity to relativise considerably any statement and, at the same time, to place it in its socio-cultural framework.

Although the place, the presence of further known or unknown persons, the interviewer, the conversational functions, the degree of confidentiality, the intention of utterance, and the personal assessment within the sociological group determine the choice of language to a greater degree than the language regulations and laws, they have, at the same time, the effect that, communicatively, the most intensive language situations within the private and family domains can disassociate themselves, to a certain extent, from the prestigious and social pressure of the majority language.

Only a thorough analysis of this linguistically intimate area in language conflict-zones can produce a deeper understanding of the linguistic behaviour of so-called multilinguals.

2.2 Polarisation

More than enough has been written for the individual and social groups in the relevant literature about the drastic consequences of political and social upheavals — in Europe: since the Industrial Revolution, in Africa: since the end of the colonial rule. Naturally, language contacts in multilingual areas cannot be considered separately from social change.

Multilingual communities which had grown up more or less harmoniously together for centuries, or had arisen in the course of hostile disputes, had found ways and means of multilingual communication whereby clear parameters of valuation arose in the form of privileged languages or prestige variants.

Example 1: Speakers of a village community in India, where twelve languages are spoken, communicate by switching from their mother-tongue into at least one, sometimes into two or three prestige variants of the dominant village languages in a state of constant yet, nevertheless, institutionalised change.

Example II: In one of the smallest but now, however, most violent areas of language conflict in Europe, the Voer (Fouron) area (lying between Belgium and the

Netherlands close to the German border), a *stable diglossia*. Dutch dialect and French standard), had developed in most of the language domains in spite of foreign infiltration, so that, among, those immanent domains such as language at school, in the city council and in public, language use, with an extraordinarily high degree of consistency, accordingly followed an almost ritualistic pattern.

The trend of the modern industrial society towards a unity of language use, together with a dominance of standard variants, created unwelcome problems for those minority areas with a marked use of dialects. Territorial monolingualism replaced the individualised diglossic situation and forced the speaker to decide for or against a particular standard language.

This *polarisation* therefore had, to a certain extent, completely unexpected results — at least in the eyes of the "logically" operating language planners; the diglossic or dialect-speaking population group rejected this pressure of polarisation by abandoning the respective standard variant and turning to a foreign "high" variety, (in India: English, in the Belgian Voer in Europe: French). As such a shift in domains cannot always be successful, it leads to *schizo-glossic* conditions (Haugen) or to language shift.

2.3 Language Shift

When at least two languages or variants meet, that is, come into contact for a longer period of time often spanning several generations, it leads, in many cases, to language shift. Mackey (1980) maintains that, on the basis of the most recent census comparisons in Canada, this shift is already predictable. This occurs through the "measurement of interlingual attraction, the elaboration on community language pressure profiles, and the geocoding of patterns of language use".[2] Since there has been, until today, no exact means of measuring the cultural qualities of a population — and to this belongs, above all, the language — no standard index for the identification of first and second languages can be formulated either. Consequently, an analysis of the respective socio-psychological context from an historical viewpoint should preferably have priority.

Sociology has already developed applicable models which allow a sociological description. Amongst these are, for example, descriptions with the aid of groups of reference and identity which, furnished with the same norms and role requirements, represent a guide-line and an instrument of control which respect the observance of these norms and sanctions of behaviour.

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[2] W. F. Mackey 1980:41. Here, Mackey also rejects simplistic counting in linguistically mixed areas.

The current, world-wide minority problems usually arose from three factors: migration, socialisation ans assimilation, whereby the latter is particulary important for the analysis of language shift and stabilisation in a multi-lingual area: under what kind of conditions and how quickly is the immigrant assimilated, with which group does he identify himself and in which cultural community does he prefer to live? However, sociology has not succeeded until now in designing a valid, theoretical picture of multilingual countries and their respective group-behaviour. The reason for this obviously lies in the variational range of language contact.

The social context with its differing social forces will, for example, force the immigrant to decide for or against a particular language. The question, what might be the reasons for the role of a mother-tongue in a bilingual context in a European city, elicited answers in the following order:

1 A lack of courage and self-consciousness
2 A belief in the superiority of the foreign standard language
3 More possibilities of promotion with the foreign language
4 A foreign language environment
5 A minority population are more gifted at learning languages
6 The minority must reconcile themselves to the prevailing circumstances
7 Pressure is exerted by the foreign language speakers
8 Children are sent to foreign-language schools

It would certainly be the duty of practically-oriented psycho- and sociolinguistics to accept such a population group as it has been established by careful analysis of the arguments involved, that the seemingly unimportant last two questions are decisive for linguistic alienation. The Belgian cure, which is currently being practised in Franco-Canada with relative success, therefore also runs as follows: in order to maintain the use of the mother-tongue of an individual, a completely monolingual infrastructure is necessary in the territorial area of:

1 Administration
2 Education
3 Business and Industry (Decree 1973, Social relations between employers and employed)

The third point, above all, has been brought into focus during the last few years, since the confrontation here is to be found with international concerns, multi-nationals and Anglo-American-based industry. In this connection, the so-called *Industrial Language Decree* of the seventies, (for example), in Canada and Belgium, was a clear sign of linguistic self-assertion. Only since that time can a certain process of reducing tension, be seen.

It appears to us to be important that language shift, in isolated situations, results not collectively, but individually, whereby these situations are to be categorised sociolinguistically.

Where does the extraordinary willingness come from, in times of world-wide recognition of the principle of existential equality of languages and cultures, to still accept, in many cases, another foreign language and culture? Together with the alienation mechanisms arising from the infrastructural description of the most important sectors in the labour market, another factor plays a part which makes *language shift*, to a certain extent, automatic. Without strong cultural connections, migrants from the countryside come not as a group, but as individuals with a strong desire to integrate as quickly as possible in order to be able to advance socially; after all, the gross national product in the city often lies a third or more above the average in the country. This over-riding willingness to assimilate leads to rapid integration. Since the urban linguistic group appears so much stronger, both professional and private contact is sought with this status group. The effort to integrate results in social advancement.

Mixed marriages are disproportionately high amongst this group. The marriage partner who speaks a foreign tongue will like-wise adapt from both a linguistic and cultural point of view for status reasons, regardless of sex which, in turn, will strongly influence the future language in the family so that a snow-ball effect arises in the second generation. For this reason, the language used in marriages requires just as much attention in any sociolinguistic analysis as the mother-tongue which, until now, was always the main factor. An example from the Belgian capital illustrates this point (Fig.):

LANGUAGE USE IN SOCIOLINGUISTIC SITUATIONS
in percentage

	French	French & Dutch	Dutch	Informants
Neighbours	32·5	27·6	39·9	695
Doctor	35·7	5·1	59·2	722
Policeman	19·6	13·0	67·4	708
Civil Servant	17·5	7·8	74·7	708
Priest	17·6	5·7	76·7	528
Salesman	16·1	15·6	68·3	706
Spouse	22·4	3·2	74·4	693
Children	22·5	6·9	70·6	608
Own Relatives	7·9	5·0	87·1	723
Spouse's Relatives	21·7	4·1	74·2	676

The inquiry confirmed this observation. 74% of all children from mixed marriages are sent to French-speaking schools and thereby undergo a language shift at the beginning which will have been completed in the following gener-ation.[3] This is supported by the fact, since women, as earlier inquires have shown, tend to change language and culture for reasons of prestige quicker than men do, the answer lies perhaps in the various fields of work: women are generally employed in the private sector which uses, to a large extent, the prestige variant.

3. *Results of Contact-Linguistic Investigations*

What consequences arise from such an investigation of language contacts and conflicts which exist in an urban population?
A few points, although differing in importance, may be summarised here:
1 The desire to progress to a status group which is regarded as being both financially and socially superior, and which therefore demands a condition of exclusiveness, must lead to language and culture shift or to language and culture conflict.
2 The linguistic and cultural alienation of the lower and middle classes, particularly of the worker, seems to be inevitable as long as a linguistic group of equal status is missing.
3 Sociolinguistic research into language and cultural conflicts should not confine itself to the individual, but rather should include groups, (families), and their linguistic behaviour, since only in this way can the trigger-effects of language shift processes be clarified.
4 Scientific research into the conditions concerning language and cultural shift can only be undertaken in an interdisciplinary manner.

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[3] P. H. Nelde 1978:38.

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