Chapter 18

Extinction in Whose Terms?
Which parts of a language constitute a target for language maintenance programmes?

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Structural linguistics has a particular view of the integrity of language which may be detrimental to the construction of appropriate language maintenance programmes for small indigenous languages. In this paper I outline ways in which 'affective' use of language may be the most useful target of language programmes in some situations. Fluency in a language may not be the achievable outcome of a language course for a number of reasons, not least among them being the enormity of the task perceived by learners of the language. For languages with few or no speakers we should be able to construct language programmes in which the use of a small number of terms in the target language, for purposes of identity, is a sufficient and realistic outcome.

While we need to talk about language extinction to motivate speakers of the languages and funding agencies into action, we also need to be sensitive to the fact that languages can be in various stages of endangerment, or extinction, but still be claimed as 'the language' of a group of people.

This leads to a fundamental question for language maintenance efforts, and for notions of 'ecolinguistics'. Which parts of a language are the ones which are necessary to keep in order that extinction can be said not to have occurred? And so where is the 'difference' that is claimed to exist by the language endangerment movement between one language and another? If, for example, a language with an extensive noun class system touted as being the genius of the language loses that system but still continues to be spoken, is it still worthy of language maintenance

efforts? Do different varieties of English constitute endangered varieties if they are not being spoken by young people in their community?

Clearly what linguists want from language maintenance programmes can be quite different to what speakers or their descendants want. What is used to mark identity can shift quickly depending on circumstances. There are serious political consequences for arguments that value the intact and traditional over the so-called tainted and modern. We don't want to devalue what people do with what little they may have left of their language, but at the same time we need to argue for the recording and support of as much of an endangered language as we can.

Often it is precisely those features of a language which are completely opaque to its speakers which generate the most interest among linguists and which linguists then claim as the major reason for 'saving' the language. Conversely, the features focussed on by speakers of a language that is no longer used everyday may be at the level of phonology and a highly restricted part of the lexicon or at the level of 'communicative conventions', as Gumperz & Gumperz point out: "Even where the original native language is lost .. discourse conventions tend to persist and to be taken over into the group's use of the majority language. In fact these conventions come to reflect the identity of the group itself ..." (Gumperz & Gumperz 1982: 6). This observation was confirmed in work by Diana Eades with Aboriginal English in Queensland (Eades 1983), where she showed that Aboriginal ways of talking English showed a number of features associated with Aboriginal ways of talking Aboriginal languages.

What informs such work as that of Eades is the important understanding that identity is flexible and adapts to the needs of the moment. Speaking a particular language may be part of one's identity, but you do not lose your identity when that language is no longer spoken. You may refocus on other identity-forming issues and decide to use whatever parts of the language are still available to you for identity purposes. Woodbury (1998) addresses Eades' work, and agrees with her findings, while cautioning that the notion that not all is lost when a language is no

longer spoken can be a "salve to the colonial conscience, happy instead to support an emergent, newly 'nativized' variety of English ..." (Woodbury 1998: 238). In this paper I want to tread the delicate line between 'salving the colonial conscience' and empowering the colonised through recognition of their linguistic heritage.

The only Aboriginal PhD linguist, Eve Fesl, quoted in National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia (nd: 83), says: "The many decades of linguistic persecution which persisted until the present time only adds to the desire of the Indigenous Australian individual and community to regain and claim whatever they are able. In the case of language this may be only a few words or sentences, but these are cherished far beyond what most non-Indigenous Australians are able to comprehend." Yet she also (Fesl 1993: 164) criticises programmes that concentrate on words with no appreciation of the complexity of the traditional language.

How then does the philosophy of language maintenance deal with situations in which people no longer use the language in question as an everyday medium of communication? What are people asking for when they say they want a language taught to their children? This situation is normally regarded as requiring a linguistic 'revival', with courses designed to ensure there will be speakers of the language in the future. This type of revival (of which Hebrew or Cornish are typical examples) is rarely practical in the Australian context and in this paper I will argue that it is not necessarily what is being asked for by the client group, speakers or descendants of speakers of the language.

Our usual definition of language in the Australian context allows neat divisions into living and dead languages, traditional and non-traditional languages, divisions which belie the continued use of Aboriginal languages or aspects of Aboriginal languages (depending on one's theoretical approach) today. This is fine if we are attempting to write a grammatical description of a language, or to do comparative work, after all comparisons are difficult if you don't have discrete objects to compare. We tailor our definition of the object of study, language, to suit

the situation that we encounter. But linguists do not have a monopoly on language study, and the resurgence of interest in Aboriginal languages by Aboriginal people means that another discourse is being heard in discussions of what, for want of a better term, is called language maintenance. This discourse situates language quite differently from the position of the academic linguist. As we shall see, efforts to preserve languages that rely solely on the linguists' definition of 'language' are more likely to fail than those that are a result of understanding what is actually asked for by the client group.

If there is a spectrum of approaches to language maintenance, with bilingual education at one end and second language teaching at the other, then revival is at a point close to second-language teaching. It is useful to think of the definition of language changing at that point to become what Eastman & Reece (1980) call "associated language". It is often this associated language that is in demand for language revival in Australia, and a practical approach based on this different perception of 'language' is outlined below.

Eastman & Reece (1980) talk of the identity forming role of a language that we associate with a chosen heritage, "regardless of whether the language is actually spoken by those claiming it or not. This 'associated' language is distinguished from a) the structuralist definition of language, and b) the 'emblematic' use of language. The former typically sees language as a system of shared meaning (langue) used for communication by individuals whose parole is a product of their own experiences, and of the moment of production. The latter is the use of parts of a language (words, fixed expressions) for purely emblematic reasons, not as a means of everyday communication. "An associated language is neither langue nor parole nor is it emblem - but it may be both or each of these forms" (Eastman & Reece 1980: 110).

I would go further and suggest that the relationship of minority groups to the dominant society is an intrinsic part of the definition of identity and language. It is in identity formation, and in resistance to the dominant society that the group's language has value. This is the context that is

crucial to an understanding of the role of minority languages in the future. Attempts at language maintenance that insist on dealing with a structuralist model of language may fail to appreciate the rich possibilities for recreation of nonstandard forms (in either the target language or the mainstream language).

The Aboriginal people that I have worked with have often taken for granted the inter-relationship between traditional values and language. When talking about their own language and bringing words back to mind, the first topics of conversation often include kin-terms, or hunting terms, or (depending on the context) swearwords. Using these words is an important way of showing not only that there is a difference between the cultural history of these Aboriginal people and the non-Aboriginal people around them, but also between different groups of Aboriginal people.

Language plays a role in Australian Aboriginal society that is different to the role of English for the dominant society. Sutton (1982: 193) talks of the use of naming in confrontation, Ellis (1985: 53) talks of the power of songs in healing or inflicting injury, Strehlow notes that songs were thought to "contain those magic virtues which gave power over Nature and environment in the locality where they had originated - a power capable both of creation and destruction" (Strehlow 1971: 126). Language itself is seen as effecting changes in the physical world.

An oral culture obviously places great importance on language, for ritual purposes, for story telling, for its location in history. My experience with Aboriginal people who no longer use their ancestral language as their main means of communication leads me to suspect that the role of language and the value placed on traditional languages has carried through changing physical circumstances, becoming even more of a marker of identity as the everyday use of the traditional language declines and it becomes seen as a link with an idealised harmonious past.

The claims made for traditional languages by the people I have worked with initially appear to be quite fantastic. It is not unusual to be told that,

if only language can be relearned, then the traditional order will be returned. The order of parental authority and rule by elders is lost by losing the language that conveyed instructions and discipline. The coordinator of a childcare centre in Perth who was trying to run a language programme for Nyungars (local Aboriginal people) emphasised the need for 'respect' words to be included in the first lessons of the language course that was being planned. Further topics to be included were "strict moral aspects of the language, discipline", and greetings and farewells. "I'd like to see more promotion (of language). At the moment the kids are in limbo because they don't really identify with it. ... if they get into crisis it causes real problems because they can't identify with one or the other. ... If we would establish something like this, they can see where they fit in, and therefore they're moving forward with the technology" (Middle-aged Nyungar woman, Perth 1986).

It is most common when discussing language and language maintenance for the following topics to be raised;

'olden days' rituals involving increase ceremonies, bush skills, healing, medicine, spirits, (often, but not necessarily, including the use of ritual language).

importance of protecting local significant sites or preparing for land claims by reviving interest in the language associated with a part of the country. One group in WA has been reasserting its tribal affiliation with some country which is also being claimed by a rival group. As part of the reidentification with the land in question the group have been engaged in collection of wordlists and stories in the traditional language.

general confidence: "I think it worries the government that if we do bring up the maintenance on Aboriginal languages, they may get worried that Aboriginals are becoming more independent ... teaching their own languages, that's what they need, because then their

incentive might come for an enterprise development" (Middle-aged Nyungar man, Perth 1986).

On a trip in the bush with some Aboriginal people from Roebourne, two middle-aged men, two 16 year-old boys and myself, the topic of conversation was the goanna that we were looking for, I was asked if I knew the language name for goanna. I used the Yindjibarndi word *kurrumanthu* which I had heard all four members of the party using earlier. I was told I was wrong by one of the men who asked the boys for the correct (Ngarluma) name. One of the boys called it *birkala* and was corrected by his questioner who said the "right language" was *birrikarlira*. The boy replied with "It's a word isn't it?" The boy's concern was that he had a language word, not whether it was the appropriate language in a town where there are two main languages and numerous other languages are represented; 'language' in opposition to English.

From all of the above examples it is clear that the language being referred to is not the language of the descriptive linguist. 'Language' can refer to parts of what a descriptive linguist thinks of as language; words, sentences, stories, meetings. This is not surprising when we consider that Aboriginal languages generally have one word that means word, language, way of talking, and discussion.

It is important for contemporary speakers or descendants of speakers of Aboriginal languages to define directions for language work themselves, hence their need for information that linguists can provide, and hence the need for linguists to recognise the aims involved in Aboriginal calls for language maintenance, revival or reintroduction. Aboriginal participation in the process is essential both for the success of the project itself, for the development of skills involved in collecting stories, words and associated information, as well as for the more amorphous idea of empowerment.

By starting from a person's knowledge of the language there is not as great an implication that their contemporary usage is a degenerate form

of the 'old language' as there would be in a typical language revival programme. By involvement as researchers into their own language situation the participants become more aware of their own usage and how it differs from the dominant society. They may use a pidgin or creole or speak Aboriginal English and it is a thin line to tread between attempting to revalue 'traditional' Aboriginal languages and devaluing contemporary Aboriginal usage (especially Kriol). The emphasis on traditional languages in maintenance programmes, can fall into the trap of portrayal of indigenous culture as either traditional (= true) or non-traditional (= degenerate).

The process of revival described here is a way of valuing minority languages and dialects and has implications for education and for confidence in dealing with speakers of other dialects. Discussing models of such revival work, and determining what sort of language to use, are extremely productive forms of language awareness activities and satisfy the need for information about cultural heritage.

It is politically unwise, given the imbalance in the power relationship of the dominant society and Aboriginal society, for the linguist who is developing a language course to attempt to use forms that the present population rejects, be they in the spelling system, the lexicon or syntax. The course materials may be rejected because the orthography contains, for example, a voiced rather than a voiceless symbol, or entire programmes may be shelved because of a disagreement about the phonemic status of one sound. Russo and Baldauf (1986: 310) discuss the case of Elcho Island and Garden Point where the language of instruction for a bilingual programme was chosen after too brief a period of consultation. In the first case a minority language was chosen, and in the second case the language (Tiwi) was undergoing rapid changes, resulting in a form of everyday language quite different from the 'classical' style adopted by the language programme. Involvement of speakers of the language, in the second case, as designers of the course may have ensured a more appropriate and so more successful language course.

Language revival programmes typically rely on recorded sources, and on the knowledge of remaining speakers who have been unable to pass their knowledge on to the present generation. Both sources will provide only partial information about the language; in the absence of a speech community it can be assumed that there will be attrition in the discourse styles and syntactic structures of remaining 'semispeakers' (Dorian 1977). Even if historical written records of Aboriginal languages are immediately usable, which in my experience is rarely the case, there is not always going to be the type of information recorded that is required in revival programmes (see Barlow & Triffett 1987: 92). Thus the forms that will be used in this type of programme will have to be reconstructed or drawn from similar languages. The question then will be, what language is actually being revived?

If a revival programme is requested, we can assume that there is an interest in the community in learning the language, and that there is a group of people who will undertake the course and will engage in finding out about the language. 'Revival' programmes deal with a language that is still used or still remembered. Typical among the revival programmes discussed in the literature are Gaelic in Ireland (Benton 1986), Hobbema in Alberta, Canada (Kent-Gooderham 1975) Same, in Scandinavia (Paulston 1976) and, in Australia, Kaurna (Varcoe 1994), Awabakal (Heath 1982), Ngarrindjeri (Kirke 1987), and Wangkamara (ALA Newsletter April/ May 1985). Wurm (1986: 535) observes that it is "not uncommon" for a language to be successfully revived "if economic and status advantages result to the speech community". He goes on to suggest that "such instances have occurred in Australian Aboriginal groups", unfortunately without references. In fact there is no documented case of the revival of everyday use of an Australian Aboriginal language.

The methods used in these courses vary, depending on resources available, but usually language revival relies on recorded sources and on a linguist who can interpret the recorded information. An example of this type of revival is Cornish, whose last monolingual speaker died in the late eighteenth century (although it may have been spoken for up to a

century after that (Shield 1984)). A movement to resurrect the language began in the seventeenth century, but the revival of the 1950s resulted in approximately 1000 people attending classes, of whom only 50 were subsequently capable of holding a conversation in Cornish (although undoubtedly a different type of Cornish to that originally spoken in Cornwall). Similarly, Mithun & Chafe (1979) describe a Mohawk revival course planned and developed with Mohawk teachers over several years. The language is taught from kindergarten through to sixth grade and only Mohawk is spoken in the classes. It is a programmed approach roughly following the order of a child's acquisition of Mohawk, aiming at communicative competence in the language. The authors consider a key factor in the success of the programme to be community attitudes and assistance in devising the course. At the same time there were objections to the programme from Mohawk people who had been punished for using the language in their youth and who now considered the language to be 'backward' (Mithun & Chafe 1979: 29). This type of programme benefits from having a large population of potential users, and this is one reason that such a course is rarely practical in the Australian context. In the cases where it is possible, the materials devised for Ngarrindjeri (Kirke et al. nd) or Wangkamara are a good example.

Where there is not the time or dedication on the part of potential users to learn all the complexities of the traditional language, another approach may be more useful.

Powell (1973) discusses the type of language programme designed with Quileute people in the USA. Powell had designed a course of instruction assuming that the goal was student fluency in Quileute, i.e. to resuscitate it as an everyday spoken tongue. The programme failed in a very short time. The complexity of the language is such that the class had "neither the time nor the interest to master a system so different to English". "The Quileute wished to know their language

1) as a means of cultural identity,
2) as a link with their heritage

　　3) as a symbol of group identity, and
　　4) as a portable proof of Quileuteness that could be
　　brandished before whites or other Indians.

Interestingly, none of these goals required native fluency or even reasonable virtuosity." (Powell 1973: 6).

The Hobbema Curriculum Project in Alberta, Canada similarly found that, while it was to teach Cree language to primary school children, "at no time did the Hobbema Curriculum Committee identify the development of fluency in the Cree language as one of the objectives of their project." (Kent-Gooderham 1975: 52)

My experience in writing introductory lessons for Paakantji (Western NSW) (Thieberger 1983) is similar to that described by Powell. The lessons follow a second- language teaching approach, and assume (implicitly) that the goal of the user is proficiency in the second language. The course material has not been used to my knowledge, and there have been no requests for further lessons to be written. The materials fail to address the needs initially expressed by the users. A major reason for this is the lack of involvement of the users in the design of the material.

Powell goes on to discuss the type of language (which he characterises as a pidgin) that was used in the course as he redesigned it. He reasons that it is best to start with the known language, English in the case he describes, and to use Quileute vocabulary that is known to the students as the starting point for the exercise. He gives the following example;

　　Give me half that candy,
　　Give me half that łape',
　　Hes me half sa' łape',
　　Hes me tala'a sa' łape'   (Powell 1973: 6)

The final version retains the English word order with Quileute words.

Sandefur (1983) uses the term 'relexification' rather than 'pidginisation' for the process Powell advocates. He gives examples of the process in Ngandi (Northern Territory), where the known language, Kriol, is used as a base and relexified with Ngandi words. At the risk of aiding in a proliferation of terms, I suggest that Aboriginal people in their efforts at reviving a language are actually recreating the language. The process of recreation, rather than revival, best describes the way in which language is reified and interpreted in the situations described in this paper.

Kirke (1987) describes a similar programme for Ngarrindjeri, and notes that there is tension in the relationship of 'young fellers' (who had gone to the School of Australian Linguistics to work out how to approach the language) with the older people who are the authorities on the language and consider that they should be consulted before any work is done with the language. A group in Bunbury (Western Australia) avoided this problem by involving older people as teachers in the course. They set about learning Nyungar, a generic name for the languages of the South-west of Western Australia. They had a sketch grammar and numerous vocabularies, and the class included two older people who remember some Nyungar. When faced with the morphological complexity of the language as presented in historical sources, the group reconsidered their aims. They drew a timeline, with 'Old Nyungar' on one end, and English at the other end. They chose a form of language that they considered would be located somewhere along the timeline closer to the English end than to the Old Nyungar end. The use of the timeline illustrates their identification of their own vernacular as related to the traditional language, however distantly. While they produced some literature in their neo-Nyungar, deciding what form of language to use, and conducting fieldwork with their grandparents was a worthwhile process in itself. They have continued to work on this recreation of Nyungar and will soon produce a kit that will be used in schools. The project has been a result of the efforts of Nyungars, and its success must, in part, be seen as resulting from their informed consent for the choice of language used.

There is a large number of Aboriginal languages in Australia whose 'last speakers' (cf. Evans forthcoming) have been dying, and their children have not been learning more than a few words. Language death studies show the attrition in knowledge of aspects of a language that accompanies language death or decline. Languages usually do not just disappear, but they undergo a series of structural and functional changes ending up in shift to the dominant language. It is the product of this attrition that will be the input into the language programme that is discussed here. Hence there is a cline of possible inputs to the language programme, depending on how much of the language is left to work with.

Some typical examples of the way that the Aboriginal students I have worked with have re-created the traditional language are given below. This re-creation is based on the products of attrition, that is, the students' knowledge may have been gained from 'rememberers' of the language so that their input has been subject to the process described in studies of language shift or language death.

Phonological: A collapse of distinctions in the recreated language that are not made in the dominant language (e.g. palatal, interdental, retroflex points of articulation collapsed to alveolar), the use of the stop d/t in place of the trilled rr (Wajarri (Gascoyne, WA) *yirra -> ita, *marnkurr -> mangkut).

Morphological: Regular citation form involving some suffix which is now regarded as part of the stem. Paakantji (NSW) use of the present participle ending -ana, or Nyungar (South-West) use of -iny, present continuous, on all remembered verb forms regardless of actual tense/aspect required.

Semantic: Narrowing, widening or shifting of meaning of words of the traditional language, use of one word in a semantic field as a hyponym for the field, e.g. the word for 'silver bream' becoming the contemporary word for 'fish' (Ngarluma).

Word order: General use of English word order except for some fixed expressions, which students referred to as 'back to front' (e.g. Nyungar: *kart wara* = 'head-sick', or *twangka purt* = 'ear-bad').

Donaldson (1985: 137) discusses similar changes undergone in Ngiyampaa, and points out that older speakers do not chide or correct younger people for using a form that "may not seem to be speaking properly when judged by outside standards (those of the older Ngiyampaa speakers) [but] is in a sense proper (and intimate) for those people within their age-group." However, the Ngiyampaa story-books produced by Donaldson still had to be written, at the request of older speakers, in the oldest speakers' language. The fact that there was no objection to this on the part of younger people Donaldson ascribes to respect for the elders.

While the current understanding of the language should be the input for a language course, the principle of community involvement must also be paramount in any course design. Donaldson does not provide further information about the story-books, but one suspects that they may become tangible tokens of the 'old language', and while useful, may not have the same appeal to younger speakers as would an approach which related more closely to their own understanding of Ngiyampaa (compare the use of 'classics' of literature in European society as a guide to 'proper' usage, both written and spoken).

Factors in the Australian context that favour language programmes of the kind advocated here.

1)   Not enough resources are allocated even for bilingual programmes (which make sense in the type of economic analysis used by most funding bodies) hence there is no great prospect of funding for the usual types of revival programmes whose rationale is almost exclusively based on sentiment, not often a successful basis for government funding.

2)   The small numbers of people interested in language work in a community which is itself very small militate against attempts at reviving a language.

3)   There are too few linguists available to work in the existing programmes.

The type of programme advocated here:

1)   does not require the amount of resources that would be used by a revival programme. The process involved in the discovery of the 'old language' and in awareness of Aboriginal ways of speaking requires classwork but not the elaborate literature and material support that a revival programme would require.

2)   is suited to small groups of people doing their own fieldwork in their own community.

3)   requires only a part-time advisory linguist, a role suited to language centres, who could also make available the work of previous researchers in the area.

Problems with using the model of associated language:

'Mixed-up' language may be rejected by members of the community who want either the old language or English and nothing else in between. In Jigalong Martu Wangka is the language used in school, made up of the different Western Desert languages that were brought into Jigalong, however there is criticism by some people there that the language is not pure Kartujarra or Manjiljarra or Putijarra. In places where less of the language is remembered by young people than at Jigalong however it is more likely that older people will welcome any knowledge of the language, even if it is not exactly how they remember the language to have been.

The ownership or custodianship of knowledge in Aboriginal society means that certain people will have to be consulted, even though they

may not actually know the particular information that we are after, because they are widely recognised as authorities.

There is a danger that the form of language used in this course will be taken as evidence of the simplicity of Aboriginal languages. Obviously students will have to be aware of the complexity of the traditional language. In the example of Nyungar and Quileute we saw that it is precisely because of the complexity of the language that students chose to recreate the language in a more familiar form. Once students have understood the recreated pidgin or relexified version of their language they may want to go on with more research into the complexities of the language as it once was.

CONCLUSION

It is necessary to provide assistance in the form of linguistic advice to those groups of Aboriginal people who are asking for revival programmes in their languages or the languages of their ancestors.

I have suggested that language revival need not be an 'all or nothing' venture. Revival in the sense of Hebrew, for example, requires huge resources, a committed population of potential speakers, and then will develop a form of language which might bear great resemblance to a hypothesised, once-spoken language, but which is nevertheless a new form of the language. The approach advocated here is not intended for languages that are still spoken and have adequate resources supporting their use. Language recreation is ideally suited to situations where older people still remember something of the ancestral language, and where younger people have a core of words.

Positive outcomes for language recreation programmes are most likely when students can begin with their own knowledge of the language, and create forms that conform with that knowledge. It is this process which is of value, and any other outcomes must be seen as bonuses.

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