Language Shift: An Overview
Joan A. Argenté

LANGUAGE SHIFT: AN OVERVIEW

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Under the influence of correlational sociolinguistics (Labov 1966, 1972a, 1972b), we are used to thinking of inherent language variation among individuals, either of different groups in the same communicative context or of the same group in different communicative contexts, in terms of frequency patterns of language use that sistematically associate either (i) a (usually phonetic) linguistic variable and a (macro)sociological variable –such as social class, ethnic group, age group or sex group– or (ii) a linguistic variable and a speech style or (iii) a linguistic variable and both a sociological variable and a speech style. This systematic association is known as the sociolinguistic variable, and its possible values are called sociolinguistic variants. Sociolinguistic variables of types (i) and (ii) are called sociolinguistic indicators; those of type (iii) are sociolinguistic markers. There is even a new kind of sociolinguistic variable, i.e. the stereotype, characterized by people's awareness of it and people's discussion of it.

Catalan words like *platja, metge*[1] may be heard in current speech as containing alternatively either a sound [dʒ] (the standard pronunciation) or [tʃ] (a pronunciation originally typical of some low social strata, rather than a dialectal group, although progressively extended to other groups, in Barcelona). One may conceive of the variable (tj)[2] in Barcelona usage as presenting two affricate variants, one voiced the other unvoiced, and the use of one or another can differentiate social groups and/or language styles (along the formal-informal dimension). At the same time, variable (tj) presents certain features that assimilate it to a linguistic stereotype: remember the Catalan tongue-twister *"Setze jutges d'un jutjat mengen fetge d'un penjat...,"* with which Spanish-born speakers, given their inability to pronounce voiced affricates and fricatives, are put on trial by Catalan people.

The study of this same sociolinguistic variable in the locality of Petrer[3] by Gimeno and Montoya (1989) shows a correlation between the use of its variants and age groups (cf. pp. 86-89). L. Pons (1992), on

[1] Morever *platja* presents a new dialectal variant [ʒ], e. g. in Empordà, but this seems to be a particularity of this word rather than a generalized pronuntiation (i.e. *metge* does not allow this variant in this region).

[2] The "name" of a variable often is parenthetically expressed in current ortographic notation.

[3] "Same" at least in general terms, although language variability is descriptively and diachronically more complex here.

the other hand, found that another similar variable in Barberà del Vallès –let us call it variable (x), with associated variants [ʃ] and [t^ʃ] in word initial position (*xai, xop*), simplifying again phonetic data– correlates with age groups, even though in this case the gradual progression of the affricate variant in elder groups seems to be followed by its gradual regression in younger groups.

All these findings seem to inidicate that if you know the social/age group membership of a speaker, you may be able to predict, in terms of frequency, his patterns of language use. The case of age group variables is particularly interesting here for our purpose.

Although the notion of inherent variation and sociolinguistic variables are achievements of correlational sociolinguistics which we cannot deny, we regret that this orientation in sociolinguistic research has emphasized language variation in monolingual communities, but has dismissed the kind of phenomena traditionally highlighted by language contact studies: multilingualism, language interference and transfer, code mixing, language maintenance and language shift –and, indeed, it is not difficult to find handbooks, conceived by practitioners of correlational sociolinguistics, which do not even refer to these or, at least, to language shift (e.g. Wardhaugh, 1986).

However, language contact and its consequences –especially, language shift, one of the more dramatic– has always been recognized as a topic of particular concern to sociolinguists. In order to convince correlational sociolinguists of this truism, one should try to induce them to the study of age-group determined sociolinguistic variables, like the ones mentioned before, and to show how in certain circumstances language itself, when taken as a whole, plays the role of a sociolinguistic variable, i.e. to show that for certain group(s) in certain communities, in a given historical moment, language choice is variable.[4] Although variable language choice does not necessarily imply language shift, it is, notwithstanding, a necessary precondition for it.

Indeed, this is what traditional schemata, such as Haugen's (1972), tried to show (cf. Fig. 1). In these, language shift –which had been first defined by Weinreich (1953) as "the change from the habitual use of one language to that of another" [1970: 68]– was construed as the transition from a stage of A monolingualism to a stage of B monolingualism through a period of variable language choice with dominance of A at the begining (supplementary bilingualism: Ab) and dominance of B at the end (replacive bilingualism: aB), passing through a stage of

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[4] This is, by the way, the path taken by Gal (1979) in her study on bilingual communities in the Austrian-Hungarian border.

complementary bilingualism: AB. The term transitional bilingualism is
intended to reflect this necessarily unstable character of bilingualism in
language shift.

A
Ab
AB
a B
B

FIGURE 1: *Different types of bilingualism in different generations
in language shift*

Transitional bilingualism was recognized both by descriptive
social linguists, like Haugen and Weinreich, concerned with
multilingual communities, and by historical linguists, such as A.
Martinet, concerned with a rational construal of early substratum
theory. In fact, Martinet clearly saw the need for including the theory
of strata within a general theory of bilingualism (1956: 16). The actual
connection between his and Weinreich's ideas is well known.

Weinreich's approach to language shift was sketched rather than
effectively developed, and was characterized by the following features:

In the first place, the acknowledgement that language shift "is
entirely extra-structural, since it can be taken for granted that the
respective structures of two languages in contact never determine
which language is to yield its functions to the other" (1970: 107).
Curiously enough, this was exactly the reason why the topic of
language shift was excluded from his work, mainly concerned with
linguistic interference –this being understood as a structural
phenomenon, and therefore as the specifically linguistic dimension of
language contact, distinct from the psycholinguistic or sociolinguistic
dimensions. Subsequent approaches to language shift have taken
notice of Weinreich's assertion and have concentrated on functional
restriction –to the exclusion, until recently, of formal reduction (see
below).

Secondly, Weinreich formulated three recommendations:

(i) "language shift should be analyzed in terms of the functions of
the languages in the contact situation, since a mother-tongue group
may switch to a new language in certain functions but not in others"
(1970: 107). Even though the occurrence of language shift is hardly
predictable, where it happens is not a sudden phenomenon and does

not affect the whole population at once. More interesting, the hierarchy of functional replacements, although not the same everywhere, presents strong similarities from one situation to another. The study of language shift must identify what is going on in the various domains of language use. This idea underlies the approach to language shift "as a field of inquiry" taken by Fishman (1964), which set the frame for further empirical studies. Early Catalan sociolinguists were very much inspired by Fishman's approach to the study of social language use and its allocation, crucially resting on the notion of domain. (Aracil, 1982).

(ii) "the nature of shifts should be studied in contact situations where the mother-tongue division is congruent with various other, non-linguistic divisions, in order to allow for a differentiated response to the new language among various subgroups" (1970: 107). In the same way that not all functions are affected at once by language shift, neither all social groups are equally eager or prone to change their language. Catalan sociolinguists clearly realized this fact, especially when considering language shift in the Valencian Country (Aracil, 1982; Ninyoles, 1969). However, certain popularizations have been losing sight of this, and treating the process as affecting the whole community in a uniform way. Although this view may occasionally work when describing an overall completed process from a macroanalytical level, it does not help to understand the internal social dynamics of language shift.

(iii) Finally, "language shifts, like interference, can and ought to be studied carefully against time" (1970: 108). Instead of concentrating on functions, one may concentrate on age-groups (for instance, within a family) and try to give a measure of total shift from the eldest generation to the youngest. R. Rindler-Schjerve (1980, 1981) described language shift in a Sardinian family in which four generations were represented. Sometimes it has been remarked that three generations are at least necessary for the whole process to take place –however, this cannot be taken as a universal generalization insofar as it does not apply to certain cases of sudden language abandonment.[5] Anyway, as Weinreich states it, "discrete generational difference in mother-tongues within a single family is a projection of a more gradual age-and-language transition in the community" (1970: 94).[6]

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[5] As it has been the case among certain Indian communities in North-America.

[6] Although one should not take for granted that this is always the case. Gal (1979: 154-157) prevent us against confusing change in the life-cycle of individuals and language shifth in the community from similar synchronic data, i.e. in order to properly identify language shift, one has to make sure that diferences in age-groups reflect differences in generational-groups.

Additionally, Weinreich noticed –as it had been done already by substratum theorists– that shifting communities can alter certain formal aspects of the replacive language, this being imputed to socio-cultural conditions that affect language learning: "Obviously, it is a matter of socio-cultural conditions whether the speakers of the losing language learn the new language so well as to leave no trace of it, or whether they learn it in an imperfect manner, bequeathing the phonetic and grammatical peculiarities of their speech to future generations in the form of a substratum. Hence, in a language shift, the scholar must look not only for the pressures that determine the choice of language but also for those which decide the thoroughness with which the new language is learned and the flow of leveling, equalizing forces from the unilingual bulk which tend to eliminate traces of the old languages" (1970: 109). Although Weinreich also knew that the "losing language" could be formally affected by interference in language shift as in any other kind of contact, what neither the substratists nor Weinreich did realize –or were interested in– was the fact that this same language is being formally affected in a way which cannot be attributed to interference or language learning, but rather to language loss and unlearning, especially when language shift is an enduring process. This was not sistematically explored until work on language death and obsolescence was done (for instance: Dorian, 1981 and 1989).

This work emphasizes formal reduction as much as functional restriction. As we shall see, the study of formal reduction is to be centered on linguistic competence while the study of functional restriction is focused, as stated above, on language use. We shall return to this. For now let us point out that concern with language shift in the Catalan area has dealt mainly with language use. Until recently (Argente, 1991; Prats, 1990) systematic concern with language loss was not considered to be of sociolinguistic relevance.[7]

Finally, one last trait of Weinreich's paradigm is the role attributed to social *prestige* and social *control* as explanatory concepts for language shift –insofar as they are also used to account for second language learning and bilingualism is, as stated above, a pre-condition to shift. However, two remarks need to be made in this respect. First, sociolinguists coined the term *"covert prestige"* in order to refer to situations in which maintenance, rather than shift, of stigmatized varieties –in spite of the power of the standard language– or minority

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[7] Again, caution is needed not to confuse real language loss or attrition in the speech of Catalan-born speakers and language interference, as a result of second language learning, among Spanish-born speakers (cf. Argente, 1991).

languages –in spite of the pressure of the majority language– is the case
(e.g. Milroy, 1980). Sociolinguists, indeed, acknowledge two
dimensions along which the social language use is organized: these
were named *power* and *solidarity* by Brown and Gilman (1960), the
first representing social distance or status, the second social
bonds.While "prestige" refers to the power dimension, "covert
prestige" refers to the solidarity axis. Second, one cannot merely
accept prestige or any other factor to be presented as a mechanical
cause of language shift: it should be taken as just one of a rather
complex causal chain, in which the speakers' attitudes, experiences and
social practices should have a relevant place.

By now we can try again to pose the problem we are facing by
summing up in a structured way some of its ingredients, whether
they have appeared in the preceding exposition or not. Language shift
is a process by which a community substitutes one new language for
itstraditional language in some or in all of its usages. The replacive
language is called dominant and the replaced language is called
recessive, in a sense not very distant from the way these terms are
used in genetics. Finally, a recessive language may be given up by its
speakers, and it is said to have locally died out, in case the language is
spoken in another community, or to be extinct, in case there is no
other community in the world speaking it. Language shift may be
either a rapid or, more often, an enduring process; in the latter case,
the language may enter a process of irreversible decay before being
abandoned, and this is specifically called language death. Rather than
being directly associated with shift, language death is directly
associated with (precarious) maintenance, albeit finally the language
is tipped out[8] and follows the same fate as the one just described.
Where these processes take place, a certain correlation is observed
between a state of political, economic and socio-cultural
subordination of the affected community[9] and a set of linguistic and
sociolinguistic facts, affecting the recessive language and including
the following:

(a) formal reduction, from the loss of verbal resources to the
    disruption and simplification of grammar, up to the loss of
    productivity and the speakers' lack of capacity to innovate from

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[8] The term and the notion of language tip was introduced by Dorian (1986) in order
to describe the pass from precarious maintenance to sudden final shift.

[9] These correspond to what Fishman (1991:57-65) calls physical, demographic, social
and cultural dislocation of the minorized, recessive language speaking, community.

within their traditional language (i.e. the loss of linguistic inner vitality), and

(b) functional restriction, from restriction in certain domains up to the break of language transmission and the loss of speakers in favour of the dominant language (i.e. the loss of linguistic outer vitality of the recessive language).

The first of these problems is to be identified with language obsolescence, and its study impinges on language competence, while the second is usually identified with language shift, and focusses on language use. However, the challenge must be accepted to analyze their interactions. In so doing, this analysis, more than any other, should show that the evolutionary history of a language is dependent upon the sociolinguistic history of its speakers.

The observed correlation between a frame of socio-political, socio-economic, socio-cultural subordination and linguistic facts is not an explanation of these, but rather the bare fact to be explained. The question to be answered may be formulated as this: How does political economy articulate with language? (Hill, 1993)[10]

Scholars of different slants have been concerned with this question, and have built different frames within which it can be answered. Alternative analysis include the (macro)sociological approach, the politico-institutional approach -usually not considered in itself as something separate from the former by standard international sociolinguistics, but of a relative import among Catalan analysts-, the socio-psychological approach, and the ethnographic approach. I shall try to characterize each of these in the following, and, in so doing, I shall distinguish between the nature of data under consideration, the way of access to these data, and the nature of the explanations advanced within each of the approaches. Also, where possible, Catalan contributions will be considered.

In (macro)sociological analysis, social and linguistic data relative to big samples of population are collected either from censi or otherwise previously performed surveys, or else from ad hoc surveys. In this approach, the establishment of direct correlations between

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[10] Usually economic subordination entails political and cultural subordination, and, indeed, most of the cases of language shift affect economically depressed communities. One may wonder whether this is the case in, for instance, Catalonia and Basque Country -the most eveloped regions in Spain. However, there is no doubt of their political subordination and, because of this, they have lost control over their own health: it is in this sense that they may be viewed as economically subordinated also.

macrosociological variables –like those used by correlational sociolinguists (see above)– or macrosocial processes –such as military expansion, colonization, migration and other demographic changes, industrialization and modernization– and sociolinguistic facts is seen as explanatory in itself.

The first problem with censi is that they are not always available. For instance, a linguistic census of the entire population has never been performed in Spain. Only in recent times, the local governments of certain autonomous regions with a language of their own have included some linguistic questions in the municipal censi of inhabitants. In this way, the Catalan countries have at their disposal official data about the language capacities of their people. Unfortunately, administrative barriers between Catalonia, Valencian Country and the Balearic Islands have hindered a unified questionnaire and unified criteria, in a way that data from their censi, although referring to one speech community, are not directly comparable, and some readjustments are needed (Reixach, 1991). The same happens in the Basque Country between both autonomous communities: the so-called Autonomous Community of the Basque Country and the Auto-nomous Community of Navarra (Nafarroa). Not to mention the political borders between Spain and France, crossing over both, the Catalan and the Basque, speech communities.

Other methodological problems derived from the use of censi as information sources are well known, and the analyst should be prepared to overcome them (cf. e.g. Fasold, 1984: 113-124). Shortcomings derived from surveys are also well known, and I shall not deal with them here.

Thus, Catalan sociolinguists first had to face the absence of censi and the general difficulty for social research in Spain –so, they had to resort to nonstandard methods, and assumed their weaknesses–, while now they are confronted with, in more than one sense, fragmentary data from current censi. Several surveys have been done –either with financial aid from the local governments or without–, although it has not always been easy to publish their results. Albeit not always directly concerned with language shift, some of these surveys contain relevant information.

As an example of the use of censi in sociolinguistic research, I have reproduced a table from Hindley (1990) on the evolution of the Irish population and, specifically, of the Gaelic-speaking groups in the second half of the past century.

TABLE 1: Irish speaking population: 1851-1901

Census date	Total population	Speakers of Irish only		Total Irish speakers (including Irish only)	
		n=	%	n=	%
1841	8175124	—		—	
1851	6552365	319602	4.9	1524286	23.3
1861	5798564	163275	2.8	1105536	19.1
1871	5412377	103562	1.9	817875	15.1
1881	5174836	64167	1.2	949932	18.2
1891	4704750	38121	0.8	680174	14.5
1901	4458775	20953	0.5	641142	14.4

SOURCE: Hindley (1990: 19)

A look at the figures illustrates that in half a century, Ireland's demography diminished to near by one half of its original contingent –the causes are not relevant here, but recall the 1845 Great Famine and migration–, the percentage of Gaelic monolingual (already extremely low at the begining of the period) and bilingual speakers constantly decreased (even though the latter seems to stabilize at the end of the century). Conclusions are self-evident. Nonetheless, the table is by itself a description of facts and even allows a projection into the future, but it is not an explanation of them. Even Hindley admits that he cannot rely on censi, and his research relies on other kind of quantitative, but rather imaginative data.

As pointed out above, explanation are sought to show direct correlations between macrosociological processes and linguistic facts. This is clearly evidenced in Hindley's following paragraph, in which economic development is directly related to language maintenance/loss in a cause-effect relationship:

"The Gaeltacht Comission and the other Free State authorities [...] all assumed that the decline of the language was bound up with the impoverished state of the Gaeltacht cores and did what they could with their limited resources to enhance their economic and social development. They did not choose to consider the possibility that Irish survival might occur *because of* the lack of modern development and economic opportunities in those areas. True as subsequent history has proved this to be, it is impossible to blame the proponents of language survival and revival for refusing to countenance a Gaeltacht economic policy of benign neglect [...]" (Hindley, 1990: 29).

I am not interested here in discussing whether the choice made by the Irish authorities was the best or not –I agree with Hindley's final statement on this point–, but I just want to call your attention to the reasons adduced (according to the author) by either these authorities or Hindley himself. Both imply a correlation of cause and effect between socioeconomic development and language maintenance/shift.

Let us now quote once more another of Hindley's observations. In this case the reader will notice its relationship to the above mentioned idea of transitional bilingualism and Haugen's scheme (fig. 1):

"The suddennes of Irish language collapse around and after 1800 may be understood in terms of the Marxian model of quantitative changes slowly building up to major qualitative change. The desire for English built up slowly because opportunities for the masses through English built up slowly. The steady increase in bilingualism was the quantitative change which led around 1800 to qualitative change represented by the mass abandonment of Irish. This is hardly surprising, for the necessary precondition of adjudging Irish unnecessary or 'useless' would be the achievement of very widespread near-universal fluency in English. That is to say, universal bilingualism was the essential transitional stage on the way from an Irish-speaking Ireland to an English-speaking Ireland. By 1800 bilingualism was well advanced and the ultimate fate of the native language was near to a final decision." (Hindley, 1990: 12).

It is worth noting here that bilingualism is acknowledged as a precondition for final language shift, in such a way that one could see it as a mediating step between socioeconomic change and language shift. However, this is not to say that bilingualism by itself causes language shift. As for the model of quantitative changes producing qualitative change, a similar idea –although without acknowledging its ideological origins– was advanced by J. Fishman in analyzing synchronic language choice in bilingual communities. For him, language choice, being an individual hic et nunc phenomenon, is not directly related to language shift, but it can be viewed as the cumulative effect of consistent individual language choices. As a consequence, the study of both the dominant language learning facilities[11] and language choice are relevant to the analysis of language shift.

Fishman's work on language shift, which is based on the notion of domain, may be viewed as belonging to the macrosociological approach, although in a way it establishes a link between macro –and micro– (or ethnographic) approaches. In a sense, the very notion of

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[11] I borrow the term from Pueyo (1996), who studies the role of school as a (dominant) "language facilitating" system. I shall return to this work.

domain of language use is understood as a configuration of the relevant factors intervening in the communicative situation, and, as such, it is both to be described in sociocultural terms internal to the community, i.e. ethnographic terms, and it is used to explain individual language choices, i.e. a typically microsociolinguistic process. He analyzes the case of Yiddish/English maintenance/shift among the immigrant Jewish community of New York between 1940-1960 and states its allocation of language use taking into account three sources of variance –media (speaking/reading/writing), role (inner/comprehension/production), situation (formal/informal/intimate)– through five domains –neighborhood/street/mass media/Jewish organizations/occupation)–, in fact six domains –since the first one is subdivided into family/acquaintances. Contrary to macro-level analysis, however, his approach is qualitative rather than quantitative –for he only states the language(s) used in each domain in the preferred order. Catalan sociolinguists, since Aracil (e.g.1982), related the notions of domain and language norm –understood as a norm for the use of a language in a certain context–, construing a domain as the boundaries within which language norms apply (see, e.g., Mollà & Viana, 1989: 21).

Branchadell (1987), taking a rather radical stance,[12] elaborated a conceptual approach to the notion of "normalisation" –habitually used by Catalan sociolinguists (since Aracil, 1965), politicians and language policy-makers (since 1981)–, and formulated it as a "normal" aim to be reached by the exclusive presence of Catalan in each domain. Marín (1995) studies language shift in the community of Benavarri applying a domain-oriented quantitative research complemented with an attitudinal study by means of a questionnaire and personal interviews. He detects an indirect proportionality between the habitual use of the local form of the language and the attitudes toward it: old people still using the language score lower than young people when evaluating their language, while young people who are not even proficient in the language evaluate it highly. Incidentally, let us comment that, as far as evaluation is something either ideologically or affectively oriented, it acts as a compensating mechanism, and, although it is habitually taken for granted that a positive attitude towards a language makes it easier to learn it, it should not always be taken for granted that a positive attitude will necessarily yield language learning –let alone the use of it.

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[12] Allow me this conventional qualification. It goes without saying that what some people take for "radical" in certain contexts is assumed as "normal" in other contexts by the same people –which is precisely the point in Branchadel's paper. If any of these people think that he is on the wrong track, they should at most blame him for attributing "the right thing" to "the wrong context."

What I call the political-institutional approach to language shift is not usually acknowledged as an independent scholarly tradition in international literature. However, a great deal of autochthonous Catalan studies can be characterized as such (cf., e.g., Comas (1967), Benet (1973), Carbonell (1974), etc.). In these, besides censi, also legislative corpora, institutional history (government, school, church, justice administration, etc.) are taken as data or as source of data. Also explicit ideological struggle (the role of intellectuals and politicians) is taken account of. Here explanations of language shift are construed in terms of direct correlations between the institutional, political and ideological development and linguistic facts. Language shift, then, is generally seen as a consequence of explicit dominance relationships and opressive structures. In a sense, attention is focussed on what Lewis (1979) called secondary factors of language contact, which are mainly ideological. The reason why this approach is not usually considered in international literature is probably that it is nearer to (political and social) history than sociology or anthropology or strict sociolinguistics. Furthermore, this approach has been criticized by some Catalan sociolinguists, mainly Aracil and his followers, because of its alleged inherent ideological character, in the sense of displacing the burden of the responsibility toward external extracommunitary factors and allegedly serving the interests of the local regionalist ruling social class (Aracil: 1986).

The evolution of language shift in the territorial minorities –or, to speak properly, minorized communities– of Europe has been correlative to the degree of succes with which the corresponding nation-state's official language has spread. In cases like that of the Catalan community, the different degrees of success achieved by the different states involved (Spain, France, Italy) partially accounts for the unequal advance of language shift. Pueyo's work (1996), taking a global, rather than regional, approach to the Catalan speech-community, is an attempt to demonstrate the assertion. He concentrates on the historical analysis of the effectivity of school and military service as state-language spreading means.

The socio-psychological approach to language use, and eventually to language shift, is concerned with speakers' attitudes and evaluations toward languages and linguistic groups in contact. Also it may focus on the study of interethnic and interpersonal relationships, and builds its explanations in terms of the existing correlations between language attitudes and language uses or the speakers' communicative behaviour. One of the achievements of this approach has been the accomodation theory of language use, associated with the name of H. Gilles. This approach is, at least, the first to take into account the role of speakers,

their feelings, attitudes, beliefs and behaviour: in this way it adds a necessary factor to be considered in the process of language shift. Among Catalan scholars, psychologists such as the Valencian M. Ros and the Catalan L. Garcia Sevilla and M.A. Viladot are working within this frame, and among sociolinguists, M. Strubell, E. Boix, M. Pueyo and others have been oriented, in varying degree and with differing results, by this trend. Not all their work is directly relevant to language shift. But they have contributed to increase our knowledge of interdialectal (Boix, 1985; Pueyo, 1986) or intergroup (Boix, 1993) attitudes -which certainly impinge on language maintenance/shift. J. Pujolar (1992) analyzed the relationship between language use (codeswitching, language choice) and ideology in a group of young university students in terms of either their interpersonal or interethnic construal of interactive relations with peers belonging to the other ethnolinguistic group. Those who maintain their own language conceived interaction in terms of an inner/outer ethnic-group relationship rather than an interpersonal relationship. Among foreign scholars working on Catalan, see Bierbach (1988) and references therein.

The ethnographic approach, originally associated with the names of J.J. Gumperz and D. Hymes, rejects the usual explanation of macro-analysis in terms of a direct correlation between macrosociological factors or variables and linguistic facts. Instead, it searches for an intermediate variable in between. The kind of data which this approach adresses are verbal interaction, the sociocultural identities and self-presentations of the interactants, the social connotations of the varieties in contact (i.e. their social meaning) and the social activities through which these connotations emerge, primary social structures and socialization processes (rather than macrovariables such as social class), the existing natural varieties and contextualization cues in a certain community, the verbal repertoire unequally shared by the individuals and the groups in the community –i.e. the total set of linguistic resources in the community, be these languages or varieties, linguistic routines or forms of address, sociolinguistic variables or interference-like phenomena, accents or ways of speaking , proverbs or collocations, jokes or the lexicon of profanity. Methodologically, this approach may be characterized because participant –rather than objective– observation is habitually used. Scholars in this approach are interested in the end in finding out and accounting for the speakers' symbolic behaviour in a given sociocultural context. The explanation for language shift should be looked for in the intervening variable between macrosociological factors and individual linguistic behaviour. This is not to deny the

importance of macrosociological factors, but rather to comment on
the indirect relationship between these and language behaviour –as far
as one cannot obliterate the role of the speakers in the process. As S.
Gal (1979) –one of the early studies of language shift conducted within
the methodology commented here- puts it: "What is of interest to
know is not whether industrialization, for instance, is correlated with
language shift, but rather: By what intervening processes does
industrialization, or any other social change, effect changes in the uses
into which speakers put their languages in everyday interactions"
(Gal, 1979: 3).

In general, the intervening variable is to be found in
communication and its immediate conditionants. Gal shows how a
kind of primary social structure, usually called social or
communicative networks,[13] and the social connotations acquired by
language varieties in the contact situation as a result of contact itself
and as a result of their distribution through social networks are
immediately responsible for individual language behaviour, and so too
for the intervening variable she is looking for. In fact, social networks
both condition language use and are conditioned by macrosociological
factors, and even if they are used to describe and predict synchronic
language choice, they are the outcome of the individual and the
collective histories of those who enter into the network. As an
instrument of analysis they are synchronic devices, but, as they are the
result of a particular social history, they have a diachronic explanatory
dimension. Again power and solidarity relationships, understood as
dimensions structuring language use, are expressed by means of
specific linguistic resources (mainly, German vs. Magyar). Gal
concluded that language choice in the speech community that she
studied in the Austrian-Hungarian border could be predicted from the
knowledge of the social position of the adressee and the age of the
speaker, and she described synchronic language choice in terms of an
implicational scale. The correlation between age-group –or
generational group (see note 5)– and dominant language use appeared
as a synchronic reflex of a language shift in progress.

An early ethnographic study of the Catalan situation, focused in
the city of Barcelona, was done by Woolard (1989), in which she
described the norms governing language choice in the late seventies.
Her work was a starting point for further studies on language choice,

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[13] The concept was introduced into antropological studies by J. Barnes. Blom &
Gumperz (1972) used it, when speaking of the "local team," as well as other
ethnographers or language anthropologists, besides Gal, e.g. Dorian (1981). A classical
conceptual presentation and empirical use of it in sociolinguistic research is Milroy's
(1980)

like those of Boix (1993), and recently Pujolar (1995), which partially allow to follow the current change in language norms in Catalonia.

An interesting approach to the study of language shift in the area of els Ports (Morella and its surroundings) was undertaken by E. Querol (1989) in a line which makes use of different kinds of methods and relies on data obtained from different sources: starting from local censi and local knowledge, combining ethnographic methods with a sociopsychological-like approach on attitudes, the author identified first those parents responsible for the interruption of language transmission and interviewed them with the intention to find out their alleged justification for this fact, i.e. in order to discover whether they had a more or less automatized metalinguistic or metapragmatic discourse about the matter, and, if so, what it was –i.e. which was their linguistic ideology. Not surprisingly, most of them did not assume their responsibility as a free choice, rather they projected the responsibility onto other agents –the school in general, one particular teacher or the kids themselves. This is coherent with the findings of one of my students working in Mallorca or, in a very different cultural context, those of Kulick (1992; see below).

As a matter of fact, one of the most important topics to be examined in the study of language shift is the issue of language transmission and its break. This should be viewed as included in the more general frame of language and culture reproduction, a topic which has deserved the attention of anthropologists in the past years. Although language shift is or may be a long process –from the emergence of the original macrosocial changes and the further cultural pressure on the community to the final tip immediately yielding complete shift–, there is a point in the chain which is extremely relevant –although not necessarily irreversible[14]–: the one represented by the interruption of the traditional language transmission, i.e. by one generation's decision not to transmit the language to its children.[15] Or, viewed from the other side, the process of primary (i.e. family) socialization of the first generation of non-traditional language

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[14] Indeed, too many times language shift is presented as a linear process always moving forward in the same direction. More often than not the opposite is true: language shift, as any other social process, has its backs and forths, and the analyst has to be aware of this fact and take it seriously –even when the final result is hardly unavoidable. It is a fact of experience that many people who did not have the traditional language transmitted to them as children, have learnt it in their teen's and have even become habitual users of it. Eventually this change is well received by their parents, even though before they felt the need to pass over the *other* language in order to allegedly not to handicap their children. (Cf. Argente & Lorenzo, 1991).

[15] Another relevant point being the use of the dominant language for the purpose of in-group communication (language transmission being in fact one subcase of this).

monolingual speakers. A significant survey on this topic is the one
directed by M. Subirats (1991), based on data collected from a survey
realized in the old Barcelona Metropolitan Area or "great Barcelona"
(the so-called Barcelona Metropolitan Survey, 1986) –see also Vila
(1993), which relies heavily on Subirats. But, however relevant this
quantitative research may be and however illustrative of actual
tendencies their results are, it is not the kind of study I have in mind.
For one thing, Subirat's work is to be taken for what it is: a
quantitative description of social change rather than an explanation
for it. In order to understand how verbal socialization works, we
should study it from an ethnographic point of view. To my
knowledge, there has not been a great deal of research on this topic
–saving the work by Schieffelin (1990) and the collection in Schieffelin
& Ochs (eds.,1986), not directly related to language shift.
Notwithstanding, Kulick's work (1992) deserves a special mention as
far as it connects an ethnographic study of primary socialization of
children in a given speech-community –through the analysis of verbal
interactions between children and caretakers– with the study of
language shift, and both with the study of cultural reproduction.
Kulick observes that verbal interactions between children and their
caretakers in Gapun, a little community of Papua New Guinea, is
heavily biased toward the dominant language, in such a way that
children are induced to learn the new (Tok Pisin) rather than the
traditional (Taiap) language. Given certain native traditional beliefs
about self, children and language, and certain recent changes in the
cultural connotations associated with both languages in Gapun, adult
Gapuners, while thinking that they are doing nothing different from
what their parents did, indeed are bringing up their children as
speakers of Tok Pisin. Otherwise stated: precisely because they are
reproducing received cultural patterns and values which had been
traditionally –but are no longer– associated with the use of Taiap,
they are actively contributing to language shift in their own families
and communities. If asked, however, they will attribute the
responsibility for this language shift to the children themselves.
    The quoted research by Querol (1989) does not exactly fall within
this type of ethnography –his approach to the break of language
transmission is not based on the participant observation of adult-
children interactions, but on the recovery of the relevant agents'
alleged remembrance of facts and/or metalinguistic allegations–, but at
least it is an attempt to find out the assumed what and why of the
verbal practices immediately responsible for shift in terms of the
ideologized and socialized positions of social agents.
    The local ideologies and local practices of social agents occupying

certain interested positions within the community are enhanced by the maintenance/disruption of certain social networks, and all together constitute the intervening variable that ethnographers were looking for as well as the factors immediately responsible for language shift. They are obviously caused by macrosocial processes, but only they can explain the hierarchy of phenomena found in functional restriction and formal reduction or loss (i.e. the fact that a recessive language seems to retreat first from certain domains then from others or that language loss seems to affect linguistic resources and structures in a certain order).

Another interesting aspect to be explored in language shift is the shifting groups' or communities' strategies for adaptability to the new emergent context, the way which its members manage the tension between cultural continuity/discontinuity, i.e. the way they answer the issue of their cultural identity. From their total assimilation to the dominant group to the maintenance of their ethnic identity, even when losing their ethnic language, by means of a hierarchical rearrangement of identity symbols and the enhancing of those still current, there is a range of possibilities –including the hybridization process which has been called "syncretism." In any case a certain feeling of continuity is preserved. Even though many scholars have dealt with the relation between language and identity –be that in order to adopt a strong Herderian position in favor of equating language and identity, or to discuss its relation in terms of dependency/interdependency, or to take a rather relative stance which allows to view language as just one of the components of ethnic identity–, not all of them have given the relevancy it deserved to the issue of cultural continuity in language shift.

The link between ethnic identity and language, the role of ethnic identity in language-choice, and so on has often been observed. Among the authors cited or commented here, both Gal and Dorian state this link. Kulick, instead, remarks that the opposite is true upon at least as far as the case studied by him is concerned. To my view the difference among these positions lie in the fact that the first two authors are mainly concerned with inter-group relations, while the latter is concerned with in-group relations. It goes without saying that the position usually adopted –rather than empirically reached– by Catalan sociolinguists has been the first. This, however, should not preclude the study of whether or not, or how far, hybridization has taken place.

It is a fact of experience that, while Catalan language served predominantly an in-group communicative function, language norms tended to establish an equation between speaking Catalan and being Catalan: people had interiorized the idea that "A Catalan is a person whom I address in Catalan and he who answers me in Catalan, and I

am a Catalan therefore I answer in Catalan to who addresses me in Catalan." Catalan language then had a functionally restricted status, but was an identity symbol and an indicator of ethnic group membership. Recent research among young people has shown that, since the acces to both languages has been extended by the school system and the media, Catalan is increasingly used in inter-ethnic communication, with the consequence that, as far as it has increased the range of its communicative functions its symbolic value has been lessened. As Boix (1993) has observed, frontiers between ethnolinguistic groups are perceived by young people as interpenetrable rather than steady.

Let me add a new comment on cultural identity. More often than not the use that has been made of this term implies a rather static classificatory concept. There is no doubt that identity represents, among other things, a community's link with its historical past and an individual's link with its community. However, cultural identity is also open to reinterpretation and, besides its orientation toward the past, it is oriented toward the present and the future. In other words, identity is not just an outcome but a process, and in fact people construct their identities by means of their action and their discourse. An approach like that in Catalan sociolinguistics is the one taken by Pujolar (1995, 1996, and forthcoming), who explores the construction of gender identities by means of discourse and the use of verbal resources among young working class peers in Barcelona.

As I stated elsewhere (Argente, 1996), language shift and its frequent dramatic effect, language death, has existed forever. Never before, nonetheless, had it been aided by such pervasive technological means like those of today. The result is that language shift is no longer a local affaire, but a global one, with the immediate outcome that what is being endangered is, rather than the survival of one or another "local" language, the survival of language diversity tout court. This should be a matter of concern for sociolinguists, linguists, language planners, educators, politicians, and common people. When a language is given up, a particular way of construing and expressing human experience is lost forever; an unrecoverable part of human intellectual effort is gone away. But for those who are directly affected, a part of their cultural identity is being lost. The effort to maintain language diversity should involve all those who think that the given inheritance of a human group –indeed, of humankind– is worth giving to the next generations.

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