

## **F. LANGUAGE ATTRITION**

references:

Schmid 2011 especially chapter 2.

Baker 2011 ch 4 and 6

### **1. Basic definitions**

**Language attrition.** The gradual forgetting of a language by an individual.

**Language Loss.** a general term applied to any instance of the decline of linguistic skills, individuals or speech communities

**Language shift.** Focus on groups of speakers. Loss of languages in groups. It can happen in L1 or L2 and often happens across generations.

### **2. Stages of attrition**

The first sign of attrition is an increase in the length of time needed for the retrieval of words etc. (ie to find the right words). In the next stage the information becomes temporarily inaccessible under certain conditions, while still retrievable under others. (eg recognise but not produce). In the final stage of language attrition the linguistic information becomes completely inaccessible.

cp NS, advanced technical language, and the attrition, esp biochemistry, anatomy.

- a. First someone becomes slower, as for any unpractised skill.
- b. Then they temporarily cannot do it, maybe due to tiredness, or other circumstances.
- c. Finally, they can never recall or use the language.
- d. Failure usually happens: writing, reading, speaking, listening. Writing and reading are usually lost a long time before speaking and listening.
- e. 1LA and 2LA have many similarities especially in bilinguals, but there are a large number of differences.
- f. In contrast, 1L loss and 2L loss happen in largely similar ways.
- g. In the bilingual person when there is language attrition there is often compensation from another of the known languages.
- h. Obviously, when people start forgetting as part of growing old, then language also suffers.

### **3. Many variables**

- a. Older children retain linguistic knowledge better than younger. ie younger children lose languages quicker than older children.
- b. Higher proficiency in the attriting language leads to better retention. The higher you go, the slower the language loss. Therefore, if you begin to learn a language you need to be determined to keep going. It is a general observation that if you do not keep going for at least five years then you will eventually lose all or almost all you have learned. But if you keep going seven or more years, then the language loss is much less. In short, 3 years at 10 hours a week is less useful than six years at five hours per week.

### **4. Relearning**

- a. Only recently has the study of relearning received attention. For children at least, learning a language for the second time can be dramatically more rapid.
- b. Among psychologists there is general agreement that information once learned is not totally lost, it becomes inaccessible with disuse but is retrievable with the right cues (stimuli, circumstances). There is adequate recent evidence that this is true for vocabulary. See the language attrition research archive: <http://www.lara.ox.ac.uk/index.html> (checked Feb 2016) Note that code switching can compensate for some of the language loss.

5. Bilingualism at the individual level is half the story. The other essential half is to analyze how groups of language speakers behave and change. Such an examination particularly focuses on the movement and development in language use across decades. Such change in a minority language is often downwards. A language minority is rarely stable in its size, strength or safety. Therefore, examining the politics and power situation in which minority languages are situated becomes important.
6. There is no language without a language community. Since language communities do not usually exist in isolation from other communities, it becomes important to examine the contact between different language communities.

<b>Factors encouraging language maintenance From Baker ch4</b>	<b>Factors encouraging language loss</b>
<b><u>A. Political, Social and Demographic Factors</u></b>	
1 Large number of speakers living closely together.	Small numbers of speakers well dispersed.
2 Recent and/or continuing in-migration.	2 Long and stable residence.
3 Close proximity to the homeland and ease of travel to homeland.	Homeland remote or inaccessible
4 Preference to return to homeland with many actually returning.	Low rate of return to homeland and/or little intention to return and/or impossible.
5. Homeland and language community intact	... decaying in vitality
6. Occupations: stable	shifting, eg from rural to urban
7. Employment available where home language is spoken daily	Employment requires use of majority language
8. Low social and economic mobility in main occupations	High mobility
9. Low level of education to restrict social and economic mobility, but educated and articulate community leaders loyal to their language community	High levels of education giving social and economic mobility. Potential community leaders are alienated from their language community by education
10. Ethnic group identity rather than identity with majority language community	Ethnic identity is denied to achieve social and vocational mobility.

**Differences maintained reinforce language.**

**B. Cultural Factors**

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|---|--|
| 1 Mother-tongue institutions (e.g. schools, community organizations, mass media, leisure activities). | 1 Lack of mother-tongue institutions.  |
| 2 Cultural and religious activity in the majority language  | 2 Cultural and religious ceremonies in the home language.  |
| 3 Ethnic identity strongly tied to home language.   | 3 Ethnic identity defined by factors other than language.  |
| 4 Nationalistic aspirations as a language group.  | 4 Few nationalistic aspirations.   |
| 5 Mother tongue the homeland national language.   | 5 Mother tongue not the only homeland national language, or mother tongue spans several nations. |
| 6 Emotional attachment to mother tongue giving self-identity and ethnicity.                           | 6 Self-identity derived from factors other than shared home language.                            |
| 7 Emphasis on family ties and community   | 7 Low emphasis on family and community   |

**C. Linguistic Factors**

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|---|---|
| 1 Mother tongue is standardized and exists in a written form.   | Mother tongue is non-standard and/or not in written form  |
| 2 Use of an alphabet which makes printing and literacy relatively easy.   | Use of writing system which is expensive to reproduce and relatively difficult to learn.<br>Home language of little or no international importance. |
| 3 Home language has international status.   |   |
| 4 Home language literacy used in community and with homeland.   | Illiteracy (or aliteracy) in the home language.   |
| 5 Flexibility in the development of the home language (e.g. limited use of new terms from the majority language). | No tolerance of new terms from majority language; or too much tolerance of loan words leading to mixing and eventual language loss.                 |

### **Additive and Subtractive Bilingualism**

1. Where different languages have different functions, then an **additive** rather than a subtractive bilingual situation may exist. An additive bilingual situation is where the addition of a second language and culture is **unlikely** to replace or displace the first language and culture. The value added benefits could be social and economic as well as linguistic and cultural.
2. When the second language and culture are acquired (e.g. immigrants) with pressure to replace or demote the first language, a **subtractive** form of bilingualism may occur. Loss can include identity, culture, alienation, marginalisation.

### **Language loss in children**

1. Research by Hakuta and D'Andrea (1992), Wong Fillmore (1991) and Valdés (2004) indicates that the strength of the dominance of English in US society places considerable pressure on language minority students not only to acquire English at a young age, but also to replace their minority language with English. In such subtractive situations, the ideal of early bilingualism meets a challenge owing to a societal ethos that frequently does not favor bilingualism. Hakuta and D'Andrea (1992) found in the United States that early exposure to English (e.g. in the home) can lead to a shift from Spanish to English and the potential loss of Spanish. Such early exposure to English in the US may also decrease the chances of placement in a dual education program where Spanish is used.
2. This is not to warn against early bilingualism, but rather to suggest that the minority language needs care and attention, status and much usage in the young child. This is not a limitation of early bilingualism, but rather a caution that minority language development needs particular nurturing in political situations where another language is ever dominant. For example, when English is introduced very early and dominantly into a US language minority child's life, the minority language may be insufficiently stable and developed, and may therefore be replaced by the majority language. A loss of the minority language may have social, emotional, cognitive and educational consequences for the child, as later chapters (e.g. Chapter 17) will examine. As Wong Fillmore (1991: 343) argues: 'What is lost is no less than the means by which parents socialize their children: When parents are unable to talk to their children, they cannot easily convey to them their values, beliefs, understandings, or wisdom about how to cope with their experiences.'

If parents are not fluent in English, they probably will lose touch with their children.