

## 16. Language Contact and Language Displacement

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### 1 Introduction

The term “language displacement” will be employed in this chapter to refer to the processes preceding the extinction of languages. Whereas Craig investigates the effects of language shift on the structures of the disappearing languages (see chapter 15), contextual aspects of these processes will be dealt with here. Within this frame of reference declining and replacing languages, shifting speech communities, as well as settings of language displacement, will be discussed and illustrated. The process of language shift is the focus of the last part.

### 2 The Frame of Reference of Language Displacement

In all parts of the world, we observe an increasing tendency among members of ethnolinguistic minorities to bring up their children in a language other than their own mother tongue, thereby abandoning their former ethnic languages. These changes in language use by individuals might ultimately lead to the irreversible disappearance of the minority's original language. The new one, that is, the replacing language, is in many cases one of a few fast-spreading languages such as English, Mandarin (Chinese), Russian, Hindi-Urdu, Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic, French, Swahili, and Hausa.

No consensus has been reached among scholars on the extent of language displacement, although spectacular statements have been put forward in this regard. Hill (1978: 69) estimates that in the last 500 years at least half of the languages in the world have disappeared, and Krauss (1992) proposes that only 10 percent of the present languages of the world are “safe” and therefore not threatened by extinction in the future. Quite frequently scholars dispute the above statements, some in principle claiming that there is no such thing as language death at all, while others insist that language displacement never took place on a large scale and that only a few languages are threatened by extinction. The numerous language shifts and cases of language death addressed in this chapter should, however, suffice to demonstrate that language displacement is a matter of serious concern throughout the world.

#### 2.1 The subject matter: Languages

In situations of language displacement, two opposing languages are typically involved, one which is replacing and one which is being replaced. The most common occurrence is that of a dominant, spreading language ousting a receding language.

##### The replacing language

As mentioned above, few languages play a major role as replacing languages within a global context. English is in a replacing position in relation, for example, to Australian Aboriginal languages, Indian languages in North America, and Celtic languages in Great Britain. Many languages have already become extinct in these language shifts through being replaced by English. The decline of the Celtic

languages in Great Britain resulted in the extinction of Cornish and Manx with the deaths of the last speakers in 1777 and 1974; other Celtic languages, namely Gaelic in Scotland and Irish in Ireland, are entering a vulnerable stage, while only Welsh, with about half a million speakers, seems to be resisting the overwhelming pressures from English – at least for the time being. Considering its role as a replacing language, Gorlach (forthcoming) demonstrates the impact of English in focusing on European contact situations.

“It is through our language that we exist in the world other than as just another country,” stated Pompidou some 20 years ago (*The Economist*, July 9, 1994). For more than 350 years the Academie Francaise has tried to safeguard the French language by exercising attempts at linguistic purification to prevent it from becoming “bastardized.” Whereas in 1539 King Francis I issued the Edict of Villers-Cotterets to establish French as challenging the then prestigious Latin among the educated elites, French developed into a suppressive language only in the final third of the nineteenth century. Then the French State started to discriminate against indigenous languages abroad and in France. (The British, in accordance with the policy of “divide and rule,” supported the dominant languages in their colonies.) Language policy in francophone Africa was based on the use of French, since “les dialectes africains ne sont pas des langues de civilisation” (Davesne, 1933: 6). On the African continent, however, French didn't replace a single local language, but it had a strong impact on the minority languages in its own country. Until very recently, French language policy was explicitly aiming at replacing minority languages in France. President Pompidou stated in 1970: “Il n'y a pas de la place pour les langues minoritaires dans une France destinée à marquer l'Europe de son sceau” (Finkenstaedt and Schröder, 1992: 36).

Replacing languages on the African continent do not belong to the limited set of so-called world languages, but the vast majority are indigenous languages with a national, regional, or merely local distribution (cf. pp. 278–9). In some rare cases a language may be replaced by more than one other language. One example of this phenomenon is that of the Ligbi language in Ivory Coast. Whereas the majority of this ethnolinguistic group, numbering about 10,000, live in Ghana and still speak their own language, the 3,000 to 5,000 Ligbi in the Ivory Coast have abandoned their former ethnic tongue. According to their religious faith, the Islamic Ligbi shifted to Dyula as their new language, whereas the others adopted Kulang'o, a minor Gur language (Raimund Kastenholtz, personal communication).

### **The replaced language**

The other role in language shifts is played by the language which is being replaced, either voluntarily or by force. So-called “dead languages,” such as Latin, were never displaced but developed into daughter languages. Present-day French and Italian derived from Latin and “normal” language change processes affecting the language structure gave rise to these new languages. Complete language displacement, on the contrary, is characterized by the death of an ethnic tongue, which implies that the language is not transformed into a successive language.

Which languages are then, through the process of language displacement, in danger of becoming extinct? Whereas in most parts of the world it is quite obvious which languages are endangered, such as the American Indian languages in the US or Australian Aboriginal languages in Australia, this is not so clear in the many regions of Africa. In the following the term “minority language” will be used simply to indicate that a particular language is threatened by extinction. A seemingly obvious criterion for identifying minority languages is the size of the ethnolinguistic community.

In her studies of Australian languages, Schmidt regards languages spoken by more than 250 people as viable languages – the most widespread of the Aboriginal languages does not exceed 5,000 speakers anyway. In contrast to that, the Ogoni people in Nigeria regard themselves, though numbering 500,000, as a minority and state in their “Ogoni Bill of Rights” of December 1991, addressed to the international community, “that the Ogoni languages ... are undeveloped and are about to disappear, whereas other Nigerian languages are being forced on us.” Out of 400 languages spoken by the estimated 100 million Nigerians, over 380 are widely given the status of minority languages (Agheysi, 1984).

These two examples demonstrate that the number of speakers is not an unambiguous indicator for detecting the actual risk of a language being replaced. Small speech communities, of course, are more

susceptible to existential changes, which can result in a rapid decline of their ethnic tongue. The mere fact that only a few parents may decide not to use the minority language with their children already results in endangering the entire transmission from one generation to the next. Inter-marriage and migration from rural to urban regions by just a few members can have a dramatic impact on the survival of a minority language. There are, however, many languages with small numbers of speakers but with strong loyalties which seem not to be threatened. Since these statistical facts do not suffice to identify minority languages, this concept has to be contextualized.

The most serious indicator of the vitality of a language, however, may be the ratio between the number of members of the ethnic group and the number of speakers of the ethnic tongue. That would mean an ethnic group with say 200,000 members, of whom only 50,000 were speakers of the ethnic tongue, would be regarded as being endangered, whereas a community with 3,000 members but 2,900 speaking the ethnic tongue would be seen as representing a healthy state. For example, the Zaramo and Bondei on the northern coast of Tanzania, both over 200,000 with regard to ethnic membership, are about to abandon their languages in favor of Swahili (Batibo, 1992: 88). The language of the Baiso of southern Ethiopia, even though the community numbers only 3,260 people, is not threatened by extinction in the near future since all Baiso speak the ethnic language.

Minority languages are languages which exist in environments hostile to them – the schools, media, administration, etc., being dominated by other languages. As they are limited to being used exclusively within the speech community, the external threat to minority languages derives from these other domains and the weight of pressure falls in line with the importance these domains hold within the community. Whereas many ethnolinguistic minorities on the African continent are not exposed to national education and media, this is not the case for most other minorities.

To reach a real insight into language shifts one has to study the speech community, as this is the scene in which language displacement takes place, as well as the social environment of the speech community.

## **2.2 The place of encounter: The speech community**

Even though languages are spoken by individuals, it is in speech communities that languages survive or die. Members of ethnolinguistic communities shift from their old language to a new language and finally abandon the old ethnic tongue.

On account of individual shifts, for example, by urban elites or by speech communities in a diaspora, no languages die. And not all languages have died in shifting speech communities. Some have disappeared with the extinction of the entire monolingual community, as was the case with the Tasmanian people (Swadesh, 1948), the Yahi and Uto-Aztecan on San Nicolas Island (Hill, 1983), or the Yamana of Tierra del Fuego (Gusinde, 1933).

The extinction of ethnic languages in most cases results from a complete shift of an entire speech community. Some languages, however, “survive” the language shift in certain domains. Gééz, for example, is the liturgical language used by the Ethiopian Orthodox Christian Church, but to say it “survives” is somewhat misleading since, although all Orthodox Christians in Ethiopia study Gééz texts and songs, they are not able to communicate in this language.

Unwritten minority languages may also be employed in ritual contexts or as secret languages, but their use is rarely limited to such domains. Functional shifts in language use patterns reduce minority languages in most cases to being employed at least within the family and/or the old members of the community.

Language use patterns and language competence, as well as attitudes towards languages, differ within speech communities. Speech communities are not monolithic structures. Language loyalty, the most important language attitude with regard to the survival of minority languages, may be associated with old people, women, intellectuals, conservatives, leading figures, etc. It makes a big difference whether an isolated circle of intellectuals or politicians try to revive the language of an ethnolinguistic minority or a widely accepted group of, for example, religious leaders (Brenzinger, 1994). Variations of language use and attitudes have to be investigated, with the language's distribution within the speech communities. The distribution can be based on subsections with regard

to generations, gender, levels of education, mobility, etc.

### **2.3 The setting: The social environment**

The sociopolitical environment of ethnolinguistic minorities provides the components from which the package of reasons and motives for the actual language displacement is compiled. It also accounts for the mode of the language shift. Some shifts reflect a voluntary decision to abandon a language, whereas others are the result of coercion. However, in the vast majority of cases we find a mixture of these two scenarios, which means neither “language suicide” (Denison, 1977) nor “language murder” (Calvet, 1974). New value systems penetrate into communities, and social, economic, and ideological pressures have encroaching effects on the basis of language loyalty within the speech community itself.

Complete language shift, implying the disappearance of languages, is not a new phenomenon in the history of mankind. There must always have been speech communities which gave up their mother tongue, either by force from dominant groups or deliberately in the process of assimilating to dominant groups for reasons such as gaining prestige or materialistic benefits.

The environment of each language shift is specific and changes through the ongoing process. Depending on the sociohistorical horizon of a certain ethno-linguistic minority, as well as on the kind of approach from outside, the relevant social setting for a shift might be a modern state within the global setting, an imperial expansion, or a limited, regional context. Even with similar social environments, no two language contact situations are alike, and no two language shifts resemble each other. Within a certain category of setting, however, similar sets of factors prevail.

Three categories in which language displacement occurs can be distinguished: regional, imperial, and global settings. Even though imperial settings prevailed during the colonial period, settings of that kind had existed before and still exist today, though on a much smaller scale. The three categories should therefore not be understood as successive periods in a chronological sense (which would then mean procolonial, colonial, postcolonial), but as contexts which are characterized by common features in the environment of language contact.

#### **Regional settings**

Ethnolinguistic minorities in regional settings are characterized by a limited sociohistorical horizon. Since “Western” culture spreads throughout most parts of the world and reaches even remote places, regional settings are fast disappearing as environments of language displacement. Even for minorities in regional settings, one can suggest large-scale population movements for thousands of years causing language shifts and the extinction of languages. No specific information on language shifts in regional settings in the more distant past is available, and no written records of regional “traditional” shifts exist at all. (They do exist, of course, for shifts in imperial settings.). Therefore one has two means of illuminating language displacement events which have taken place in the past. First, one can try to reconstruct language history on the basis of modern language situations and, second, one can study the rare cases of “traditional” shifts which are taking place today.

Applying methods of historical linguistics, the language situation in East Africa, for instance, could be interpreted in the following manner: Dramatic changes in East African history have always been triggered by the arrival of waves of immigrants. They came from the central regions of present-day Sudan, from Ethiopia, but also from southern Africa. For the last 5,000 years, various Nilotic, Cushitic, and Bantu-speaking populations came to East Africa and spread, very often at the expense of indigenous populations, thereby causing language shifts and language death. Seldom were scholars able to detect the rare traces of displaced languages in surviving ones. An example of this kind is the language of the so-called Taita Cushites, remnants of which have been identified by Christopher Ehret and Derek Nurse (1981) in some Bantu languages, namely the Taita-Taveta, spoken in the southeastern part of Kenya.

Studies of present-day shifts in regional settings, i.e., those which are relatively unaffected by institutional pressures, suggest that long-term contacts among neighboring groups might have resulted in language displacements for quite different reasons and in various modes. Minorities which had been living in symbiotic relationships with dominant groups for a long time might have been

forced to abandon the old language at some point.

This happened to the Aasáx, speakers of a Southern Cushitic language (Winter, 1979). Living in the Maasai plains in northern Tanzania, Aasáx-speaking hunter-gatherers were affiliated to the then dominant Maasai pastoralists. The effects of rinderpest from 1891 to 1896 changed this situation dramatically. Most Maasai lost their cattle, the base of social and economic life to them, and about 50 percent of the Maasai died during these years of hunger and of smallpox. The surviving cattleless pastoralists had to rely on the help of agricultural neighbors and the hunter-gatherer groups. Whereas the bigger agricultural communities managed to control the Maasai refugees, the weaker hunter-gatherer groups didn't succeed. The former Maasai lodgers in the course of time developed into occupation troops. In order to have total control of their new environment, the Maasai banned the use of the mother tongue of their hosts. At the time the Maasai started to leave the Aasáx settlements to build up new herds, many Aasáx had established close contacts with them. After a short period in which the language was still used by the men on their hunting parties, the final decline of the Aasáx language started about 1910. Assimilated to agricultural communities as well as pastoralists, the Aasáx ceased to exist within the following decade. After that, only a few individuals retained some knowledge of the Aasáx language. In 1973 and 1975 Winter was provided with the history of the Aasáx by the last speaker of the language, Kimíndet ole Kiyangú, who died in 1976, aged about 88 years.

Another traditional setting in which languages have been displaced is the spread of indigenous *linguae francae* replacing vernaculars. Autochthonous *linguae francae* were already growing in precolonial times. On the African continent, languages such as Swahili, Manding, Songhai, Hausa, and Amharic were widely spoken and many vernacular languages were replaced by them. Some of these expansions of indigenous languages share certain features with the following settings.

### **Imperial settings**

Language displacement in imperial settings is characterized by the fact that the replacing language is the language of intruding powers which regard themselves as superior, and who expand with the ambition to extend their influence into other territories. The vast majority of known language displacements took place in such settings. At least for the last 2,000 years colonial expansion, as well as conquests motivated by religious conflicts, affected settings of language contact in most parts of the world.

Dominant extraneous powers violated the areas of others; brute force has been a feature commonly found, and in some cases the conquered people ended as the subject of genocide. Epidemic diseases often accompanied the killings, but it is not always clear whether the diseases actually took place or were just used as an excuse to hide genocide. In most cases, however, languages died before in the way that their speakers were forced to abandon the old mother tongue and to shift to the language of the conquerors. Brief examples from different parts of the world should demonstrate the extent of language displacement in these settings.

In *Southern Africa* the decline of autochthonous languages started with the arrival of the white settlers. Around 1650 the total population of South African Khoekhoe speakers must have been between 100,000 and 200,000. Within a few decades after the first European contact, the traditional economy and the social and political structure collapsed. Smallpox epidemics, as well as language shifts to Khoe-Dutch and Xhosa, led to the death of South African Khoekhoe, which was completed in the nineteenth century.

The San-speaking population spread over the total of modern South Africa, most probably for at least the last 8,000 years. They may have numbered around 10,000 to 20,000 people some 300 years ago. Only 10 speakers of a San language, that is, the /Auo language in the Kalahari Gemsbok Park, have survived; all the others have been exterminated or absorbed into Afrikaans-speaking "Coloured" communities (Traill, forthcoming).

The history of language displacement in *Brazil* is one of the most cruel, and members of ethnolinguistic minorities are still physically threatened now. In 1500 A.D., only two years after Columbus explored the coasts of modern Venezuela, Pero Vaz de Caminha, in a letter to King Manuel of Portugal, described friendly exchanges of presents with the Indian population on their arrival in

what is now Brazil. Nevertheless this was the start of the cruel suppression of the indigenous Indian population and reckless dominance by the invaders. The decline of the Indian population in Brazil since then has been dramatic. Slave expeditions, headhunters, as well as the regular military forces had their part in the reduction of the numbers of Indians from about 5 million to only about 200,000 today. Material interest was the leading motivation for many in the invasion of this continent, and still today ruthless fortune-hunters in search of gold kill Indians, tolerated by the government. The massacre in which illegal gold-hunters murdered at least 73 members of the Yanomami took place as recently as 1993, and no serious action has been taken by the Brazilian government of Itamar Franco.

Today's language situation in South America reflects the history of the indigenous Indian populations in that we do find large numbers of isolated languages. Many Indian languages have disappeared without leaving any linguistic trace, but of others at least ethnonyms or toponyms are known. Most of about 170 living Indian languages in Brazil survive in very small speech communities. In Brazil, Chile, and Argentina the indigenous population has been physically eliminated in large numbers, even entirely in Uruguay, and many languages have disappeared with the death of their speakers. Apart from that, some indigenous *linguae francae*, such as Quechua, Tupi, and Guaraní, have spread with the support of the colonial power at the expense of minority languages (Adelaar, 1991).

When Captain James Cook annexed *Australia* for the British Empire on August 27, 1770, more than 250 languages were in use by different Aboriginal communities in Australia. After approximately 200 years of white contact, only 90 languages survived, 70 of which are threatened by extinction in the near future. Only about 10 percent of the Aboriginal people still speak indigenous languages, that is, 30,000 people out of 300,000. Whereas in the past Aboriginal speech communities were made up of 4,000 to 5,000 speakers, today only about 8 languages have more than 1,000 speakers. Some 45 languages, half of the remaining Aboriginal ones, rely on very limited numbers of speakers, that is, between 10 and 100. But even the "healthy" languages are threatened by extinction, since the pressure of "Western culture," responsible for the death of many Aboriginal languages in the past, is still increasing. Aboriginal languages not only disappeared through assimilation, but also as a result of massacres and diseases (Schmidt, 1990).

In the 1740s the Aleut people in *Siberia* and *Alaska* may have numbered between 12,000 and 15,000. Ruthless violence by intruding Russian fur-traders, as well as disease, were responsible for the dramatic weakening of the Aleut people, which numbered only about 2,000 to 3,000 in 1820. Japanese forces attacked the Aleutian islands in June 1942, taking the inhabitants as prisoners. Many of the Aleut people didn't survive the war.

After World War II, speech communities of some dialects of the Aleut language, *Unangam tunuu*, which is related to the Eskimo language, had disappeared or declined. Others, for example, Attuan, still spoken in the 1950s, as well as the Aleut once spoken on the Shumagin Islands, have died since then.

In 1973 teaching of Aleut had been started, and teaching materials, grammars, and dictionaries have been written on the Aleut language. The future of these small speech communities is uncertain mainly because of their small numbers. Today active Aleut speakers in Alaska may be 500, the speakers of Eastern Aleut, mostly middle-aged or older people, up to about 450 (Bergsland, 1990).

### **Global settings**

Today, most language displacements take place in a global setting, in that a modern state provides the environment of ethnolinguistic minorities. The worldwide domination of only a few languages and the speed of their spread is due to modern communication technologies. Physical pressure, dominant in colonial shifts, has been replaced by social and, more important, economic pressure in the global setting.

Many developing countries with a multilingual population regard this linguistic diversity as a threat to national unity and "nation-building." Supporting ethnic languages is very often seen as supporting separatism. In most developing countries institutional support in the media, schools, administration, etc. is restricted to a few dominant languages of national or international distribution, leaving the majority of indigenous languages behind.

Today the future of many languages is uncertain not only because their functional range is scaled down, but because they are never used for, and adapted to newly emerging functions which are from the start associated with another language ... Lack of functional expansion and adaptation is thus a correlate and counterpart of scaled-down use.

(Coulmas, 1992: 170)

The expansion of dominant languages is not achieved by physical violence, as described under the imperial category, but by means of spreading ideologies through the mass media and the education system. The “world economy” demands adjustment and reaches even remote rural areas in developing countries, as “world religions” do. Terms such as westernization, christianization, islamization, modernization, industrialization all point in the same direction, which is reduction of diversity. Assimilation by choice will be the main cause of the worldwide decline of minority languages in the future.

### 3 The Process: Language Shift

Language contact is a prerequisite for language shifts. Ethnolinguistic communities, usually those with minority status, become bilingual in that they still retain their own language and acquire the language of a dominant group in addition. Recessive use of the old language with intra-ethnic communication leads to the process of language displacement. The changing language behavior of members of an ethnolinguistic minority of this kind qualifies to disturb the fragility of a status quo. This unstable bilingualism may finally develop into monolingualism in the new language. The process of language replacement usually takes at least three generations. This is not a unidirectional development, but in the course of time successive phases with different characteristics modify the process before a language becomes extinct.

Complete language displacement can of course be studied through the rare cases in which the history of certain languages which no longer exist today has been documented. With the Arab conquest of Egypt in the seventh century the process began which finalized the displacement of Coptic. Before that, Coptic had been the spoken language of Egypt, written first in hieroglyphic script, then in the hieratic and later in the demotic form of writing. About 2,300 years ago the Egyptians adopted the Greek alphabet, elaborated by additional letters to represent the distinctive sounds of their language, which then was called “Coptic.”

The decline of Coptic as a spoken language was caused by heavy discrimination from the new Arab rulers. Soon after the conquest Arabic became the only language used in administration and pressure to convert to Islam increased. One main factor responsible for accelerating the process of abandoning the Coptic language can be identified; that is the introduction of a progressively heavy capitation tax known as JIZYAH on non-Muslims. In 1672–3 the Dominican traveller J. M. Vansleb reported in his account of his journey to Upper Egypt of having met a certain Mu'allim Athanasius, who was regarded as the last Copt fluent in the Coptic language as a spoken medium. From the seventeenth century on Coptic “survived” only as the language of liturgy (Ishaq, 1991: 604–6).

For investigating the details of the processes leading to the extinction of languages, however, we rely heavily on shift situations which are obviously not completed yet. And in these cases we can never be sure whether changes in language behavior will eventually result in the extinction of the language or not.

Researchers in this field are regularly challenged at this point with the presumably central question of whether they can predict language death. In his review of *Investigating Obsolescence: Studies in Language Contraction and Death*, edited by Nancy Dorian in 1989, R. Hudson expressed his disappointment and concluded:

The big question, though, is defined by Romaine: can we diagnose incipient language death? Obviously this is easy when no children are learning the language concerned, but are there any other more subtle symptoms, either in the social circumstances or in the

language's structure? Knowing little about these things, I expected a positive, and simple, answer, but the book disabused me. The social circumstances under which languages die are surprisingly diverse, and, as we have seen, the language's structure tells us very little.

(Hudson, 1990: 834)

As we have seen above, the setting influences language behavior. In the ongoing process of language shift there are often phases in which ethnolinguistic minorities react with maintenance strategies or at least increased overt language loyalty. They experience their language as being threatened by extinction and sometimes fractions of the speech community try to promote the fading language. In many cases attempts to maintain the language are started too late and are not serious enough; for example, language can be seen only as a symbol of identity, or there is no lobby to support and implement language maintenance.

Pressure on ethnolinguistic communities from outside may evoke language maintenance activities and resistance. But it also may undermine self-perception, which can then result in changes in language use patterns. This is when the "downward spiral of reduced language use and loss" may start its deadly circle. The interdependence of changing language use patterns and changes within the language structure has been demonstrated in this model by Schmidt (1990: 20-1). Limited use of the minority language leads to limited exposure to that language, which results in decreasing competence, lack of confidence in using the language, and increasing reliance on the dominant language. The circle then repeats itself on a lower level, by more limited use of the minority language.

#### 4 Further Reading

In this chapter the discussion of language displacement is restricted to those cases in which the entire speech community of a certain language has been involved. In order to understand the processes of language shift, however, the study of many other related language-contact situations could provide valuable insights. Just to mention a few examples: Research on language maintenance and shift of immigrants in the United States (Fishman, 1966, 1978; Veltman, 1983) and Australia (Clyne, 1982), or the shift from Hungarian to German in the Austrian Oberwart (Gal, 1979) provide important case studies of the social contexts and processes of language shift, even though no languages die. Literature on language spread (Cooper, 1982; Lowenberg, 1988) and "language competition" (Wardhaugh, 1987) helps to identify the shift from the perspective of the replacing language.

Studies focusing on language death, that is, the displacement of minority languages which results in the extinction of languages, are not that numerous, but there has been a rapid increase during the last few years. In 1987 Fishman stated:

There aren't many Nancy Dorians around who care to go back, time after time, to dying language communities, even for research purposes, although such communities contain the answers to many of the best, the most difficult and the most important questions: the questions of limits (of where and how to draw the line between dying and changing, between illness and health, between death and life).

(Fishman, 1988: 3)

Working on Scottish Gaelic since the 1970s, Dorian is one of the pioneers in the field of investigating language death. Another piece of long-term research is that of R.M.W. Dixon (1991), who has been studying the decline of Dyrbal, an Australian Aboriginal language, for the last 30 years. And Dressler has published articles on the decline of Breton since 1972. Together with Wodak-Leodolter, he edited a topic issue on "language death" of the *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* in 1977. In "Spracherhalt - Sprachverfall - Sprachtod" Dressler (1988) summarizes relevant publications on the topic, by discussing them according to different perspectives and approaches. Several collections of articles on the subject have been published more recently, Dorian (1989), Beck (1989), Robins and



Uhlenbeck (1991), and Brenzinger (1992), providing a more solid base for further studies.

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