

Tools and Technologies of Language Documentation

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Week-01

Lecture-03

Lecture 03 : Introducing Language Shift and Ethnolinguistic Vitality

Hello everyone, this is Dripta and this is the third lecture of Module 1 of the course, Tools and Technologies of Language Documentation, offered by NPTEL and IIT Kharagpur. So, the topic of today's lecture is Introducing Language Shift and Ethnolinguistic Vitality. So, in the first lecture you have already learnt about the idea of Endangered Language, the definition of Endangered Language and also the types of Endangered Language. So, in today's class I will be giving a brief overview of a few topics which are important for the overall course. Initially, I will talk about the idea of Language Shift. You already heard about the idea of Language Shift in the previous classes.

Then I will talk about the relationship of Language Shift with the idea of Language Maintenance. I will give an overview of Language Shift in different communities, how we can talk about different types of Language Shift in different communities and I will talk about reasons for Language Shift. So, these will be probably useful for you to understand the idea of Endangered Language as a whole. I will also briefly figure out how the attitudes are related to Language Shift, attitudes related to various languages, and then I will talk about Language Loyalty and Ethnolinguistic Vitality.

Finally, a brief idea of Language Revival will be given to you. So, you already know about the definition of Endangered Languages by now and the reasons, and you know that shift to more dominant languages result in endangerment. The term Language Shift is now familiar to you, but we will be going through the detail of the definition. If you are familiar with the domain of Sociolinguistics, the discipline of Sociolinguistics, you know that choice of language plays a major role. Whenever we talk about language varieties, we do talk about some kind of choice.

The speakers make a choice in any multilingual situation, any multilingual landscape, and the choice is triggered by certain factors. So, when we will talk about Language Endangerment and Language Shift, we will definitely use the term 'choice' again. We will see that how the users are selecting one particular term, whether they are selecting the ancestral language or not, whether they are selecting from the dominant language or not. So, what kind of choice they are making is important in this regard. And if you think about dominant languages, you know what the dominant languages are by now.

So, dominant languages are the prestigious language in different kind of societies. And dominant languages are often imposed on the speakers of smaller languages. So, when it is imposed the speakers or users of smaller languages are.. they tend to choose the dominant languages, the codes in the dominant languages in public domain.

You know what the domains are. So, maybe at home domain they are not using the codes of dominant languages, but in public domain, the dominant languages are chosen by the speakers. And we can now say that there is some kind of competitions between different languages in a multilingual landscape. It is related to the choice again, but what kind of competitions are there it depends on different context. So, if you are working in a multilingual landscape, working on any endangered language, it is important for you to understand that what are the languages which are involved in the competitions, and what kind of competitions are there.

So, we see that in terms of these competitions, some languages will disappear and when some languages are disappear, it is basically the situation where we talk about endangered languages. Now, I will point out to two very important factors which are important in the discussion of Language Shift and Endangered Language as a whole. One is 'social mobility', the other one is 'economic advantage'. So, if you have, if you receive an economic advantage by using the codes of one particular language, then you will tend to use that right, and that is a major reason for Language Shift. Similarly, social mobility related to some particular languages force the speakers to use that particular language in multilingual landscape.

And at this point, I should also mention that the role of adjacent languages is important too. So, if you have different languages in one landscape, the adjacent languages of the smaller or minority languages will determine the habitat conditions or shift. Language Maintenance and Language Shift, these two notions are parallel and these will move hand in hand. So, when we talk about Language Shift in terms of some domains, we see that it is maintained in some domains. And in future, we will talk about these domain specific language shift in detail.

Because this is an introductory lecture, I think I should tell you that Language Maintenance and Shift are related concepts. So, we see that in some particular domain like home domain, the minority languages are maintained, but in public domains as I have mentioned earlier briefly, the language shift is quite prominent. And if for example, we think about language maintenance and shift in terms of schools, we see that in case of many languages, parents force the children to use the dominant language, but in some cases, parents do not force the children to use the dominant language. So, if the parents do not force the children to use the dominant languages, we will see that the smaller languages survive. So, school domain is one important domain and we will talk about examples from different school domains for the future lectures as well.

Now, let us talk about language shift in different communities. The nature of language shift is not the same in case of different communities and there are some factors which control the language shift. For example, if we talk about migrant minorities, we will see that the shift has a particular pattern. I work on some languages in the tea garden belt of northern Bengal and Assam. So, I see that the migrant communities mostly migrated from Central India in colonial times for working in the tea plantations.

These migrant community members speak various minority languages and they shift to something else. They shift to a common link language named Sadri, also known as the Tea garden Sadri, but the ancestral languages of the migrants were not maintained in most of the cases. Maybe you will find one or two exceptional examples, but what I have seen from my own work that most of the speakers of minority languages have shifted to the common link language and they have stopped using their ancestral language. So this is an example of migrant minorities, but if we talk about non-migrant communities, they shift their languages too. So what we think about the non-migrant communities here? So we see that there are political, economic and social changes which result in language shift.

So I have put an example of Oberwart in Austria, which is located in the border of Hungary. So it is an interesting case and there have been works on this language and it is interesting because the communities they are shifting from Hungarian to German which is the language dominant language in Austria. But before the First World War, Oberwart was a part of Hungary. So, Hungarian was the dominant language, but because of the change of boundary, they shifted to a different language. So we can see the change of border can also compel a community to shift their language.

So if we think about Indian context, many of you are familiar with the different instances of reorganization of provincial borders after the independence of India in 1947. So, there

were certain colonial divisions during the British era for administrative purpose, but it was quite different after the independence when new provincial boundaries were created through different policy documents. So we have seen that some communities shifted to the dominant language of the new province. Maybe one particular area was a part of a different province and after the reorganization of political boundaries, which was done on the basis of linguistic basis, the community members shifted to the dominant language of the new province. So I have given example of two different languages in this regard where I have worked.

So shift from Odia to Bangla at the Medinipur and Jhargram district of West Bengal in India is a very common example. You can see that one part of Medinipur was earlier a part of Odisha and now it is it has been incorporated in the province of West Bengal. So the speakers, who earlier used Odia in public domain, shifted to Bangla, which is the official language of West Bengal. Also a shift from Eastern Hindi to Bangla in Purulia district of West Bengal which is very evident. So there were multiple border changes in the district of Purulia.

And we have seen that the speakers who earlier used Eastern Hindi have shifted to formal standardized Bangla as a result of the provincial changes. So now let us talk about the shift by migrant majorities. So not only the migrant minorities, but we also see that migrant majorities shift language. So what do we mean by migrant majorities? If the migration is happening in a bulk, if a huge population is migrating for a particular reason, we will also see that language shift is taking place. In case of New Zealand, the Maori speakers, a huge number of Maori speakers shifted to English because of the prestige associated with English.

And in Indian context, we can say that after the partition of Bengal, many people migrated from the present day Bangladesh to the present day West Bengal. They abandoned the so called non-standard varieties of Bangla and they shifted to the so called Standard Bangla. So this shift can be considered as a shift by migrant majorities. So we can of course, talk about the various factors which are associated with them, but I will talk about it later in today's class. When we are talking about different kinds of shift, we have to keep in mind that negative attitudes towards certain stereotyped languages or linguistic varieties is one important reason for the shift.

If there is some kind of negative attitude involved or associated with a particular language, then the speakers will tend to hide their linguistic identity and as a result they stop using their own language and shift to a different one which is a dominant language. So the reasons for language shift are listed here. Let us talk about them briefly and I am sure if you are thinking about your own data, the language on which you are probably

working, you can figure out the factors which are operating for your kind of language shift which is important for you. So, we talk about economic, social and political factors. So if we think about jobs, if jobs are available for knowing a language in industrial belts for example, many communities abandon their traditional languages as there is a social stigma and language shift takes place.

So, for example, in Indian context again we can talk about English. The shift to English is quite common in many industrial belts because of the use for the purpose of industrial work. And we can also think about Hindi and official languages of different provinces in India where many minority communities shift to these more prestigious languages for the sake of their job. And I already talked about the change of political boundary which affects language use. Demographic factors can also be important in terms of the language shift.

So in rural areas, if we think that there is one entire population who speaks a minority language, then they will maintain their language. And, we can also find that the isolated communities tend to maintain their language because there is no pressure from adjacent communities. A community is located in an isolated area then they will tend to maintain their language instead of shifting it. So, one example is Toto, a small language which is spoken in India-Bhutan border. They did not shift to a dominant language entirely though there is a pressure of Nepali and Bangla because of administrative reasons, but because Toto speakers live in an isolated area, they somehow managed to use their language and they did not shift entirely to the language which are dominant for administrative reasons.

So now we will come to attitudes toward languages and I will briefly point out to the factors related to attitude. I already told you that negative attitude or different kind of negative attitudes are important for language shift. So, attitude toward languages are actually determined by various social and political factors and we will have one entire class on attitudes related to language and I will explain with some examples later. But for now, we should know that attitude towards a language determines the shift. If a minority language is valued in an area, shift will be slower and if it is again stigmatized, then shift will be quicker.

So, if we think about example of French in Canada, which has an international status, we can see that the French speakers in Canada maintain their language and they did not shift to any other language. I will also introduce the idea of 'language loyalty' here which is an important notion for us. So following Fishman, who is an important figure in the domain of language shift, So Language Loyalty is a variable function of language for group maintenance. So here we are talking about maintenance by a group. And if we think about any immigrant situation, we will see that language loyalties of the host and

immigrant

communities

meet.

So we are talking about immigrant situation and thinking in terms of the host community and the immigrant community. At times the host communities will pressurize the immigrant communities as we have seen for other cases. But in case of many immigrant situations, we can see that there is an expectation on both sides for acquiring the majority language. So if the host community wants the migrant population to learn their own language and if the migrant population is also interested to learn the host communities language, then there will be a clear cut language shift. But on both sides, if we have that there is expectation for acquiring the majority language and maintaining the ancestral language, then language shift is not a major issue.

If the host community understands the importance of the minority languages or the ancestral language of the migrant population, then there will be a maintenance of both the ancestral language of the community and maintenance of the dominant language which is spoken by the host community. So we need to understand what kind of situation we are dealing with. If we are dealing with field data, you need to understand that whether these two communities are creating a pressure which is moving towards shift and whether these communities are ok with the maintenance. So again this shift and maintenance together will determine the linguistic landscape of any area. So we see that according to Fishman it is culturally variable.

So you can see that different kind of situations are found in different geographical areas and along with the geographical area, we will need to think about the social and political factors and at times the economic factors as well. So when we are talking about this pressure from the host community or the users of the dominant languages, we will see that the immigrant communities either maintain or shift their language. Let me introduce you to this idea of Ethnolinguistic Vitality at this point. In the next lecture, I will be talking about ethnolinguistic vitality in detail, but it is very important for us to learn about ethnolinguistic vitality because it is directly associated with language shift. And our ideas of language shift and ethnolinguistic vitality together will help us to understand different kind of situation in terms of endangered languages.

You already know that there are different types of endangered languages, and there are different layers as given by UNESCO. If you understand language shift along with the idea of ethnolinguistic vitality, you can also figure out the status of a particular language in terms of the layers suggested by UNESCO. So ethnolinguistic vitality if we try to define it, we will see that it is an aggregate of socio-cultural factors that determine a group's ability to function as a distinct collective entity. So if a group together is maintaining their language or they are maintaining their cultural pattern which they got

from their ancestral places, then we will see that this ethnolinguistic vitality is in a different shape and we will see that in some cases, along with the language, the cultural patterns are also shifted because of the pressure from the dominant groups.

So we need to understand that. So if we think about the factors which are controlling the ethnolinguistic vitality, we will again see that demography is a factor. I mean I am talking about the population dynamics, what kind of population is found in an area where you are working, but we also need to figure out what kind of institutional support is given to the language, to the minority language. And status in a society determines the ethnolinguistic vitality too. So, in terms of demography, we not only think about the nature of the population, we also think about the size of a group, if it is only a few speakers or if it is a like majority group. So what kind of demographic features are associated with it, total population and also, we consider the residence patterns, whether in a same village all the speakers are concentrated or they are located in different parts of one village or one target area, it is important as a part of demography.

We also consider birth rate, endogamy and whether there is still a flow of migration to the target area. So if there is a flow, there is still a flow of migration, the situation will be different from another area where there is no migration happening in recent days. Talking about institutional support, we talk about particular domains like education, use for the governmental domains, media and religion. So you already learnt about them in the first lecture briefly in terms of endangered language. So I am coming back to these factors in terms of analyzing ethnolinguistic vitality and institutional support.

So if you have one minority language which is introduced in the educational domain, you will see that it somehow tends to survive, it is not wiped out. If it is used by the government, even then we will see that there is some kind of motivation for the speakers to use it or learn it and teach it to the next generation. If it is used for entertainment in media, for example, the recent YouTube videos created by different communities, then there is a motivation too from the community's part to maintain the language, And we also see that some languages are maintained for religious purpose. For religious festivals, for example, the language is used. So there will be a motivation from the community's part to teach the language to the next generation.

So if we think about status for any society, we will see that position in the social prestige hierarchy is important. So there is always a hierarchy right, if you think about any area where there are multiple languages, in any multilingual landscape there is a hierarchy. So if we think that the status of the target language, which is a small language, what kind of status is there? We will see that the status in terms of economic cultural and linguistic aspects are important. So may be economically it has a high status, but it is not

maintained for cultural domains, then we need to take care of all these issues. So overall, we can understand that ethnolinguistic vitality helps us to understand the nature of language maintenance and shift.

So how a minority language can be maintained is an issue. We will talk about the maintenance of minority languages in our future lectures as well, but at this point, because this is an introductory lecture, I will of course, let you know that some community members take steps in maintaining and protecting their language. If there is an understanding, the community is losing their language, then they will try to protect it from the threats and try to maintain it in some particular domains. So at this point I have two examples. One is use in school which is the case of Welsh in England and also, how a language is used for religious purpose which is Hebrew in Israel.

So increased use in these two domains helped these two languages to change the status in terms of shift. So in future also we will see how these different domains are important. And if we think about this revival, I was talking about revival right. So we can say that there is a Reversal of Language Shift. Again I am borrowing this term from Fishman, who said that reversal of language shift can help to revitalize a language.

Revitalize means you basically help the language to survive and protect it from death. So if a language is in danger reversal of language shift can help us. Again, I will give the example of Maori in New Zealand, where there are initiatives of revitalization through the reversal of language shift and whenever this reversal of language shift is initiated, there is a strong need of an assessment of the language loss. Whether all the speakers use the language, whether different generations use it in different domains, so we will come to it later, but I thought I will just give you one or two examples. So immersion programs in different languages help to revive languages through schooling.

So we will see that there are different bilingual education programs and at times there are also introduction of television channels in those languages which help to revitalize different languages. For example, Welsh in England was revitalized through both. So, we are coming towards the end of the lecture. I will give you a very small diagram which has been given by Spolsky in 1978, where this dimension of analyzing Language Maintenance and Shift through different domains. So I am showing this diagram to you because you can start thinking about your own data, start thinking about the target language on which you are working.

And or maybe if you are speaker of an endangered language, you can start evaluating the situation of your own language. So there are these domains called educational, socio-cultural, economic, political, institutional, demographic and attitudinal. So all these

domains, though their percentage might vary, but they will help you to understand the nature of language shift and maintenance in terms of any target language. So you need to understand the nature of language shift and to consider various factors that affect the language shift, it can be different for different speech communities. So here is the conclusion for today's lecture, I will talk about all the topics that I have covered briefly.

So initially I talked about the shift to dominant languages which result in endangerment. And I also said that choice of language is important in any multilingual landscape and especially if you are talking about migrant minority communities. Social mobility and economic advantage determine language shift, and language maintenance and shift both are domain specific. And we have seen how migrant and non migrant minorities and migrant majorities may have different patterns for shift. I also introduced you to this idea of Language Loyalty and Ethnolinguistic Vitality which will be important for us throughout this course.

And we found that the group's ability to function as a distinct entity is basically the idea of ethnolinguistic vitality and we will continue with this discussion in the next class. Finally, we learnt about the reversal of language shift can save the endangered languages and we found examples of revival through different examples. So, these are the references, the key references and thank you.