

Tools and Technologies of Language Documentation

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Lecture 31 : Language Revitalization

Welcome to the 31st lecture of the course, Tools and Technologies of Language Documentation. Today, I will talk about language revitalization. Often, when we talk about language documentation, we also talk about language revitalization because the outputs of language documentations can be used for language revitalization and as you know, that some scholars have already suggested that there should always be some outcomes for the language documentation which can always help in reviving the language. So today, the topics which I will cover are revitalization, revitalization and language reversal; how they are different, factors required for language revitalization, Fishman's model of language revitalization and language revival in India. In Indian scenario, what do we see; how inclusion in the VIIIth schedule can bring more prestige to a language, how we see nowadays, community members try to revive their language, what efforts they put or how we can see in certain communities, they are trying to revitalize their language so I will talk about all these things. What do we mean by revitalization? The term 'revitalization' refers to strengthening a language by bringing it to a new generation of language learners, that the new generation also start learning their own language rather than shifting to some other language.

So, language revitalization is also referred as language revival or reversing language shift. By now you know what is language shift, because when we talk about language endangerment, a major factor is language shift where the community members shift to other dominant languages leaving their own language back. So in those cases, where there is reversing shift, that means, if the community members have shifted from x

language to y language and then they are coming back to their own x language, that is the reversing of the process. That is what is done in language revitalization.

So, language revitalization attempts to expand the number of speakers and use of language. So of course, when the language users will be more, the language will not be endangered; more people will use the language. It is also a method of maintaining the language. If you see that there are few speakers left in a language, then there is a process through which they are encouraged to maintain their language, so that, they do not shift to other language. That can actually help in the language health, it can make the language survive.

So, the language is protected from getting extinct. That is why, for language maintenance also, sometimes this process can be used. So, language revitalization is a fairly recent sub field of linguistics. So, it can also be studied as a sub field of linguistics that is concerned with the halting and reversing of extinction of languages. So, when we are talking about endangered or dead languages, then we are trying to revive it.

So, that process is all about revitalization. So, interested parties may include individuals, cultural or community groups, governments or political authorities to reverse the decline of a language. So, what happens is that, it is a process which can be initiated by an individual or by a group of members. So, these groups can be representatives of the government or by the community members themselves . So, anyone can actually put their effort in reviving the language.

And when we talk about language revitalization, it is again multidisciplinary. So, when I talked about language documentation, I mentioned that the process is multidisciplinary. We involve scholars or experts from different fields. In language revitalization also, we involve experts from different field, because when we are talking about language, it is not only one thing; language has different dimensions. By now you know, how language is affected by various other factors starting from the ecology of the place, sociology of the place, political scenario, political policies, educational policies.

So everything affects the language. So when we are talking about reviving the language, we need experts from those fields as well, so that, the language can be revived. So, making policies depends on various types of policies, educational policy, economic policy; those can actually affect language revitalization. Similarly within linguistics, documentary linguistics, eco linguistics, computational linguistics, all can actually work together in a revitalization of a language. Sociology, sociolinguistics, ecology, all of these together can contribute in the process of language revitalization.

So, as you know that shift is not a conscious process. Similarly, maintenance is not a conscious process, but when we talk about revitalization it is a conscious process. So, unconsciously the community members they shift to other language or unconsciously they maintain their language. But when we are talking about revitalization of a language, that is a conscious process; that is a conscious effort. So, the community members have to be very conscious that consciously try for revitalization of the language.

And again there are other efforts made by the scholars or experts from different fields. So, that revitalization can be done. success for a language. So, now language revival, reversal and revitalization are generally used in lots of cases where we see different terms are used. Sometimes, they are used for this same concept, but again, we also see that there are minor differences in that.

Like language reversal, Fishman defines as ..it starts with a language still in use, but in decline. So, when we see a language is endangered, people are actually shifting to other language, then we can say or talk about language reversal. It is an attempt to return around declining trends in intergenerational transmission.

So, when there is a decline when there is the language is not passed from one generation to another, then a conscious effort is made. the language is spread across the generation, everyone learns the language. That is more about language reversal. And when we talk about revitalization, it starts from a language in decline, but it does not focus exclusively on increasing intergenerational transmission. So, it is not only about the language is spreading across generations or not, it also talks about adults learning the language.

So, there can be different methods which are included in education, technologies, social or mass media. So, what we see is that everyone, irrespective of their age, should use the language, start using their own language and for that, materials are being made available. So, that is more about revitalization. The goals for both reversal and revitalizations are same you can say, where both aims to save the language or protect the language from dying, but there are difference in methods which can be said, but as I mentioned, sometimes, both the terms are also used interchangeably. So now, factors which can help in revitalization, what are the factors? So, these are 6 factors mentioned by Crystal, where he talks about these factors which can actually help in language revitalization.

The first one is about adding prestige to the language. So, when the dominant community will not think inferior of the minor community, then the community members will not feel that prestige is added to their language, they will not feel like shifting to the dominant language. So, if equal respect is there, if equal prestige is there for both the dominant language and not dominant language, the smaller languages, the minor

languages, then the speakers of these smaller and minor languages will not feel like shifting to other language. So, adding prestige to the smaller languages is a very very important aspect. Then comes increase their wealth.

So, by wealth what do we mean? Scope of employment. If the language speakers are not forced to shift to some other place, to migrate from their own village to some bigger towns in search of jobs, then they will not go and along with that, their language will also be maintained. If they stay in their own village, if they get proper earning, if they get proper employment, then they will not be forced to migrate. And when we see there are migrations we see language shifts are there. So, when people will maintain staying in their own village they will also maintain their own language and culture.

Increase their legitimate power in the eyes of the dominant community. So, every language or every speech community should be equally powerful. It should not be like the dominant language is enjoying all the power, while the smaller language community members are not having any power rather they are being looked down upon by the dominant community. That should not be the thing. Have a strong presence in the education system which is again, very very important.

If there is no educational materials available, the language is not part of the education system, then we see there is a tendency of shift. If the smaller languages are also included in the education system, then automatically prestige and respect is added to the language. Otherwise people say that there are no books in available in that language, the language is not taught in the school and so, slowly a negative attitude grows with that language by the community members and also by the other community members. But when the language is taught in the school, then there is a positive attitude which grows with that. Again by the community members and also by the outsiders.

So, when there are educational materials available in the language, when the language is included in the educational system of that particular area, then that helps in language maintenance and language revitalization. So, when we talk about language revitalization, we often talk about creating educational materials in that particular language. Can we write down the language or not? So if you remember, in my lecture when I was talking about script, I said script is very important for revitalization. That is what here Crystal talks about when he says that revitalization can be successful when there is a script for the language Because when we talk about the script that means, we can publish lots of materials in that particular language in that particular script. Can make use of electronic technology: that what he says and we can also say, digital space, whether the language can be used in the electronic technology and in the digital space or not.

because that is a very prominent domain nowadays; we all are using digital platform every time. Whether the language can be used in that platform or not because when the language cannot be included in the digital platform or in electronic technology, then of course, the language will be excluded from an important domain and then the users will be forced to shift to other language. So, that should not be the case and the language should be found in the electronic media, as well for revitalization process. Now, looking at the model of revitalization given by Fishman.

So, his talks about these steps. So, these steps are one by one that is what he talks about. So, this model shows different steps where you can see the language revitalization process starts with adult learning the language. So, the adults of the community should accept or should be motivated enough to learn their own language. They should be convinced and as I mentioned, this is a conscious process; this does not happen unconsciously. So, they should agree or they should be motivated enough to learn their own language.

So, when the adults of the community know their language, they are talking or they are using their own language, then they can make social groups. So, initially we see individual adults learning their language, then we see that they are actually using the language in the social groups when they are gathering somewhere or in social programs or in other rituals, they are using their own language. That way, the language spreads across the community. Encourage informal use of the language. So, when they are actually gathering somewhere and using the language that, in itself, is an encouragement of the use of the language in informal context.

When the language is used in the informal context then of course, people can use it more, they can use it in the home domain, in market domain, in different informal spaces, they can use the language. And the more the language will be used, the health of the language will improve. That is very very important and when the language will be used in all the informal domains then the script can be actually created or designed for the language. So again, as I mentioned, script is very very important for revival of a language. So, when the script is developed, then literacy programs can be started in that language.

So, there can be smaller literacy programs like within the village, where some individuals can teach language or there can be also inclusion of the language in the schools, in the local schools, in the education system so that is a very big step when the language is included in the education system then that means language is safe now or protected now that means it is not that the language will die soon In many of the communities, we have seen that the community members have their Sunday schools or

they have their informal schools where they teach their own children in their language in their script . So, those are also smaller steps for revitalization where we see that the language is not used in the formal schools or in the other schools, but then where community members they have their smaller schools and then there are some volunteers who teach in these schools. They use those languages, their own language to teach the children. And in these schools, everything is taught; math, science, literature everything is taught, but using their own language. So, medium of instruction becomes their own language and that helps in maintenance of the language, children learn that language and also, at times it helps them to understand the concepts when they hear it in their own language.

So parallelly, children go to the regular schools and also to these community-run schools. So parallelly, they attend both these schools. So, when the language is used in the schools then slowly we can see that the language can also be used in the workplace. So, by workplace we mean writing applications, doing some official works are also accepted. So, when there is script, when the language is used in the school, we know the language is used in the school, when there are some materials published in the language.

So, we know that there should be some grammar, there should be some dictionaries already available in the language. And when there are already some formal texts like grammar, dictionaries and all those, then the language can also be used in the workplace and then in media. So, in media that means, media can be different types of media, electronic media, print media, social media, in every type of media. So, when people are using the language in media that means, they are interested in their language they are using the language because mostly media is used for entertainment also sometimes, for spreading some information. So, for all those cases when the language is used that means, the language is revitalized now; it is in a safer position now.

And then of course, to the higher education that means, in the colleges, in the universities, when there are departments of that language, then we know that the language is quite stable and it is no more vulnerable because it is used in various domains. and it is also used for higher education, but all these steps actually takes time. It is not like one day, will be adults learning the language, second day, they will gather and start talking, third day, they will start using it in other domains and all. It is not like very rapid thing. As you know that language dies very slowly, endangerment has several steps and then a language dies.

Similarly, revitalization process is also very slow. Slowly, step by step things are done and mostly they are done in a very planned way. It is not done in just any random way because to have successful revitalization of a language steps have to be followed in a

planned way and in a very slow way. It is not like forcing people to learn the language and quickly, they will learn and then the language will be started in the school.

It is not so. One thing is that. Secondly, sometimes these steps are also followed parallelly. So, maybe people are using it in schools and also simultaneously, they are also using it in their workplace or they are also using it in media. So, all those things are parallelly done. So, that is also the step. The steps are run parallelly, but in most of the cases, first adults need to learn the language.

So, these steps are there, but sometimes again like step 1 and 2 can go parallelly; that can also happen. So now, talking about revival process in India, In India, inclusion in the VIIIth schedule is a major step for a language. So, article 344 (1) and 351 of Indian Constitution lists the official languages of India. So, these are the languages of the country, not these states.

States have their own official languages. And these listed languages are known as scheduled languages. So, there are 22 scheduled languages. So, when a language is included in this list, we see that automatically prestige is added to the language. So, these are the list of the 22 scheduled languages. So, recently Dogri, Maithili, Bodo, these languages were added in the list.

So, what we see is that Santhali. So, these were the recent inclusion in the list. When a language is included in the scheduled list, then automatically, the language gets prestige because it is there in the list. Government also starts funding more for these languages, like you see for Santhali Earlier there were no materials available, but after Santhali was included in the list, we see lots of publications have started for Santhali. We see books being published and also, the languages included in the schools where Santhali is spoken. So, government takes initiative to develop and promote the use of these languages in different domains.

After Santhali became a scheduled language, Ol Chiki was developed as its script. Santhali was written in Devanagari and Roman script earlier. So, now, you see a script was developed for the language and then we see lots of books educational materials were being published in the book. In fact, what we have witnessed is that when we were collecting data for some other Austro-Asiatic languages and these villages were near Santhal villages. So, these members they were actually trying to identify themselves as Santhali people.

So, they were neighbors of the Santhali communities, they were not speaking Santhali, but they were speaking a similar language from the same family. But because Santhali is

now more prestigious, it is part of the list, that is why these other communities, they were trying to get merged to Santhali to get the benefits of a scheduled language. So, that type of thing also can be seen, where just because now Santhali is included in the list it has got more prestige and then, the other minor languages which enjoyed the same status of Santhali now is feeling that Santhali is dominant language. Santhali is more important language than theirs and that is why, they are trying to merge with the Santhali community . So, education related materials are now being published in Santhali people are getting identity and they want to relate to the language they want to identify themselves as Santhali people because more prestige and respect is added to it.

People want to identify themselves as Santhali to get the privileges from the government. Moreover, what you see is that when Santhali is being used in the school as a medium or as a subject, then, also teachers, who can speak Santhali are also hired for that. So, when you see that the language is included in the school, then we also see more job opportunities being there for the community members. So, when more materials are being printed or written, then of course, more community members are getting engaged in writing those, in printing those, in analyzing those or in teaching the language in the schools. So, more people are actually getting job by using the language.

So, that is again very very important for a language. So, fonts are made into Unicodes. Language technology is now being developed for Santhali we see lots of digital dictionaries present in Santhali, which were not there earlier. So, means of entertainments are being provided. Role of social media also, we can see that there are several pages and all those for Santhali. So, what we can see is that the presence has now become quite evident, while earlier it was not so.

And that one of the reasons is that because now more economy is being related with the language. There are more job opportunities, more facilities available for those who use Santhali language. Now, looking at therevitalization process driven by the community members. Dhimal, I have always mentioned in some of my lectures, it is a smaller community of Darjeeling district, where you see that Dhimal community has been taken as an endangered community, there are only like 9 or 800 families is staying in 2 and 3 villages of Darjeeling district. Now, these community members they realize that their younger generation are not learning the language.

The younger people they are going to Bangla medium or Nepali medium schools and they are not learning their own language. They are fluent in Bangla and Nepali and Hindi, but not in Dhimal. So, some of the community members together are trying to revive the language and they have also formed this group called Dhimal Community Existence Preservation and Welfare Society . So, this is a society under which they perform various

programs, they teach younger children, they have also published grammar books, they regularly organize cultural programs, they gather together, they have meetings in their language. So, what they are trying to do is that they are trying to preserve their language.

So, some of the people are motivated and they are trying to spread the word across the community. They are involving the children and everybody in their process of reviving the language. The speakers of the community are shifting towards the major language Bangla, because they are the neighbors, but they are trying to save the language from getting endangered. And again Bangla learning is ok, they are learning both Bangla and Nepali, but along with that they also want their children to learn Dhimal.

They teach them all songs, dance and everything. So, these members actively work for revitalization of the process, though they are not very aware of the various aspects related to language documentation and revitalization. They do not know the theories and steps behind it, but at a very practical level they are practicing it. So, those types of things we also see for many smaller communities in India. So now, I would like to conclude by saying language revitalization is sometimes differentiated from language reversal though both aim at similar goals, but their means are different. So, both want to protect the language from getting endangered or from getting from dying.

These process involve a lot of others aspects, as I mentioned, they are interdisciplinary and sometimes they are also called transdisciplinary because they are all about language and languages are present in every domain of our life. So, there are various steps involved in the process. However, there has to be a conscious effort from within the community to revitalize a language without that revitalization cannot be a success. So, sometimes government sources or other agencies can motivate the community members, they can make them understand how they are losing their language and how it is important for their identity and culture to save the language, to protect the language that can be done and in the process, slowly the language can be revitalized. But it is always necessary to motivate the community members, it cannot be forced to them.

The other thing we can actually force. We can force the community members to not use their language, we have seen that. Sometimes it can be a cause of endangerment, where the community members are not allowed to speak their language. But the other way around, to speak his or her own language for that one cannot be forced, there has to be self motivation. And that is actually a challenging task, but when the community members realize and when there are initiatives from within the community then we see there are successful revitalization of the language.

I hope you enjoyed the class. These are the references. Please go through them. Thank you!