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Language Awareness in Diasporic Contexts

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Introduction

Diaspora communities face two major challenges that are relevant to language awareness research: the maintenance and intergenerational transmission of their heritage language; and the acquisition of the high prestige language(s) used in their newly adopted country. This chapter is focused on the first challenge and aims to review the development of the field with a particular focus on those issues where sociolinguistic theory informs language awareness research. Some of these issues include parents’ and children’s attitudes towards their immigrant (heritage) language, their awareness of language shift and the factors contributing to this. Research in the field is also concerned with the power-relations between heritage and mainstream languages, issues of authenticity and legitimacy and related attitudes and ideologies vis-à-vis the speech of second-generation speakers and accented speech. While the chapter reviews relevant conceptual and methodological developments from an international perspective, many of the examples are from the Australian context, since this is where the author’s own research activity has been concentrated. The chapter concludes with a discussion of future research directions that can further enhance language awareness in diasporic contexts.

Language awareness as a concept is well established and broadly applied in second language learning and mainstream educational contexts. However, the diasporic (immigrant) context is highly relevant, and, in fact, this was part of the context in which the concept first appeared. Hawkins (1999: 126) writes about how the language awareness field grew as a response to research conducted in UK schools in the 1970s, which revealed low literacy outcomes amongst “children from manual labouring homes” and “children of West Indian origin”. He makes particular reference to the low English grades that were being achieved by ‘West Indian’ and ‘Asian’ pupils at that time (p. 127). The aim for language awareness was “to stress the need for sensitivity to and conscious awareness of the nature of language in its social, affective and cognitive domains” (Komorowska, 2014: 5).
While most language awareness definitions focus on teacher and learner awareness and often emphasize ‘consciousness’, a broader definition recognizing the social aspect is most relevant to the diasporic context, such as the one by van Lier:

Language awareness can be defined as an understanding of the human faculty of language and its role in thinking, learning and social life. It includes awareness of power and control through language, and the intricate relationships between language and culture

van Lier, 1995: xi

While language awareness incorporates cognitive, affective and social parameters (Wolfram, 1998), this chapter will use the term to refer to the sociolinguistic aspects in immigrant or diasporic communities with a focus on immigrants’ awareness of the vitality of their mother tongue (subjective ethnolinguistic vitality) and their perceptions of the value of their heritage language in the new linguistic ecology (language attitudes). Vitality is defined as “that which makes a group likely to behave as a distinctive and collective entity within the intergroup setting” (Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor, 1977: 308). Subjective ethnolinguistic vitality is an important indicator of intergenerational language transmission and the long-term maintenance of immigrant languages. Language attitudes reflect the speakers’ attitudinal stance towards their heritage (immigrant) language. Therefore, they are central to language awareness research.

Mobility and Language Awareness

With unprecedented levels of mobility in our era of globalization and superdiversity (Vertovec, 2007), there has been an increased sociolinguistic interest in the study of mobility and the linguistic and social transformations (Silverstein, 1998) of diasporic immigrant communities. Originally, the concept of diaspora was derived from the historic experience of the Jewish people who became stateless, migrated to various parts of the world and settled to live there for many generations. The term, therefore, was used to describe a relatively stable community in exile. However, in our late-modern era, diasporic communities are far from being stable and their sociolinguistic ecology (Haugen, 1972) is best described as a dynamic linguistic, social, psychological, ethnic and political milieu where languages and people’s everyday lives are shaped by multiple factors constantly interacting on multiple levels (Blommaert, 2010; Blommaert, Collins and Slemrouck, 2005). These social changes have a profound effect on the linguistic ecology in speech communities, and call for new methods of research.

As result of relocation to another country, immigrants immediately become more conscious of their language resources and, especially, their lack of such assets. They face the challenges of learning new languages and sustaining their own. While the majority of immigrants are already bi- or multilingual when they settle in a new country, they may have treated their multilinguality as a natural phenomenon and an integral part of their lives. However, “immigration mobilises laypeople’s awareness of language” (Yelenevskaya and Fialkova, 2003) as it puts languages and their speakers into a new power relationship which is shaped by a two-way process. On the one hand, immigrants adjust linguistically, socially and culturally to their new country. On the other hand, the host society adjusts to accommodate their newcomers. According to the
Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), “individuals use communication, in part, in order to indicate their attitudes toward each other and, as such it is a barometer of the level of social distance between them” (Sachdev et al., 2012: 394). The two-way adjustment between immigrants and the host society is theorized in socio-psychology by the Interactive Acculturation Model (Bourhis, Moïse, Perreault, and Senécal, 1997), which provides the social embeddedness and the context in which linguistic or (language) awareness develops. Therefore, this chapter aims to provide a broader picture to include external factors, such as the attitudes of the host society towards newcomers.

Sociolinguistic Aspects of Language Awareness in Diaspora

The study of language awareness in diasporic contexts is centred on the social and socio-affective factors of language choice and the longer term consequences of language maintenance and shift. While the term language shift was used as early as 1822 by Grimm who studied the Germanic consonantal system, its broader meaning referring to changes on all structural levels was introduced by Haugen (1938) who studied Norwegian immigrants in the United States. The concept was further developed in contact linguistics by Weinreich (1953: 68), emphasizing the functional change of language stating that “language shift may be defined as the change from the habitual use of one language to that of another”. Fishman’s (1964) later definition clearly identifies shift more broadly to do with “variance in language behaviour”, paying attention to the “antecedent, concurrent or consequent psychological, social and cultural processes” (Fishman, 1964: 33):

The study of language maintenance and language shift is concerned with the relationship between change or stability in habitual language use, on the one hand, and ongoing psychological, social or cultural processes, on the other hand, when populations differing in language are in contact with each other

Fishman, 1964: 32

While in the global context of linguistic diversity, the terms language loss, language endangerment or language death (Crystal, 2000) are used to refer to the functional decline or obsolescence (Dorian, 1989) of a language, in diasporic contexts the term language shift is used to refer to two main types of shift: intergenerational shift where immigrants fail to transfer their mother tongue (heritage language) to their children or grandchildren such as exemplified in Gal’s classic study of the Hungarian diaspora in Austria (Gal, 1979); and intra-generational shift, where first-generation immigrants experience a decline in their language use, or language ability over time (also known as attrition). This chapter will focus on intergenerational aspects with a special focus on theories relevant to language awareness.

Conceptual and Methodological Development

Language maintenance and language shift (LMLS) research has used a plethora of methods and concepts and as Fishman has stated, researchers have largely “gone their own way, methodologically and conceptually, and little cumulative meeting of minds has been arrived at” (Fishman, 2002: 2). Researchers generally agree that “no analytical arsenal or single set of factors have been developed up to the present day that would
make the causal, universal, and predictive explanation of language shift and language maintenance possible (Maitz, 2011: 151), and “no one factor or set of factors always predicts language maintenance and shift” (Myers-Scotton, 2006: 105).

Sociolinguistics has identified numerous factors that impact on the maintenance and ethnolinguistic vitality of immigrant languages. These factors, in the early days, were usually classified under three main categories, which formed the basis for the objective vitality measures: (1) demographic characteristics of the immigrant community; (2) institutional support provided by the host country; and (3) status factors, such as the use of the immigrant language in public domains (Giles and Johnson, 1987). In terms of demographic factors, researchers (Clyne, 1994; Kloss, 1966) have found that, among other factors such as absolute numbers and average age of community, the relative geographic isolation and territorial concentration of diaspora communities seem to have a strong impact on language maintenance, although as Fishman noted these are insufficient in predicting language outcomes on their own and indeed subjective factors also play a significant role (Fishman, 2012). Rural immigrant communities are relatively stable, and have been shown to form linguistic enclaves, or Sprachinseln (Clyne, 1994; Kloss, 1966) which facilitate the local valorization of the immigrant language in public domains and enhance the vitality of immigrant languages. Residential concentration in urban suburbs can have the same effect, as it creates the opportunity for using the immigrant language in daily life. On the other hand, urban immigrant communities that are relatively dispersed across various locations and have higher levels of social mobility will have higher rates of intergenerational language shift. Since locality has been a central concept in the study of LMLS in diasporic contexts, we will turn to this concept in the next section.

From Locality to Space of Language Use

A significant conceptual development in the study of LMLS has been the shift in the definition of locale. In the early studies, location was seen as a static variable, and while much attention was paid to the ethnographic detail of describing the geographical ‘place’, the general approach was to take location for granted and treat immigrants as passive participants within. Typically, sociolinguistic studies focused on the linguistic adjustment of one particular speech community in a given nation-state. Speech communities were, wrongly, considered to be monolithic and uniform and the approach resembled Saussure’s structuralism where researchers made generalizations about rates of language shift and compared these datasets across groups and localities synchronously.

Fishman’s (2000) concept of domain was the first major attempt to deconstruct spaces of language use and go beneath the homogenizing treatment of locality as uniform and static. Fishman proposed the concept of domain as a complex sociocultural construct “abstracted from topics of communication, relationships between communicators and locales of communication” and emphasized the benefit of the concept to distinguish between individual behaviour and social patterns (Fishman, 2000: 94). Domain as a sociolinguistic concept was a major step in the right direction and it is still used widely (Boxer, 2002). However, with the unprecedented transformations of contemporary speech communities (Silverstein, 1998), authors have increasingly seen localities as fluid entities and argued that language choices are far from being predictable and consistent (Blommaert, 2010; Blommaert et al., 2005; Heller, 2008).
Space emerged as a concept to emphasize that individuals operate in multilayered linguistic ecologies where their language choices carry a strong indexical value. Blommaert (2010) defined space metaphorically as vertical. In this space, various socially, culturally and politically salient distinctions occur (p. 5). As he argues, language choices are indexical as they can only be interpreted against the backdrop of “stratified patterns of social, cultural and political value-attribution” (Blommaert, 2010: 5). Language awareness research, should not, therefore, be limited to the horizontally isolated segments (such as districts, neighbourhoods, and towns), but incorporate vertical layers to illuminate factors of language use. This approach necessitates a focus on subjectivities, which is discussed in the next section.

**Subjective Factors and Language Awareness**

A key theoretical development in the study of LMLS was the shift from objective to subjective factors which have a predictive power of the long-term vitality of ethnolinguistic groups. This shift was encapsulated in the development of the subjective ethnolinguistic vitality theory (Allard and Landry, 1986, 1994; Bourhis, Barrette, and Keith, 2006; Giles, 2001). As the original ethnolinguistic vitality model proved inadequate to explain why some communities with the same demographics, status and institutional support maintain their heritage language, while others do not, the model was refined to include subjective vitality perspectives. These subjectivities are most relevant to language awareness and they relate to vitality perceptions, language attitudes and ideologies. The subjective ethnolinguistic vitality scales were developed to capture the speech community’s perceptions *vis-à-vis* the continued use and presence of their heritage language, as well as their perceptions of the strength of the high-prestige language in their language ecology. The new measures proved more effective in predicting the language behaviour of groups and the subsequent studies have shown that ethnolinguistic vitality is related to a broad range of language attitudes (Bourhis et al., 2006). The next section will turn to language attitudes research *vis-à-vis* ethnolinguistic vitality in immigrant contexts.

**Attitudes to Own (Heritage) Languages and Language Shift**

Language attitudes have been shown to influence language behaviour in a broad range of sociolinguistic contexts. In diasporic contexts, the key issue that researchers have attempted to address is the relationship between attitudes to one’s mother tongue and predict the longer term tendencies of language maintenance and shift. Most research has been centred around the family domain with numerous studies looking at children’s attitudes (e.g. Hofman and Cais, 1984), some others focused on parents (e.g. Clyne, 1970), grandparents (e.g. Braun, 2012), while some others have broadened the field to examine teachers’ attitudes (Lee and Oxelson, 2006). Drawing on survey and interview data collected from secondary school teachers in a Californian school, Lee and Oxelson (2006) argued that the authority of teachers’ voices should be utilized to strengthen children’s attitudes and motivation to maintain their heritage languages. Some language attitude studies examined both minority and mainstream perspectives. For example, in the Basque country, a survey-based study (Ibarraran, Lasagabaster, and Sierra, 2008) investigated the attitudes held by local and immigrant students and found that both groups of students held rather negative attitudes towards Basque, whereas
their attitudes towards Spanish and English were favourable. From the diasporic perspective the most notable finding was that immigrant students’ attitudes towards their own languages were the most positive overall.

Despite the plethora of studies in diverse contexts, the exact nature of the cause and effect relationship between attitudes to one’s heritage language and the subsequent language behaviour and maintenance prospects remains controversial. For example, Lasagabaster (2008) examined the attitudes of Basque-Americans towards four different languages including Basque and found that the Basque language “enjoys a very healthy attitudinal condition”, but these positive sentiments did not go hand in hand with higher proficiency in the Basque language (Lasagabaster, 2008: 79). However, such inconsistencies between attitudes and language behaviour are of interest for research and challenge scholars to develop new methods (Garrett, Coupland, and Williams, 2003). Even if long-term effects for language maintenance remain unproven, the study of language attitudes in a given time and space provides invaluable insights into a community’s aspirations and helps us understand their everyday lives. Future research, therefore, should shift the focus from the cause and end relationship and bring the research lens to the ‘here and now’, as conviviality in diverse communities largely depends on attitudes towards other languages and cultures. As the French-born biologist, ecologist and humanist, René Dubos, put it: “Human diversity makes tolerance more than a virtue; it makes it a requirement for survival”.

Attitudes Towards Immigrants

In addition to the attitudes held by minorities towards their own language and their own ethnic group, it is equally relevant in language awareness studies to examine the attitudes that mainstream speakers hold towards immigrant languages and their speakers. Such attitudes form part of the socio-psychological context of the language ecology. Attitudes have been shown to shape and be indicative of the wider acculturation strategies that immigrants take, such as assimilation and integration. While early models of acculturation were limited to the adjustment of immigrants without recognition of the external factors, later models such as the Interactive Acculturation Model “take account of the dynamic interplay of host community and immigrant acculturation orientations” (Bourhis et al., 1997: 370). As immigrants do not settle into empty spaces, the local attitudes towards outsiders and their languages have a significant bearing on the linguistic outcomes of language contact, and therefore need attention.

In Australia, for example, Michael Clyne’s (2003) seminal work paid careful attention to the xenophobic attitudes and the monolingual mindset which prevailed in Australian society between the wars and during World War II. For example, a notorious Dictation Test was used in Australia to determine which immigrants were to be accepted and which ones were to be sent home. This dictation test was to be administered in randomly chosen European languages. Clyne’s work also brought awareness of linguicism (discrimination based on language) (Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas, 1996) during World War II and in the post-war years. For example, the Australian Jewish News (19 May 1939) warned newly arriving Jewish refugees not to use German, in order to avoid anti-Semitism: “Do not speak German in the streets and in the trams… do not make yourself conspicuous by walking with a group of persons, all of whom are speaking a foreign language” (Clyne, 1991: 15). In Australia, during World War II, such xenophobic attitudes were exhibited towards German-Australians, even those who
became Australian citizens and those who were born in Australia from a German background. The Germans were declared to be ‘Enemy Aliens’ and many of them were imprisoned as ‘Prisoners of War’. It is not hard to imagine what effect such attitudes had on the use of the German language in public spaces. Germans rapidly shifted to English only and abandoned the use of German. They became known as the invisible immigrants, hiding their origins, striving to become Australians and blend into the mainstream (Hatoss, 2006; Kaplan, 1995). In the American context, anti-German legislation and sentiment during and after World War I has done similar damage to the German language (Fishman, 2012). Negative attitudes to immigrants, and the assimilationist ideology of speaking English and conforming to Australian ways is unfortunately still present. In a recent study, Hatoss (2012) discussed the “othering” and “racialisation” of Sudanese refugees in a rural Australian setting. Such attitudes adversely impact the use of immigrant languages and the everyday practice of multiple identities, which will be discussed in the next section.

**Language and Identity**

One of the key topics relevant to language awareness in diasporic contexts is the interconnectedness of language and identity. Many scholars have argued the close connectedness between language and identity, with the most prominent theories being the subjective ethnolinguistic vitality theory (Bourhis et al., 2006), which argues that the maintenance of minority languages is not only dependent on objective factors such as demographics, status and institutional support, but on the subjective dimensions of language attitudes, identity and belonging, as well as having a positive vision for the continued use of the minority language in the future (as discussed earlier). While identity was long seen as a uniform and homogenous entity that people have (May 2012), with the increased influence of post-structuralism and postmodern thought, identity came to be recognized as constructed, fluid, multidimensional and negotiated in discourse (Blackledge and Pavlenko 2001; Bucholtz and Hall, 2008). In terms of research methods, a major development in the field has been a decrease in the ‘survey-based’ approaches to identity (who do you identify with?) to an increased focus on collecting empirical evidence of interaction and contextualizing the study through ethnography (Bucholtz and Hall, 2008). In other words, there has been a shift from making direct connections between language use (linguistic structure) and identity choices, to a fine-tuned interactional approach where linguistic structure is not equated with identity choices, as Bucholtz and Hall (2008) argue:

(M)oving too quickly from linguistic structures to identity categories without considering how interactional stances mediate between the two short-circuits the analysis and diminishes much of the utility of considering identity in the first place

*Bucholtz and Hall, 2008: 153*

However, the authors recognize the need to consider the broader social, political and cultural contexts in which identities are negotiated in interaction. Therefore, they conclude that “neither identity categories nor interactional analyses alone are enough to account for how social positioning is accomplished through language” (Bucholtz and Hall, 2008: 154). In their view, the study of identity is most effective when these two approaches are combined. Following this development, a large body of research has been conducted using discourse approaches to study identity and its connection...
with language use. Maryns and Blommaert (2001) studied the narratives of a Sierra-Leonian asylum seeker living in Belgium and found that the linguistic-communicative repertoire of the speaker was a continuum of ‘Englishes’, ranging from hyper-corrected English to full Krio (Sierra Leone creole). The authors have argued that language users carefully manoeuvre their linguistic repertoires to index their multilayered identities, and such indexicality calls for an ‘interpretive approach’ (Auer, 1998: 13). This line of research in immigrant contexts has offered a new focus on migrant identities and their past experiences. This research has great potential to explore language awareness as the analytical focus is not restricted to the description of ‘what happened’. Instead, it is about the ‘telling’ and the speakers’ voices, framings, positionings and evaluations. Narratives are treated not simply as transparent accounts of past facts, but rather, as discursive events that reflect the participants’ identity, attitudes and awareness. Narrative analysis has been used to explore refugee and asylum seeker discourses by a number of scholars (Baynham, 2006; De Fina and Georgakopoulou, 2008; Hatoss, 2012, 2013; Relaño Pastor, 2010).

Gender has long been identified as a factor in language change in diasporic communities. One early study was Susan Gal’s seminal research exploring sex roles and their effect on language shift in the Hungarian-German bilingual diaspora in Austria (Gal, 1978). The study found that women of Hungarian ethnic background were leading a shift to German from Hungarian as they did not want to marry farmers and Hungarian language use was associated with peasanthood. Instead, women strived to increase their social status by marrying German men and this was best achieved through speaking German. More recent studies explored gendered identity and its role in language change as constructed in discourse. Winter and Pauwels (2005), for example, explored the discursive construction of gendered ethnolinguistic identities among second-generation German and Greek Australians in talk about language maintenance and use. The study found that language maintenance is impacted by gendered ethnolinguistic identities. For example, language maintenance was enhanced through the femininities of opportunity for German women and masculinities of authenticity for Greek men, while masculinities necessitated a shift to English with peers and a muting of German for German men. (p. 167). The focus on discourse-based studies occurred as a result of post-structuralism and postmodernism which helped the deconstruction of abstract concepts such as ‘language’, ‘identity’ and ‘gender’. This trend continues today and informs language awareness research methods (Howard-Hamilton and Frazier, 2005; Winter and Pauwels, 2005).

Language Attitudes and Ideologies in Diasporic Contexts

The study of language attitudes is highly relevant in the context of language awareness in diasporic communities. Firstly, immigrants’ attitudes towards their own ‘ethnic tongue’ constantly shape their linguistic ecology and have an impact on the maintenance of their heritage language intra-generationally as well as inter-generationally. Attitude is defined as a disposition with three main components: affective, cognitive and behavioural (Edwards, 2006: 329).

Investigating language attitudes in diasporic contexts, therefore, needs to consider these three elements. As Edwards (2006) has pointed out, many researchers erroneously use elicitation techniques which relate to beliefs rather than attitudes. For example, someone might have a belief that learning a given language is beneficial for one’s future,
but at the same time have negative attitudes towards that same language. While most LMLS studies in the past were concerned with the attitudes to one’s own ethnic language, there is a growing body of research investigating first-generation speakers’ attitudes towards the speech of the second or third generations. In other words, these studies explore parents’ and grandparents’ attitudes towards their children’s or grandchildren’s language use. For example, Barkhuizen (2006) studied Afrikaans-speaking immigrants living in New Zealand and used narrative analysis to explore the awareness and emotional responses that they had towards their children’s language use and language loss. This study found that parents had conflicting views, but felt that the benefits of learning English outweighed the loss of Afrikaans. Another study investigated language use, language proficiency and language attitudes of Afrikaans families in Queensland, Australia (Hatoss, Starks and van Rensburg, 2011) and concluded that attitudes tended to be ambivalent towards the long-term survival of Afrikaans in Australia, and families focused on the pragmatic use of Afrikaans, with only a handful commenting on a strong link between the Afrikaans language and South African identity. In the Australian context, similar trends were identified in the older immigrant groups, such as the Germans and the Dutch, which were explained with the theory of core values not incorporating the ethnic tongue (Smolicz, 1999).

Another related concept that has attracted much research is language ideology. As Gal has argued, language ideologies are never about language only; instead they are “grounded in social position and experience, in moral and political stances” (Gal, 2006: 179). Ideologies, therefore, are informative about the social-psyche of the speech community and can illuminate normalized distortions of the power relations in speech communities. One aspect of ideology is iconization whereby linguistic features with which groups are identified become iconic representations of them (Gal and Irvine, 1995: 37). As Gal, argues, language ideologies are not uniform, but vary within communities and this variability (for instance, across schools, families, friendship circles) calls for enquiries into the relative authority of these different ideologies (Gal, 2006: 179). Language awareness research should, therefore, not lose sight of these heterogeneities. Also, the study of overt and covert ideologies of institutions and governments informs the language ecology of immigrant languages from the policy perspective.

Awareness of Foreignness and Accent

In diasporic contexts, much research has focused on the study of attitudes to accents and unveiled covert social attitudes. As Edwards (2006: 324) has stated, “views of language correspond to views of the social status of language users; in this sense, language (or dialect or accent) provides simple labels which evoke social stereotypes that go far beyond language itself”. One interesting topic relevant to intergenerational language maintenance is the fear of transmitting a foreign accent to the next generation. For example, in the Australian context Hungarian post-war immigrants have reported that they preferred to continue to use their heritage language with their children in Australia (Hatoss, 2004), as they were afraid of teaching them the wrong English and that the children would pick up their foreign accent. Typically, post-war European immigrants arrived without any knowledge of English, and they often relied on their children to teach them the language. This, consequently,
enhanced the valorization of heritage language in the family and led to stronger L1 maintenance in the second generation. Negative attitudes to accented speech in the heritage language, on the other hand can enhance language shift. If parents exhibit negative attitudes towards their children’s accented or ‘inaccurate’ speech in the heritage language, children are not likely to continue to use the language and shift to English. These changes in language behaviour are, therefore, attributable, at least in part, to ideologies of “nativeness” and prescriptivism.

Critical Language Awareness in Migration Contexts

Language Power and Inequality

The power relations that shape linguistic practices have long been the focus of sociolinguistics (see e.g. Bernstein, Hymes, Gumperz, Labov), but more recently researchers have brought critical language awareness to the fore and illuminated “the role of language in constructing the relations of social inequality” (Heller, 2010: 34). One specific area that has received attention is the linguistic misrepresentation of refugees and asylum seekers during identification processes. With the increased number of asylum seekers in Europe and the West generally, there has been increased sociolinguistic interest in the study of the identification processes used by authorities to deem the origin and legitimacy of resettlement applications. Sociolinguists have drawn attention to the role of language and linguistic practices in exclusion and the new mechanisms of inequalities that immigrants encounter in their everyday lives (Blommaert, 2009; Codó, 2008; Piller, 2016). Blommaert (2009), for example, reported the erroneous identification of a Rwandan asylum seeker by the border protection authorities in the UK. He argued that asylum seekers in Western Europe are routinely subjected to identification processes that emphasize the national order. As he argued, such modernist nationalist approaches are not suited to the postmodern phenomenology of language in society (Blommaert, 2009: 415). Piller and Takayashi (2011) examined the ways “identities and ideologies mediate the relationship between linguistic proficiency and non-language outcomes such as employment, further training, settlement success, social recognition or sustainable livelihoods” (p. 371). The authors have concluded that while government policies and institutions express the desire for a multilingual workforce, “the kind of multilingualism that is valued and imagined to be conducive to social inclusion is usually a very specific set of competencies: two or more monolinguals in one” (Piller and Takahashi, 2011: 378). The study confirms the prevalent myth that native-like proficiency in two or more languages is what we can accept to be true forms of bilingualism or multilingualism. These findings reflect the fact that policy-makers and those in institutional power set unreasonable expectations driven by their limited level of awareness of bilingualism and immigrants’ language skills. Language awareness, therefore, is a concern and requires further critical research in the context of the host communities more broadly.
Theoretical and Practical Impact of the Research

As this chapter has argued, there are numerous attitudinal and awareness dimensions that impact on the maintenance of immigrant languages in diasporic contexts. While research has progressed a great deal in terms of theorizing the interconnectedness of these factors, the theories have had little practical benefit for the end-users: researchers have had little impact on policy makers’ attitudes and diaspora communities remain dependent on grass-roots efforts to promote their heritage language. Apart from the pervasive monolingual ideologies of modern nation-states (May, 2012), the crux of the problem is the logistics of catering for the linguistic diversity within state boundaries. For example, in the Australian context, there are over 350 immigrant languages, making the official top-down language planning rather difficult to achieve. Language planning theorists (see e.g. Liddicoat and Baldauf Jr., 2008), have, therefore, advocated bottom-up language planning, which is more closely aligned with the needs of a given ethnolinguistic community.

Another related issue is that the development of new theories and concepts does not necessarily bring change. While the measurements are more refined in terms of predicting the vitality of immigrant languages, researchers have not been able to reverse language shift. At best, research has been able to diagnose the issues better, but the ‘cure’ still remains to be seen. Researchers have also tended to step back from taking an advocacy role, leaving it to the speech communities and their individual members to decide what linguistic outcomes they want. Nevertheless, as Bezinger has pointed out within the context of language endangerment:

While scholars would do well to refrain from sentimental statements on languages of other people, they may very well respect and assist in spreading the emotional attachment of the speakers themselves to their language.

Brenzinger, 2006: 542

In terms of methodology, there is still no consensus among scholars with regards to whether there should be a universal theory of language maintenance and whether the collection of individual case studies without a consistent and rigorous methodology is equally useful and justified. While some scholars have advocated exploring unique language ecologies without aiming to achieve a uniform method and theory, some others have argued for more parsimony in research. Maitz (2011), for example, argued that researchers of language maintenance and shift will not achieve anything by simply adding subjective factors; instead, they need to pay more attention to the constructs measured. As Maitz argues: “a systematic exploration of the social psychology of language choice may promise more results than a mere understanding of the sociology of language choice” (2011: 160). This leads to the question of future research directions, which is discussed in the next section.

Directions for Future Research

Globalization is reshaping the linguistic markets and creates new opportunities and constraints for language use (Blommaert, 2010). Therefore, there is a need for a critical sociolinguistic perspective (Heller, 2008, 2010; Mesthrie, 2009; Pennycook, 2001) that should, at least, “provide an accurate diagnosis of these issues” (Blommaert, 2010: 4),

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such as the uneven power relationship between languages and the inequality created by globalization. A critical perspective necessitates a new ontology and methods. In terms of methodology, there is a need to continue language awareness research in diasporic contexts which moves further away from the “census ideology in sociolinguistics” (Makoni and Pennycook, 2005: 143). Instead, researchers should use multiple methods of data collection, and multiple data sources such as voice, image and observed practice. The advantages of these methods were illustrated in a study by Busch (2012) using language portraits with Austrian school children to explore their perceptions of their linguistic repertoires. The author emphasized the advantages of this method with the following words:

What distinguishes this creative, multimodal method, which is based on visual and narrative descriptions, is that the change in mode to one of thinking in pictures contributes to foregrounding the emotional experience of language, power relations, and desire

Busch, 2012: 521

Prior work in this direction includes the study of visualization of the home country in diaspora contexts (Coupland and Garrett 2010; Garrett, Coupland, and Bishop, 2005). There is potential for language awareness research to build on the existing body of work in linguistic landscapes (Blommaert, 2011; Gorter, 2006; Landry and Bourhis, 1997) and use multi-methods to further investigate the deeper connections between the symbolic representations of linguistic diversity and the impact it has on diasporic identity affiliations and vitality prospects for the corresponding languages.

Signs are of high interest to language awareness studies, as they are indexing the “social, cultural, material and ideological contexts that generated them and in which they operate” (Blommaert, 2014: 433). Through the analysis of the linguistic signs, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of the norms, expectations, attitudes, inclusions and exclusions and the power dynamics of the language ecology of contemporary speech communities. While early studies of linguistic landscapes focused on the question of “what languages are used here”, later work has developed a stronger critical perspective. Coupland and Garrett (2010), for example, used a qualitative, critical, frame-analytic account of Welsh language and culture, as part of the linguistic landscape in Patagonia and called for a critical approach to incorporate meta-cultural aspects, which treat language use as a discursive practice. As the authors argue, a critical approach investigates the questions of “what cultural and symbolic values are being activated, intentionally or otherwise, for whom, and how, through which particular indexical displays of languages and symbols, in what particular contexts, and in what particular semiotic relationships” (Coupland and Garrett, 2010: 14). Further research is necessary to include interviews in linguistic landscape studies which allow the researchers to address language attitudes and bring the field closer to language awareness studies.

Questions of authenticity (Bucholtz, 2003; Coupland, 2003) are also relevant to language awareness research from a number of perspectives. Language use is driven by the interaction between habitus and the field, using Bourdieu’s famous terminology. In other words, people need to know how to play the ‘language game’ to fit the context (Bourdieu, 1991). When diaspora communities settle in a new country, they need to abide by a new set of language rules and norms, and know, for instance when to use which language, what level of ‘correctness’ is expected and whether translanguaging
(Wei, 2011) and creativity characteristic of metrolingualism (Pennycook and Otsuji 2015) is acceptable. Speakers’ attitudes to their own language use (e.g. ethnic accent in L2) and their perceptions of the acceptable ‘correct’ way to use their heritage language (L1) can be theorized through notions of authenticity and legitimacy. While much research has focused on attitudes to accents and authentic language use in second and foreign language learning contexts, these concepts have been relatively unexplored and undocumented in the context of heritage language maintenance. For example, we know that the second generation uses the heritage language differently, but we do not know how first-generation immigrants perceive this language use and how these attitudinal and ideological dimensions may affect the language choices of younger generations. Everyday ideologies of language use are connected with notions of “nativeness” and “non-nativeness” (O’Rourke et al., 2015) and what makes “good local speech” (Dorian, 2009). Language awareness studies, therefore, have an important role to play to further enhance our knowledge about the way these socio-affective factors govern language choices in diasporic contexts.

Conclusion

In sum, language awareness researchers in diasporic contexts face numerous methodological and ontological challenges. As attitudes and ideologies are constructed on an everyday basis, researchers should treat language awareness as a dynamic construct being shaped by multiple layers of dialogic processes (Bakhtin, 1981) that occur between immigrants and the host society. Language awareness studies, therefore, need to pay due attention to the broader environmental aspects that guide attitudes and ultimately influence immigrants’ language choices and the intergenerational transmission of their heritage language. As Blommaert et al. (2005: 197) argue, “multilingualism is not what individuals have and don’t have, but what the environment, as structured determinations and interactional emergence, enables and disables”. Moreover, researchers need to refocus and move away from questions of causality in language maintenance studies. The traditional approach of finding cause and effect relationships has been largely fruitless in terms of bringing change to speech communities.

Therefore, survey-based studies of objectivities (demographics of language use) need to be complemented with qualitative and discourse-based studies which allow the deeper exploration of subjectivities and allow researchers to build new theories from the bottom-up, using grounded theory. As language choices are driven by complex speaker-internal factors (attitudes, perceptions, beliefs, proficiencies, identity positionings) as well as speaker-external factors (outsiders’ or interlocutors’ attitudes, ideologies and perceptions, expectations, etc.), there is a need for more qualitative research in unique sociolinguistic contexts to uncover how these subjectivities shape the language ecology, the mobilization of linguistic repertoires and how they can enhance our understanding of immigrants’ everyday lives.

In the context of globalization, researchers also need to recognize that diasporic communities are fluid and are in a constant state of flux, connecting on multiple levels and scales, locally and globally. Language use and its motives are not uniform and static; rather they differ on the individual level, across various groups and change over the lifespan. Therefore, language awareness research needs to continue to use sociolinguistic strategies of “disinvention” (Makoni and Pennycook, 2005) and pay due attention to variability “within”. Such disinvention treats each language variety, each speech community and each individual differently and aims to explore diversity rather
than uniformity. In the context of language endangerment, Brenzinger emphasized that the success of reversing language shift “depends heavily on communities’ attitudes toward their own language” and “the speakers themselves who decide to either maintain or abandon their language” (2006: 548). This point is also true in the context of diasporic communities. Therefore, it is crucial to bring language awareness research into the study of language shift.

Related Topics

Language maintenance and shift (LMLS); attitudes; ideologies; diaspora; ethnonlinguistic vitality

Notes


References


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