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THEME FOUR: Language Contact and Change

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1. Language Contact and Change

Language contact is a sociolinguistics phenomenon by which speakers of different languages or varieties of language (i.e., dialects) come to interact with one another. It is commonly known that this contact usually occurs when two groups of people get in touch, or two groups meet because of neighbourhood, or a given language of a dominant group is imposed on speakers from different groups through education, or a group of people gets in touch with another because of trade. Ostensibly, in all these cases, a transfer of linguistic features and aspects from one language to another could occur. In the meantime, this transfer always leads to language change.

It has been claimed that many manifestations of language contact are to be found in a great and various number of levels. Specifically, examples of these manifestations concern change through borrowing, grammatical replacement, multilingualism, extinction, and attrition, etc.

- **Language Borrowing:**

- It often begins with non-basic words, then it expands to concern all the remaining words.
- It also concerns phonology. In the beginning, it borrows some sounds to go through the whole phonological sound system aftermath.
- It includes even typologically-compatible morphology and syntax.

- **Grammatical Replacement:**

- Grammatical structures in one language can replace other ones in another language.
- Grammar could also be developed in either a unilateral or multilateral transfer.
- The beginning of grammatical replacement often begins with borrowing new structures from the juxtaposed language or languages.

- **Multilingualism:**
 - It occurs when more than one language might be used within the community because its members come from different areas.
- **Extinction:**
 - This phenomenon often happens with a monolingual community that is absorbed in an original language.
 - It occurs when the second generation of that same community is bilingual with a dominant language.
 - The third generation will then be monolingual with a new different language.
- **Attrition:**
 - As a speech community shrinks, its maternal language is lost.
 - Such a phenomenon often leads to extinction or language loss.

2. Outcomes of Language Contact

The outcomes of language could be noticed through the emergence of various, often sociolinguistic phenomena among the speakers of languages that are in constant interaction. In the literature, examples of the major language contact outcomes that are often cited include borrowing, bilingualism, language shift, code-switching, language death, diglossia, pidgin, and creole.

In what is next, a brief elucidation of these sociolinguistic phenomena is presented:

2.1 Borrowing

In sociolinguistics, the term borrowing stands for borrowing different linguistic features from a given language to be adopted by a speaker or speakers in their first language. According to Djenane (2018), borrowing is the by-product of language contact situations. This author refers to Hugen (1989) to make this sociolinguistic concept more explicit. Hugen sees borrowing as, “the general traditional word used to describe the adoption into a language of a

linguistic feature previously used by another” (p. 187). Likewise, the same author cites Kemmer (2003) who observes that borrowing is also called loanword. The abstract noun borrowing means the process adopted by the speakers to use words from a source language into a native language. This simply means that the senses of “borrowing” and “loanword” are mere metaphors since they do not bear literal meanings.

Hoffer (2005) considers, on the other side, that the speakers of a language have various options when confronted with new items and ideas in another language. In this respect, he organises these options in terms of the following:

1. **Loanwords:** It concerns the speakers who adopt an item or an idea from a source language. The borrowed form is a loanword. These forms function in the usual grammatical processes, with nouns taking plural and/or possessive forms of the new language and with verbs and adjectives receiving native morphemes as well.
2. **Loan-shift:** It is another process that occurs when adopting native words to the new meanings.
3. **Loan-translation:** It is also called calque. It occurs when the native language uses an item-for-item native version of the original.
4. **Loan-blend:** It is a form in which an element is a loan word and the other is a native element (Hoffer, 2005, p. 53).

2.2 Bilingualism

Bilingualism is the existence of two different languages side by side within the speech repertoire of either an individual or a society. A bilingual is, thus, usually described as someone who uses two languages to communicate. Regarding the degree of proficiency in mastering these two languages is still problematic. For some sociolinguists, being bilingual means that the speaker is able to use two different languages at an advanced level. Nevertheless, for others, a person may describe himself/herself as bilingual although s/he does not possess the ability to

communicate fully in the same way in the two languages. Franson (2009) sees that “a person may describe themselves as bilingual but may mean only the ability to converse and communicate orally, others may be proficient in reading in two or more languages (bi-literate)” (p. 1).

As to this point, it has been argued that there exist two types of bilingualism: individual and societal bilingualism.

2.2.1 Individual Bilingualism: It is when an individual has two languages in his/her repertoire. Djenane (2018) considers four dimensions in the classification of individual bilingualism.

2.2.2 Societal Bilingualism: It is when a society has two different languages existing side by side and the two languages are assigned similar or different functions within it.

2.3 Code-switching

Code-switching is a well-known sociolinguistic phenomenon in bilingual communities. It refers to the usage of two languages in a mixed manner, generally, in oral interactions. Nordquist (2019) defines code-switching as, “the practice of moving back and forth between two languages or between two dialects or registers of the same language at one time” (p. 1). In the literature, code-switching is also referred to as code-mixing or style-shifting.

As for the types of code-switching, many accounts have been provided. Bloom and Gumperz (1972) and Eldin (2014) (as cited in AlHeeti and AlAbdely, 2016) suggest two types of code-switching: situational and metaphorical. For Palpack (1980, as cited in AlHeeti and Albdely, 2016, p. 117), other types of code-switching are proposed. These include tag switching, inter-sentential, and intra-sentential switching.

2.3.1 Tag Switching. Involves inserting a tag or a short phrase in one language into an utterance that is otherwise entirely in another language.

2.3.2 Inter-sentential Switching. Concerns switching at sentential boundaries where one clause or sentence is in one language and the next clause or sentence is in a different language.

2.3.3 Intra-sentential Switching. This occurs at clausal, sentential, or even word level.

2.4 Diglossia

The term “diglossia” has first been introduced in linguistics by Charles A. Ferguson in 1959. He is credited to be the first linguist who use the specific term, diglossia, in his article entitled “Diglossia”. Later on, it was the turn of Joshua Fishman who gave a modification to Ferguson’s original concept and generalised the concept of diglossia to bilingual communities. For Fishman, a diglossic community is not characterised by the use of two language varieties only, but it is also concerned with the use of separate languages (as cited in Rafha, 2018).

Rafha (2018, p.2) provides other definitions of the concept of diglossia suggested by other linguistic sources. These are:

1. “When two languages or language varieties exist side by side in a community, this is called diglossia (Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics, 1985)”.
2. “Diglossia refers to the societies with two distinctive codes of speech which are employed in different situations (Wardhaugh, 2006)”.
3. “Diglossia is the characteristic of a speech community, group of people with common rules of speaking rather than individuality (Holmes, 2008)”.

For Holmes (2008), diglossia is a situation where, in a given society, there are two closely-related languages, one of high prestige, and another one of low value. The high variety, usually referred to as H-variety, is used to represent literacy and is used for formal, public, and official use. Whereas, the low variety, referred to as L-variety, is non-standard and usually is

the spoken vernacular tongue. Vernacular refers to the native language of a country or locality. It is used in informal situations, such as between family members, neighbours, local markets, and friends/close friends. That is, the low variety, contrarily to the high, is used for informal conversation and daily use.

Rafha (2018, p. 5) refers to Ferguson (1996) who lists six specific characteristics of a diglossia language situation. These are mentioned in the following:

1. **Prestige:** Prestigious speakers consider H-variety as the more powerful. People's attitude towards the H-variety is more positive.
2. **Acquisition:** The H-variety is often learnt, whereas, the L-variety is acquired.
3. **Literacy Heritage:** The H-variety is usually used in literature, except the folklore literature that uses the L-variety.
4. **Standardisation:** The grammar system is the main point in H-variety. Ferguson calls H-variety "grammatically more complex".
5. **Phonology:** In the H-variety, phonology is important. However, in the L-variety, it is not.
6. **Lexicon:** High and low varieties have differences in the case of their lexicon. On the other side, the L-variety does not consider these rules.

2.5 Language Shift

Language shift is the process whereby a community eventually shifts to use one language over another one. Very often, it is the language of the majority that displaces the language of the minority mother tongue. Osther (2019) defines language shift as,

The process, or the event, in which a population changes from one language to another... It is a social phenomenon whereby one language replaces another in a given society. It is due to underlying changes in the composition and aspirations of the society, which goes from speaking to the old, to the new language (p. 1).

In the literature, many factors can lead to language shift. These factors could be economic, political, social, or demographic. A brief elucidation of these factors is presented in what follows:

1. Economic, Social, and Political Factors:

- The language of the majority is associated with a special status and prestige.
- Getting hired for a job requires the mastery of the language of the host country.
- The pressure of powerful institutions, such as education and the media foster the adoption of a specific language.

2. Demographic Factors:

- It is noticed that urban areas favour language shift than rural areas.
- The size of the community speaking a language could determine which language exerts its power on another language whose speakers are a minority.
- Social relationships among the members of different groups speaking different languages help in making one language displace another.

In some cases, it has been argued that language shift could lead to the extinction of the minority group's mother language. In worse cases, when this language is no longer used by the members of the same community, it will vanish. This sociolinguistic phenomenon has been well-expressed by Fishman (1991). For Ravindranath (2003), who cites Fishman (1991),

Language shift is a process whereby intergenerational continuity of the heritage language is proceeding negatively, with 'fewer speakers, readers, writers, and even understanders' every generation... In many cases, the shift may be abrupt... and the number of speakers may drop off considerably from one generation to another (p. 7).

2.6 Language Death

Language death is also called language extinction. It is commonly known that a language dies when the people who speak that language die. In other cases, a language dies

because a dominant language, the language of the majority group, spreads and leads the minority group language to retreat and be only used in narrower circles, such as at home or during activities as counting, praying, and dreaming. Very often, this language dies because it is no longer used by the members of the same community.

Why languages die is a question that has always been raised. Crystal (2014) responds, Before we can decide what can or should be done [about endangered languages], we need to understand the reasons for the endangerment. Why, then, are language dying? ... We can get some sense following the appearance of written language, for we now have records ... But the extinct languages of which we have some historical record in this part of the world must be only a fraction of those for which we have nothing. (p. 68).

For Janse (2003), the factors determining language death are typically “non-linguistic”. The most commonly cited factors are socio-economic and socio-political. In his words, these factors are clearly expressed:

The socio-economic factors include the lack of economic opportunities, rapid economic transformations, on-going industrializations, work patterns, migrant labor, resettlement, migration. Among the socio-political factors are official language policies, discrimination, stigmatization, repression, war, etc (p. 10).

2.7 Pidgin and Creole

A pidgin is a simplified language that evolves from contacts between groups that share no common language but need to communicate verbally. These people create a common language based on the more socially dominant language, often referred to as lexifier, with an influence from the other contact language, also referred to as substrate (Siegel, 2008). For the most part, the lexifier provides the lexicon (vocabulary) while the substrate language influences the grammar.

It is commonly known that the situations in which pidgins arose from included trade (Vellupillai, 2014) or in slave societies in which slaves were purposefully picked from diverse linguistic backgrounds (Wardhaugh, 2010). The main characteristic of pidgins is that they were not used at home, or in social situations, but at labour, markets, ships, or plantations (Villupillai, 2004). As an auxiliary contact language, a pidgin is limited in function to specific, specialised usages (Decamp, 1971). The phonology is not standardised. Rather, it usually depended on the native language speaker (Wardhaugh, 2010).

It is argued that there exists a big number of examples of pidgins. Some examples of the most known pidgins include the following:

- Patois (Jamaican and English).
- Basque-Icelandic (Basque, Germanic, and Romance).
- Béarlchas (Gaelic Irish and English).
- Hawaiian (Portuguese, Hawaiian, Cantonese, English, and Spanish).
- Nigerian (English and Nigeria Krio).
- Portuñol (Spanish and Portuguese).
- Denglish (Dutch and English).
- Siculish (Sicilian and English).

A creole is a nativised pidgin, expanded in form and function to meet the communicative needs of a community of native speakers. This means that when the pidgin takes the place of a community's primary language and their children grow up and acquire it as their mother tongue, it is called a creole (Sigal, 2008). For Romain (2017), the development from pidgin to creole involves expressive faces in response to communicative needs.

Historically speaking, the term "creole" was first used in the American colonies founded by Spain and Portugal in the 16th century. This term was used to describe people of Spanish, Portuguese, and African descendants who were born in the new colonies. In 1865, the

French explorer, Michel Jagolet, was the first to use the word “creole” to refer to language. He used it to describe a Portuguese-based language he heard in Senegal. It was not until the 1700’s that other people began using the term “creole” to describe mixed languages (Creole Definition, Examples, and Origins, n.d.).

It is important to note that there are a number of creole languages, with different creole words that have been used by different cultures all over the world. For instance, the Indian Ocean Creole languages are based on a combination of European and Asian languages. Moreover, the Atlantic Creole languages are largely based on a combination of European and African languages. Other examples of creole languages are:

- **The Belize Creole Language:** It is an English-based language. Most Belizeans speak Kriol in addition to English and Spanish.
- **The Guyanese Creole Language:** It is also called the Creolese. It is a mix of African languages with Dutch and English.
- **The Haitian Creole Language:** It is largely based on French and African languages.
- **Jamaican Creole Languages:** It is also referred to as “Jamaican” or “Patois”. It is based on English, French, and African languages.