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Purism vs. compromise in language revitalization and language revival

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ABSTRACT

Conservative attitudes toward loanwords and toward change in grammar often hamper efforts to revitalize endangered languages (Tiwi, Australia); and incompatible conservatism can separate educated revitalizers, interested in historicity, from remaining speakers interested in locally authentic idiomaticity (Irish). Native-speaker conservatism is likely to constitute a barrier to coinage (Gaelic, Scotland), and unrealistically severe older-speaker purism can discourage younger speakers where education in a minority language is unavailable (Nahuatl, Mexico). Even in the case of a once entirely extinct language, rival authenticities can prove a severe problem (the Cornish revival movement in Britain). Evidence from obsolescent Arvanitika (Greece), from Pennsylvania German (US), and from Irish in Northern Ireland (the successful Shaw's Road community in Belfast) suggests that structural compromise may enhance survival chances; and the case of English in the post-Norman period indicates that restructuring by intense language contact can leave a language both viable and versatile, with full potential for future expansion. (Revival, purism, attitudes, norms, endangered languages, minority languages, contact)*

Speakers of well-normed wide-currency languages commonly meet strong puristic attitudes for the first time at school, where they are likely to be exhorted to mind their grammar, avoid slang and excessive colloquialisms (at least in settings of any degree of formality), and in some cases to foreswear the overuse of foreign loanwords. When the norms for such languages are of long standing, as is the case with English, many speakers view the puristic attitudes of their schoolteachers as a little laughable – a variety of fuddy-duddy conservatism about language which is consistent with a similar schoolteacher conservatism where clothing and hairstyles are concerned.

In more recently normed languages, the situation can be very different; puristic attitudes may threaten the very success of the effort to promote a

standard language. In India, where a popular form of "Hindustani" had come into being before independence through natural interactions among people of various backgrounds, standardizers promoted a policy of Sanskritization and deplored the many loanwords of Persian, English, and other origins which characterized Hindustani. They had enough influence to put in place a conservative and puristic policy which expanded the vocabulary of Hindi, as a new national language, by drawing on Sanskrit. This policy has suited the educated urban elite well enough, but it risks "alienation of the language from the masses" (Coulmas 1989:11).

Purism has also been a problem in the Arabic-speaking world; here, however, the problem is not recent norms, but ancient ones. Classical Arabic, codified in the 8th century C.E., has led a rarified life as a fossilized language form, growing increasingly distant from all spoken forms of Arabic. Although a Modern Standard Arabic exists, it is not the variety of Arabic represented in the grammar books, nor are the modern lexical items of Modern Standard Arabic entered in dictionaries. Grammar constitutes a particular problem.

The grammar books teach a lot which long ago ceased to be of any relevance to standard Arabic as it is practiced today . . . Since the rules of Arabic grammar are based on prescriptive rules instead of actual usage, they will remain hopeless and unattainable goals for the vast majority of Arab learners. (Ibrahim 1989:42)

In all of these contexts, purism can be seen to represent a form of conservatism, a harking back to the favored forms or styles of earlier times: those of relatively recent generations in the case of English, but those of a truly ancient ancestral language in the case of Hindi, and those of a less ancient but still very remote period in the case of Arabic. The norms invoked in these cases are not truly those of the community at large, but rather those of a small segment of it: an educated elite of teachers, writers, broadcast journalists, intellectuals, and the like.

It would be possible to imagine, on the basis of such cases, that puristic attitudes are typically imposed on the general community of speakers; and that those speakers, if not reined in by the exhortations and warnings of conservative language monitors, would soon kick over the linguistic traces and abandon traditional norms. But the regularity with which puristic attitudes appear in small language communities – even those with low literacy levels, or with only very recent experience of literacy – speaks against this notion. Everyday speakers of languages large and small often subscribe to puristic notions. Whether or not puristic attitudes are universal, they are widespread enough to create problems for efforts to support minority languages with a small native-speaker base, when these come under heavy pressure from neighboring languages of wider currency with larger speaker populations. I sug-

gest that a common challenge for language revitalization and language revival is to limit the restrictive role which puristic attitudes are likely to play in the communities in question, or to channel such attitudes into forms which are useful rather than harmful.

In what follows, I distinguish revitalization from revival. In contexts of revitalization, the language survives, but precariously. Efforts on its behalf require the mobilization of remaining speakers, as well as the recruitment of new speakers; in fact, the mobilization of at least some of the remaining speakers is typically crucial to the recruitment of new ones. In contexts of revival, the language is no longer spoken as a vernacular; it may have ceased to be spoken rather recently, or it may have been out of use as a vernacular for a long time. In either case, there may still be some fossilized use of the language, with the users either aware of the precise meaning of the fossil forms or unaware of it. Recruitment in this sort of context can perfectly well be undertaken by individuals who have not originally been among those most involved in traditional cultural life, and have not been among the leading users of whatever fossilized language forms remain.

Language revitalization efforts are much more common than language revival efforts. For one thing, there is a large – distressingly large – number of languages which still have a modest number of proficient elderly speakers, but far fewer middle-aged speakers, and perhaps none at all among young people.¹ For another thing, introducing a language which can still be modeled for potential new speakers by remaining fluent speakers is considerably easier than introducing to them, in any convincing way, a language which exists in recorded texts or in books, but is not in ordinary use by any living person.

Puristic attitudes should, in theory, be more of a potential problem in revitalization than in revival, since bringing about alterations in what people are already saying could be expected to produce more resistance than prescribing certain ways of speaking a language they have yet to learn. Yet in actuality puristic attitudes are likely to cause problems in both sets of circumstances, as a few illustrations will indicate.

The Tiwi language, spoken on Melville and Bathurst Islands off the north coast of Australia, shows an all too typical profile for an indigenous language overtaken by the rapid expansion of a wide-currency language, in this case English (Lee 1987, 1988). With exposure to intense pressure from English, quite radical changes have taken place in the structure of the language over a short time period; thus an older, already largely bilingual generation – which knows (and among its own members still uses) a conservative traditional form of the language – co-exists with a younger and wholly bilingual generation, which uses a much modified form of the same language. The traditional language is polysynthetic, with a particularly complex verb structure. The elderly still control this form of the language; but younger speakers' Tiwi

shows changes in phonology, lexicon, noun classification, syntax, and, above all, in verbal constructions.

The verbal construction in N[ew] T[iwi] comes from the traditional T[raditional] T[iwi] verbal construction ... but there are fewer inflections on the auxiliary. Also the small class of free form verbs has been expanded by a greater use of loan verbs from English and also some simple imperative forms from TT. In NT basically the only inflection on the auxiliary is the prefix(es) though these are normally changed phonologically. (Lee 1988:82)

Examples from Lee include the following:²

- (1) TT: *yi-p-angurlimay*
 he.P-CON-walk
 NT: *wokapat yi-mi*
 walk he.P-do
 'he walked'
- (2) TT: *ngi-rri-min-j-akurluwunyi (nginja)*
 I-P-you(sg.)-CON-see you(sg.)
 NT: *lukim ngi-ri-mi nginja*
 see I-CON-do you(sg.)
 'I saw you'

In theory, the Tiwi language is in a relatively favorable position for a small indigenous language in a region colonized by Europeans: rather than being wholly abandoned by all but the very elderly, it has continued to be spoken by younger people, even though it has undergone drastic changes in the usage of those younger people. In terms of revitalization efforts, however, the situation is actually a very difficult one: with a steep continuum of varieties of Tiwi stretching from the fully traditional (and agglutinatively complex) language to a much simplified language, with many free forms introduced from (Pidgin) English, what form of Tiwi can or should realistically be supported?

When a bilingual program was begun, with the approval of the Tiwi, at the Roman Catholic school on Bathurst Island in 1975, the intention was to use the traditional language as the medium of instruction in the early grades, with a gradual transition to English to follow. Lee reports that "this is what was desired by the community" (1987:7). The primers and readers designed for school use are produced by what has grown into the Nguiu Nginingawila Literature Production Centre, associated with St. Therese's School. They are beautifully illustrated and are geared very much to the children's own culture: the human figures are those of Aborigines, the flora and fauna are local, and the content deals with Tiwi legends, history, and ways of doing things. These texts are not in any way translation equivalents of typical English-language texts, but fully Tiwi-oriented originals. But while subject matter and illustrations seem clearly appropriate to the Tiwi children for whom they are intended, the language of the texts is unavoidably problematic.

The older people within the Tiwi community of Bathurst wanted the traditional language used, passing to the school the job of teaching the children

this conservative form of the language which was no longer being transmitted naturally via the family. This is in itself dubious policy. Fishman 1991 devotes a full chapter to "limitations on school effectiveness in connection with mother tongue transmission," pointing out that "without considerable and repeated societal reinforcement schools cannot successfully teach either first or second languages" (371). The Tiwi situation was more difficult than average, since attempts to use Traditional Tiwi for school purposes meant not just teaching literacy, but also providing oral Tiwi instruction: the children were being introduced to a form of Tiwi quite different from the range of Tiwi styles they were most familiar with, and sharply different from the kind of Tiwi they actually spoke. The difficulties were such that the bilingual program shifted over time away from purely Traditional Tiwi toward the various styles of what Lee (1987:80) calls Modern Tiwi: "a modified/simplified traditional Tiwi." Lee herself, in her teaching efforts on Melville Island for the Summer Institute of Linguistics, tried to lessen the gulf between what young people actually spoke and what they would encounter in their first efforts at reading Tiwi by preparing comics (a genre she thought might seem acceptable for use of the modified Tiwi of the young) with the text in "a formal style of N[ew] T[iwi]" (91); she also encouraged teacher trainees to write stories initially in language they would ordinarily speak, and subsequently to put that material into a more "proper" style if they wished, as most did (1988:92). She encountered difficulty, however, when a wave of puristic conservatism greeted the texts she had prepared.

By writing down NT the author [i.e. Lee] seems to have inadvertently "stirred up a hornet's nest." Although the materials have been apparently accepted and enjoyed by some people, a number have objected to seeing NT in writing . . .

Because of the strong reaction from influential members of the community, the author is drawing back from producing materials in NT. She and her SIL colleague hope to act as catalysts in helping the school, church and community to work out suitable forms of expression allowing individual expression. (1988:92)

Lee worries, not without grounds, about the utility of all the support work for Tiwi. She fears that the language will not derive realistic benefit from text preparation, school programs, the compiling of a dictionary, teacher-training programs, or anything else that might be undertaken, if the children who are the targets of all these efforts do not find the Tiwi they are exposed to enough like the Tiwi they speak to interest and encourage them to use the language.

. . . the Tiwi language situation is an extremely complex one. It is a very sensitive issue for many of the Tiwi people. The traditional language can only be acquired in all its intricacies through the regular and consistent use

of it in the home and camp environments. However, this is an impossible situation as many of the parents of the children, being young adults themselves, do not speak the traditional language as their first language. The situation may be saved if older people are willing to concede to a simplified form of T[raditional T[iwi] as being acceptable. Even so, a concerted effort with the support of the community as a whole would be needed for such a style of Tiwi to be accepted as the norm. (1988:93)

In the Tiwi situation, there is an echo of the problem that plagues Arabic: puristic norms militate against the teaching of the students' actual language forms, and instead promote unrealistic norms from an earlier version of the language. Tiwi, like other hard-pressed minority languages in intense contact situations (Dorian 1981:151-53, Schmidt 1985:213-14), has undergone major change in a sharply foreshortened time frame. In the span of three or four co-existing generations, it has reached something resembling the distance from a traditional model which Arabic has reached over many centuries. But in the case of Tiwi, it is neither the teachers at the Roman Catholic school nor the linguists of the Summer Institute of Linguistics who chose to promote the most conservative form of the language, but "influential members" of the community itself.

The problems related to purism which arise in the case of Irish are different, but no less difficult. Puristic attitudes operate in two different directions in the Irish case. One set of conservative attitudes exists in the tiny remaining heartlands of the Irish language, consisting mainly of several non-contiguous extreme-western pockets of Donegal, Mayo, and Kerry; the other exists in the positions taken by the standardizers who were responsible for arriving at a normalized Irish suitable for country-wide use in textbooks, official documents etc. The two seem irreconcilable.

Irish, in contrast to Tiwi, has an exceptionally long literary history, with a written tradition dating to the 7th century. All the same, when the revitalization movement took hold in the late 19th century, the last great period of the written language (Early Modern Irish, also known as Classical Irish) lay more than 200 years in the past. In the interim stretched a period of drastic decline in the number of speakers, of restriction in geographical distribution, of contraction of spheres of use, and of repression or neglect of the language by the governing powers. What had been a brilliant literary language survived in the monuments that had been produced by its practitioners; but so far as the spoken language was concerned, what remained was rustic in character, surviving in daily use almost exclusively among a peasantry. There were marked dialect distinctions from region to region.

When political independence lent practical means to the hopes of those who wished Irish Gaelic to become once again the distinctive language of the Irish people, and to come into regular use among them, modernizing and

standardizing tasks loomed large. It was not feasible to take one of the living Irish dialects as the clear-cut basis for a modern standard language, since none of the three main dialects had any obvious superiority in prestige or numbers (Ó Baoill 1988:111); without such a realistic basis for selection, the speakers of each dialect were certain to object to any one dialect among the three being singled out for official favor. Compromise was necessary, but the result was inevitably artificiality. Revitalization required a single, normalized form of Irish which could transcend dialect differences. To speakers of living Irish dialects, however, the result is *Gaeilge B'í Ath* 'Dublin Irish', a stilted, unnatural form of Irish (Hindley 1990:60). The puristic conservatism of native Irish dialect speakers takes authenticity as its chief virtue, and "Dublin Irish" fails the test.

If authenticity is the form which conservative attitudes take in the rural *Gaeltachtaí* – the scattered residual areas where one of the living dialects is still spoken natively – historicity might be said to be the form which conservative attitudes take in the "official" Irish ultimately produced by the long labors of the standardizers. The standardized form of Irish steers clear of extreme regionalism, but makes less effort to steer clear of the grammatical complexities of conservative forms of the language.

Literature written in the standard form creates very few problems for the average reader. In trying to use the system, however, even the most competent users have to often consult the dictionaries or handbooks. This is due mainly to the complicated morphological system of Irish, and the standard now evolving has not succeeded to any great degree in reducing the complex system of grammatical rules involving the use of inflections and the mutations of initial consonants of Irish to express different shades of meaning. Many of the rules and forms advocated by the standard have been simplified in the speech of native speakers . . . (Ó Baoill 1988:117)

To each his own form of conservatism, it seems. The standardizers, who were by necessity men of some erudition, found it possible to dispense with regionalism and idiomatity, but not with traditional grammar. Native speakers, for their part, had found it possible over the centuries to dispense with some of the more complex features of the traditional grammar; but in each locality they preserved the distinctive speech of their own region with its own forms, phraseology, and idioms. While each form of Irish has certain clear advantages – supra-regionalism and uniformity in the case of the standardized Irish, realistic local vividness in the case of the regional dialects – each has faults that limit its overall usefulness.

By far the fullest and most penetrating account of the threat which purism can pose to a small language community is Jane Hill and Kenneth Hill's study (1986) of Mexicano (Nahuatl, i.e. modern Aztec) in the Malinche region of Mexico. Mexicano and Spanish have co-existed for centuries, with

contact phenomena appearing in both languages as spoken regionally; but Spanish influences in Mexicano are the more evident. Although the Hills take the view that “an ecological perspective can see linguistic syncretism as having a positive, preservationist effect on a language when its speakers must adopt rapidly to changing circumstances” (59), some local attitudes are less tolerant. As part of a heightened attention paid to the ethnic boundaries of the local population and their towns, native purists reject the syncretic form of Mexicano, with its high Hispanic content, and insist on an artificial variety which is not only unrealistic, but in some instances even inauthentic (140). The result is a self-consciousness and exclusivity with potentially harmful consequences.

Purism in the Malinche towns may work against the survival of the Mexicano language. Since Mexicano is considered to be of very little economic utility, many people question the instrumental value of the language. Purism, which deprecates all modern usage, inspires speakers to question the moral and aesthetic value of Mexicano as well . . . Since no formal education about Mexicano is available in the Malinche towns, it is unlikely that young speakers can be educated to a purist standard, and when young speakers feel that their Mexicano is inadequate, they may choose to use only Spanish. (Hill & Hill, 140–41)

The Hills note (122–23) that Mexicano purism focuses most zealously on lexicon as a particularly salient locus for contamination. External lexical influence is usually conspicuous in contact situations; in most revitalization efforts, the problematics of conservatism is very clearly to be seen in connection with attempts to nativize the lexicon while also updating it. There are normally two obvious options: to borrow or to coin. The difficulty is that the remaining native speakers often reject both. By way of illustration I offer anecdotal evidence from my personal experience with the reception of a coinage, on the one hand, and a pair of borrowings, on the other, by Scottish Gaelic speakers (cf. Dorian 1978).

One friend, a telephonist in a family of telephonists and a native speaker of a variety of Wester Ross Gaelic, came across the coinage being promoted in one or another Scottish Gaelic publication for ‘telephone’. This took the rather straightforward form *guthan*, built on the noun *guth* ‘voice’. She delighted for a time in quizzing every native speaker who came along as to the Gaelic word for ‘telephone’ – stumping them all, of course, since the word was completely alien to ordinary speakers. Most tellingly, she did not actually adopt the word for regular use herself.

Another friend, a native speaker of an Inner Hebridean Argyllshire Gaelic dialect, a number of times told scornfully of hearing a broadcaster ask the fellow whom he was interviewing *Dé an team a tha thu a’ support-achadh?*

'What team are you supporting?', with the English words *team* and *support* painfully obvious in the otherwise Gaelic sentence. It occurs to me in retrospect, however, that my friend never, in all the times he brought that interview up, suggested anything the broadcaster might have said in Gaelic instead in order to avoid the borrowings.

Fishman notes (1991:347–48) that pilot testing of proposed neologisms has been carried out successfully in Sweden – a tactic which can prevent coinage from being too exclusively the creature of language planners with esoteric knowledge and philological biases. However, this approach may require a level of finance and technology not readily available to many small languages. In some language settings, especially those with a certain residual vigor, semantic extension may be partial solution to the problem of updating the lexicon. Words meaning 'a band (of men)' and 'prop, hold up' might be pressed into service for *team* and *support*, or modified slightly to take on those meanings. Slightly archaic words could be reintroduced in the new meanings; or dialect forms might be given the new meanings, and introduced into general use. If another Celtic language already had words for these concepts, analogs could be created in Scottish Gaelic. All of these methods were used in the creation of Modern Turkish lexicon during the language reforms of Atatürk's time, with considerable success (Heyd 1954), and they are part of the arsenal of language planning generally. But in the case of Scottish Gaelic – with few country-wide communications links among speakers, with no generally accepted spoken norm, and with full literacy not yet widespread – language planning efforts have been limited, and have had correspondingly limited success. To be effective, coinage and semantic extensions both require the support of a lively broadcasting industry, educational system, and publishing industry; these phenomena are only just appearing in Scottish Gaeldom. Speaker conservatism has usually been profound, and novel usages have been the object of derision and rejection. These reactions are hardly limited to Gaelic-speaking Scots, of course; they are responses already familiar from other language-planning efforts. Yet today's widely used coinage or extension was often yesterday's laughingstock; transition from the latter to the former can seem random and mysterious, and the observer may see no reason to account for the successes, as opposed to the failures.³

It's reasonably easy to appreciate the difficulties posed by conservative attitudes in instances of revitalization. By comparison, revival settings look invitingly free of potential resistances, since speakers have no entrenched habits to overcome. In revival settings, however, the hazards of rival proposals, giving rise to rival factions, pose just as great a threat; purism of one sort or another is quite likely to be at the heart of the rivalry. If the language to be revived is well preserved, even though not conversationally spoken, there may be disparate traditions for rendering it phonologically, as was the case with

Ashkenazic and Sephardic pronunciations of Hebrew. If the language to be revived is not well attested, or is attested in more than one earlier form, there may be disparate reconstructions of the language itself, forming the basis of rival teaching materials for modern-day learners. This is the unhappy situation of Cornish, the Celtic language of Cornwall, which survived as a spoken language up to the late 18th century but is only moderately well attested as a written language.

Efforts to recover Cornish, and to create the texts and reference works which would make it accessible to those who wanted to become acquainted with it, began in the very early 20th century. Antiquarian interest in the language gradually gave way to a more active involvement, with some individuals and groups espousing revivalist sentiments. Two different approaches to locating "true" Cornish have led in very recent years to rival revivalist factions, each promoting its own version of the language. One faction favors Dr. Kenneth George's version of Cornish, based on meticulous computer analysis of the grammar, lexicon, and orthography of the available Cornish texts, which span the period roughly from the 12th to the 17th centuries (Ellis 1974, O'Callahan 1989:27). The other favors Richard Gendall's version of Cornish, based on Edward Lhuyd's Cornish grammar of 1707 and on a modest amount of fossilized Cornish which survived in one or another enclave (e.g. among fishermen in West Cornwall) into the 19th and even the 20th centuries. Both factions claim authenticity; the George faction claims the authenticity of grounding in scrupulous analysis of all established written texts, and the Gendall faction the authenticity of oral tradition (Lhuyd having based his grammar, according to them, on direct work with surviving Cornish speakers). The rivalry is acute and unfriendly, with each faction competing for the loyalties of prospective learners. There seem to be a fair number of learners and would-be learners, and there are perhaps 50 to 100 fluent speakers (O'Callahan 1989:30, Anonymous 1990:19). Some of the fluent speakers are now raising Cornish-speaking children, so that Cornish can once again claim to be a living mother tongue.

On the one hand, the dedication of Cornish enthusiasts in bringing the language to a genuine "life," if only in the mouths of a few child speakers, can be admired. On the other, the respective purisms, one textual and the other folkloristic, must be regretted insofar as they siphon off the energies of revival workers and alienate the sympathies of potential supporters. *Bro Nevez*, the newsletter of the US branch of the International Committee for the Defense of the Breton Language, published a rancorous letter by Richard Gendall, in response to an article in an earlier issue which appeared to favor the George version of Cornish; and the editor commented, in an appended note: "If some of the tremendous energy Celts have used to belittle each other's ideas of 'the truth' was directed towards working for more resources to support research, teaching, and media use of Celtic languages

and arts, people would not need to talk so much about survival" (Kuter 1989:40).

Revival leaders might do well, in the spirit of Kuter's suggestion, to concede that more than one kind of authenticity exists, and to begin the more productive work of establishing a compromise version of Cornish which sacrifices a modicum of each form of authenticity in favor of learnability. If declensional patterns should be more regular in one of the versions of Cornish, but lexical coherence best reflected in the derivational patterns of the other, then it would serve potential learners well to promote a single form of Cornish which incorporated both of these features, even though they might derive from different approaches to reconstructing the language. This sort of compromise, if feasible, might achieve a channeling of the energies of linguistic conservatism for useful purposes, as Kuter urged.

There has recently been some actual evidence in the literature of language obsolescence to suggest that, in cases where a small or otherwise precariously placed language has survived longer than might have been expected, an absence of puristic attitudes may have characterized some speakers. Hamp (1989:198-99) found, for instance, that phonological intactness was no measure of survival potential among the pockets of Albanian, known as Arvanitika, scattered through Greece. On the contrary, the youngest speakers with serviceable (if very incomplete) Arvanitika came from Attica, and spoke with a substantially hellenized phonology. In Eleia, at the same period, he found by contrast only one old man who could attempt some minimal bits of Arvanitika – to be sure, with a phonology which preserved more of the original phonological characteristics of an Albanian speech form than the relatively serviceable Arvanitika of the university students from Attica.⁴

The suggestion in the Arvanitika case that structural compromise is not necessarily deleterious to the continued use of a small language is supported and strengthened by the work of Huffines in her research with two different groups of Pennsylvania German (PG) speakers. Among what she calls the non-sectarians (i.e. the non-Anabaptists), she found that the older generation for whom PG was the native language spoke a relatively conservative PG, showing little convergence with English; yet within this linguistically conservative community, "the death of PG . . . is rapid once it begins and is complete across three generations, often across two" (Huffines 1989:225). Among the Mennonite and Amish sectarians in her study, shifting into English is impermissible within the community itself (though not in dealing with outsiders), but convergence with English and incorporation of English loanwords is commonplace. The sectarians' German speech is not in immediate danger of disappearing, but it is noticeably less conservative than that of the non-sectarians. Huffines concludes, regarding the sectarians' flourishing PG, that "sociolinguistic norms prescribe its use but not its form" (225).

The greater conservatism of non-sectarian PG is not necessarily causal in

its decline, but it is at any rate clear that it has not operated to preserve the language. That is, structural or lexical purity is not in itself a key to survival, nor does "impurity" necessarily represent an opening of the floodgates to external influences which must inevitably swamp a small language. A perceived need for linguistic integrity may in some cases offer a rallying point for revitalization or revival, especially among the intellectuals who are often the spearhead of such a movement (cf. Fishman 1989:229–301); but a sense of differentness, sufficient to sustain a separate identity, need not rest on a native linguistic purity that will stand up to strict etymological and grammatical scrutiny.

In an instructive case of conscious language revival from Belfast, Northern Ireland, it appears that movement away from conservative norms may represent a price to be exacted in return for the emergence of young native speakers. Late in the 1960s a group of couples, learners of Irish, deliberately formed a community in Belfast where they could raise their children as Irish speakers. Members built their own homes on a site secured by a company which they established, and in 1971 a primary school using Irish as the medium of instruction was opened. The children of the 11 Shaw's Road families formed the original nucleus of the school population; but in 1985–86 there were 194 pupils enrolled, including many from neighboring areas (Maguire 1987:74). For the Shaw's Road children, Irish was the first language of their homes, their neighborhood, their primary school, and their church. They are effectively Irish speakers, as their parents had hoped; but their Irish turns out to deviate markedly from the norms of the grammar books to which they were exposed in school. In particular, quite a number of grammatical features which are conveyed wholly or in part by changes in the initial consonants of nouns, verbs, and adjectives are often compromised – e.g. gender, certain tense forms, and genitive possessive constructions. Analogical verb forms appear in place of traditional irregular ones, and analytic ones in place of synthetic ones. In addition, English syntactic influence is evident, and English lexical items are plentifully borrowed.

Gabrielle Maguire, who reports on the Shaw's Road community, shows a keen awareness of the difficult balancing act called for in revival settings when she presents her findings on linguistic developments in children's Irish in her book-length study of that community (1991:186–228). She quotes Haugen's warning (1977:101) about the risks arising from "linguistic straitjacketing": "It may be better to bend than to break. Acceptance of useful convergence between codes is better than a total rejection of the mother tongue, which is likely to result if one always and everywhere insists on [the] rigid rhetorical norms of the academicians." But at the same time (191) she contends that Haugen was not endorsing "allowing the language to landslide into the system of the D[ominant] L[anguage]," and she urges "a firm grasp

on the reality of what constitutes healthy, inevitable change within a particular set of circumstances.”

The problem, of course, is to identify what constitutes “healthy” change. Some adopt the view that the end-product is healthy by definition if it survives, as opposed to disappearing, regardless of its form. Others consider a highly convergent outcome too poor a representative of the original language to count, and so disdain it. This is a value judgment and should be recognized as such. When the convergence in question lies safely in the past, the disagreement is innocent enough. English emerged from its period of social subordination to French, in the wake of the Norman Conquest, quite different in form from the English which had existed before the Conquest. Arguments can be made (and have been) for its continuation as a distinctly Germanic language – or for its latterday emergence as a mixed language, or even a creole.

When convergence features are evident in a present-day speech form, the debate can take on more than academic interest. Maguire notes that the Shaw’s Road children are capable of some degree of grammatical monitoring and avoidance of English loanwords in more formal situations (1987:87, 1991:228). But overall she finds that they “adapt their [Irish language] system to suit their own needs,” and her summarizing comment (1987:88) leans to the conservative side: “Although communicative competence and functional adequacy are mastered, a language which is very much on the defensive must aim higher in order to ensure its own separateness from the dominant language.” This is at heart a puristically inclined evaluation. In its absolute form, it is belied by the evidence of the sectarian speakers of Pennsylvania German; but it is certainly true that a sense of separate identity is a valuable sustaining feature in ethnic language revival and revitalization efforts.

Ó Baoill, considering the outlook for preservation of traditional Irish phonological contrasts among speakers of whom many or most will be learners, in the context of the Irish Republic, considers compromise a likely necessity: “If Irish is to become a viable means of communication among the general population, I fear that much leveling will take place, and it is certain that many of the contrasts now existing in Irish will be lost. If the revival of Irish were to succeed, then it might all be worthwhile” (1988:125). Ó Baoill’s is a slightly tooth-gritting embrace of revival, since he suspects that it can only come at a cost of phonological leveling in the original language. His predictions for Irish may have been embodied for Greek Albanian in the young Attican semi-speakers of Arvanitika whom Hamp encountered.

Maguire and Ó Baoill both hope for the preservation of Irish and the proliferation of speakers of Irish. Maguire, like many language loyalists before her, is asking how dilute a language can become while still remaining the linguistic entity it was – distinct from all others, including (and especially) the

neighboring language of wider currency. Ó Baoill, in a more pragmatic tradition, is asking how traditional a threatened language can afford to remain if its traditional forms pose obstacles to learnability and hence dissemination. In the best of all possible worlds, one would not need to choose, of course, and Fishman's characterization of enlightened planning in a nationalist framework would prevail: "The enlightenment of nationalist purism in language planning . . . proceeds along many well-trodden paths: the differentiation between ethnic core and nonethnic periphery, between technical and nontechnical, the differentiation between preferred and nonpreferred sources of borrowing, and, finally, the appeal to common usage among the masses" (1989:309). But in very small language communities which have no nation to their name, and little immediate prospect of acquiring anything deserving the term "masses," a choice may be unavoidable. The rapidity of change and the expansion of contacts with other peoples add to the pressures. Drapeau (1992:3) points this out in connection with Betsiamites Montagnais, an Algonquian language with a moderately solid speaker base, but extensive exposure to French despite its geographical isolation in Northern Quebec.

The need for lexical elaboration is so high in persistent linguistic enclaves . . . confronted with the communicative demands of modern life, that there is no way for these communities to cope with this problem without importing massively, overburdened as they are by the sheer number of items to create [by coinage].

On the evidence of the difficulties posed by puristic stances for even very large modernizing languages, like Hindi and Arabic, and with the suggestive findings of Hamp and Huffines in cases at the other end of the spectrum as an encouragement, it may prove the wiser course to accept considerable compromise rather than make a determined stand for intactness, where threatened languages are at issue. If a language survives, after all, it has a future. If it can never again be exactly what it once was, it may yet be something more than it now is. Gifted speakers and writers may eventually appear who will coax new richness of expression from it, and tease it into forms that will be uniquely its own, even if not those of its past. Ælfric might well have been horrified at what Chaucer called English, had he lived to see it, since English emerged in a markedly altered state, both lexically and grammatically, from two centuries of domination by the Norman French and their language. But if Chaucer wrote in a sharply modified and even gallicized form of English, by comparison with that of Ælfric, that did not prevent Chaucer from writing masterful and enduring literary works. Purity need not be a requirement for persistence, and compromise need not be the death knell, for small languages any more than for larger ones.

LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION AND LANGUAGE REVIVAL

NOTES

* I'm grateful to Stephen Griffin for alerting me to the material in *Bro Nevez*, relating to the controversy over the form Cornish should take, and to Dr. Lois Kutei for supplying the relevant issues of the newsletter.

¹ Languages of this sort correspond to Stage 7 in Fishman's typology of threatened statuses (1991:86-7).

² The abbreviations are: P 'past', CON 'concomitative'; the parenthesized element in the second TT line is optional. Note that in each case the NT verb is a borrowing from (Pidgin) English: *wokapat* derived from *walkabout* and *lukim* from *look*.

³ The struggle to eliminate foreign loanwords from the German language produced vast numbers of coinages and extensions from the 17th century on. Browsing through a few *Verdeutschungswörterbücher* produces some smiles at the apparent absurdities that zealous Germanizers urged on their compatriots; but these are quickly balanced by surprise at the realization that many words, utterly respectable and ordinary now, were coinages no less novel and curious in their time than the coinages which failed to gain acceptance and so produce smiles. In the 19th century, Arthur Schopenhauer found the coinage *Stickstoff*, recommended by the writer Campe as a replacement for *Nitrogen*, so ugly that he suggested *Azot* instead (Tschisch 1969:260). But Campe prevailed; modern German dictionaries offer *Stickstoff* for 'nitrogen', but no *Azot*.

⁴ In the village of Embo, East Sutherland (Scotland), where Gaelic is dying out, it surprised me originally to find that the two mothers whose children are today the youngest Gaelic speakers were less conservative in their Gaelic than many of their older-fluent-speaker peers. It's possible, however, that the willingness of these two women to adapt their Gaelic somewhat toward young-fluent-speaker norms may have been a factor in producing a home environment which encouraged their children to speak Gaelic, when most young people of comparable ages were not actively acquiring the language.

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NANCY C. DORIAN

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