LANGUAGE BIRTH AND LANGUAGE DEATH

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Over time all languages change. Some languages which existed in the past may have modern descendants; others have become extinct. New languages such as pidgins and creoles have developed. In general, it is impossible to date the genesis of most languages since they began in pre-recorded history. However, the origin of pidgin and creole languages there is often sufficient historical data to describe the way they began and to trace their growth. Analysis of several dying languages has also made it possible to describe the process of language extinction.

Some languages are no longer spoken but have modern descendants. Latin is extinct but has descendants today —Spanish, Portuguese, French, etc. A language may die in one area, but continue to thrive in others. Spanish in Trinidad is an example of this type of death. Moodel (1982) found that "Unlike other spanish Caribbean dialects, Trinidad Spanish is at the point of extinction" (p. 206).Another type of language death is caused by the death or extinction of the people who are native speakers of the language. This occurred with Yani, a Native American language in Northern California. In this situation, extinction was rapid and the command of Yani by the last speakers was said to be faultless.

Language death can ocur as a result of language shift. When this happens, one language gradually replaces the other or others that are spoken in the area. When this happens, there are a wide range of linguistic abilities among the speakers of the original language. Bloomfield (1927: 437) found this to be true of Native American language, Menonimi. He said that one 60 year old woman spoke "a beautiful

and highly idiomatic Menomini." However, a 40 year old man spoke a variety that was "atrocious". He had a small vocabulary and "barbarous" inflections.

Language death is ocurring in every part of the world. Recent news articles noted the extinction of Romanesch, one of the four national languages of Switzerland. In Africa, the Bullom languages are dying and in Asia, Limbu.

Language change is not just a picture of language death. New languages such as pidgins and creoles develop. These new languages grow out of contact situations resulting from trade, slavery, plantation systems, etc. A pidgin is defined as "a marginal language which arises to fulfill certain restricted communication needs among people who have no common language" (Todd, p. 1). "They are mixed, reduced and simplified languages and languages of restricted use" (Trudgill p. 33). "A creole arises when a pidgin becomes the mother language of a speech community" (Todd p. 3). Not all pidgins live to become creoles. Unlike ,the genesis of most languages which began before recorded time, the date of the origin of many pidgins and creoles can often be approximated. As Bickerton (p. 1) pointed out in discussing the origin of Sranan, a language in Suriname, "before 1650 there was no Sranan. The language simply did not exist; the area where it was going to be spoken was not populated."

For some pidgins and creoles there is sufficient data to describe the way they began and to trace their development. One pidgin for which this is possible is a variety of West African Pidgin English spoken in Old Calabar, which is in the country know today as Nigeria. Data from the 18th century have made it possible to describe the conditions under which this language began, its functions, and the changes that have occurred (Fayer 1982).

Recent detailed study of several dying languages makes it possible to study the process of language extinction. The most complete is Dorian's analysis of the death of East Sutherland Gaelish spoken in Brora, Golspie, and Embro, towns in the northeast section of Scotland. Others include Moodie's study of Trinidad Spanish, and Trudgill's description of the death of Arvanitika, an Albanian dialect spoken in Greece.

In language birth and language death are different end points in the life cycle of languages, it would seem that there would be a linguistic model that would include both processes as well as the process of "normal" change. The fact that there is no such model probably reflects our still limited knowledge of these two types of language change. On the basis of the data that is now available, it appears that although there are similarities in language birth and language death and other types of language change, there are differences as well.

The sociolinguistic conditions associated with 'normal' change are not exactly the same as those associated with all fluent speakers in their youth, for departing from grammatical and lexical norms." In pidgin situations there are no guardians of the correct and the beautiful and the idealized native speaker" (Muhlhauser p. 53).

Sankoff (1979: 2) stated: "The deeper one digs, I am convinced, the more one is led to conclude that pidgins at least as stictly defined, are a product of European colonial expansion." These are not quite the same conditions that produce language death. In Greece, the Albanians are descendants of Albanians who came between the 11th and 15th centuries. "Today they refer to themselves not as Albanians but as Arvanites, and call the language they speak no Albanaian but Arvanitika. ...(They feel) that they are not only Arvanites but Greeks as well." (Trudgill, p. 32) If language death is seen as the result of the expansion of another culture, then there are similarities to pidgin situations. Dorian saw the death of East Sutherland Gaelic as part of the language competition that began in the Middle Ages. Sutherland was Pictish territory and Gaelic displaced Pictish in ways what are similar to the ways that English is supplanting Gaelic. Language shift causes language death.

As the language dies Dorian (1981 p. 115) found there is an appearance of semi-speakers — speakers who are not completely fluent. Se did not, however, claim that this is a universal. This group of semi-speakers or imperfect speakers "characteristically appear who have not had sufficiently intensive exposure to the one language, or who have been much more intensively exposed to some other language; and if they continue to use the home language at all, they use it in a form

which is markedly different from the fluent speaker norm."
In pidgin settings everyone is a semi-speaker of the pidgin.

The semi-speaker of East Sutherland Gaelic may not be able to produce standard speech but they have receptive control of the language. "They are fully privy to all ordinary conversation in East Sutherland Gaelic; they can laugh at jokes and stories, pick up whispers, enjoy repartee and make out messages under high noise conditions (Dorian 1981, p. 155). This does not seem to be true for pidgin speakers.

In language death, at least some speakers can choose the language they wish to speak on a given occasion and can switch from one language to the other. In language birth settings this is not possible. The pidgin arises because the groups cannot communicate with each other. The native language or languages of each each group is unintelligible to members of the other group or groups. A pidgin must be used reciprocally. Sankoff (p. 4) said "much of the literature on 'pigins suggests that a putative 'pidgin' must be use reciprocally, i.e. that 'both parties in the contact situation use it. Though this is not explicitly criterial in the definition, it would seem that if native speakers of the language, this is evidence at least of passive bilingualism on the part of foreign, 'pidgin' speakers, if not of the mutual intelligibility of 'pidgin' and 'native' versions. This was found to be true among the speakers of West African Pidgin English in Old Calabar although the varieyt used by English speakers and the variety used by Efik speakers contained different features.

Dorian (1981 p. 154) found that "In general it seems possible to suggest that sociolinguistic factors rather than purely linguistic factors, distinguish change in 'healtht' languages," In contrasting the changes that are found in language death and those that occur in languages which show no sign of becoming extinct, the types of change in structure are not so different but the timespan in compressed and the amount of change is greater in language death. This is also true in pidgins and creoles. Sankoff (p. 2) said "Pidgin-creole studies of the past decade in particular have permanently laid to rest the idea thast language change must be slow and gradual, taking centuries (or at least many generations) to accomplish. They have demonstrated (as have other studies of ongoing change in a number of communities) that a linguistic change may be virtually completed in generation."

The question is them what types of changes occur in language birth and language death. All grammatical definitions of pidgins note that in these languages there is a small vocabulary which is usually taken from one of the languages in the contact situation. Since pidgins are used for limited functions it is not necessary to have words for all the linguistic needs of the people. As the process of crealization begins the lexicon is developed. Although the study of West African Pidgin English does not focus on lexical expansion, a general increase in the lexicon can be noted in the four year period in the *Diary of Antera Duke,* a diary written in 18th century West African Pidgin English. (Fayer 1982).

There are vocabulary changes in language death. Bloomfield whose observation on Memomini were cited earlier found that the speakers that he studied had small vocabularies. Dorian said that the lexicon of East Sutherland Gaelic is reduced by comparison to textbook language and other Gaelic dialects that are healthier. There are differences between the size of the English vocabulary and the Gaelic vocabulary of the people in East Sutherland. Dorian (p. 121) stated that although the vocabulary is reduced "it seems often to be the case that isolated vocabulary items survive long after all the productive use of the language has disappeared in a community." She used a 215 item lexicostatistical list of basic vocabulary in her testing. Of these items, 119 were produced by all speakers — fluent and semi-speakers alike. The weakest semi-speaker produced 150 items but "he has very little ability to use the words productively in sentences" (1981 p. 146). The results of the fluent speakers were erratic. "Lexical recall did not correlate well with grammatical conservatism for fluent speakers."

Table 1 indicates that all the speakers could produce .55 of the words. All fluent speakers could produce .90 of the words on the list. Table 2 indicates the difference between the lowest fluent speaker produced .95 and the highest semi-speaker produced .89. In the semi-speaker group the highest scores were not older fluent speakers as might be expected but younger fluent speakers. There was, however, a good correlation of the

lexical scores and the grammatical scores of the semi-speakers. "The best semi-speakers scored highest and the weakest scored lowest."

Trudgill found (p. 40) "The Arvanitika lexicon ... has been subject to interference or substitution, but not to reduction." He saw the Greek loan words which have taken the place of Arvanitika words as integral parts of the vocabulary, He did note that there is 'a small number of prepositions and other relational words which is a well-known characteristic of pidgins." Some of these have been replaced by Greek words, but there are examples of forms that have been loas completely in the speech of younger speakers. Although in Standard Albanian there are different forms for *while* and *when*, in Arvanitika there is one word with both meanings. In Standard Albanian there are separate forms for *about, round,* and *near,* in Arvanitika there is just one form. This loss of contrast is found in West African Pidgin English. In the 18th century data the preposition *for* corresponds to Standard English *to, from, in, at, with, until,* etc.

Comparing the grammatical changes that occur in one language death setting with those that occur in another is somewhat difficult. One reason for this is that researchers do not always look at the same features and do not use the same models to present their results. In addition, dying languages do not share the same features.

Trudgill (p. 41) noted the loss of tense marking in the Albanian dialect he studied. "Of the forms that remain in full use only the present and past definite are inflected." The past definite is used instead of the imperfect and the conditional mood is disappearng. A summary of his findings is presented in Table 3. The loss of the indicative is an example of reduction. Often the conditional is replaced by a periphrastic not synthetic forms. Trudgill (p. 42) said "the tendency to replace synthetic forms by analytic forms which is commonplace under pidginization and is of course well attested in linguistic change generally."

Handout Table 4. Dorian stated that in the linguistic system of semi-speakers East Sutherland Gaelic morphological inflection is lost in the future and conditional. Transformations such as the passive are missing. Table 4 summaries these findings.

Table 3 and Table 4 illustrate the difficulty of comparing change in two dying languages. Trudgill does not use precentages of frequency but merely the categories of use, some loss and moribund. He does not divide his informants as to linguistic ability. Dorian does divide according to ability and age. She gives percentage of retention as well as failure of occurrences. In spite of the lack of correspondences, it can be seen that the conditional tense is disappearing in both situations.

Other grammatical changes that Dorian observed are that morphological inflection is generalized in the case of the plural. Word order is the same as among fluent speakers and some embeddings remain intact among semi-speakers.

Trudgill noted that in the nominal system the ablative has been replaced y prepositional phrases and there has been a loss of the distinction between definite and indefinite connecting particles.

Both Trudgill and Dorian found that gender distinctions remain,. In the pronoun system of eary forms of West African Pidgin English this is not true. The pronoun *he* or *his* is the third person singular subject form and can refer to masculine, feminine, or neuter nouns.

The grammar or a dying language can be reduced not only by loss of categories or the substitution of analytic for synthetic forms, but by the reduction in the number of variants for a given construction. Moodie stated that there are four ways third person possession can be expressed in Trinidad Spanish. They are

Variant 1 *su casa*
Variant 2 *su casa de el*
Variant 3 *la casa de el*
Variant 4 *ø casa de el*

There are some constraints on the use of Variant 4, that are not important to the discussion here. Her results of the use of these variants are found in Table 5.

From this table it can be seen that the oldest group commands all the variants. The youngest group uses only Variant 3 and Variant 4 and does not use Variant 1 and Variant 2. The grammar of Group C is more limited than that of Group A.

Recent research in the untutored acquisition of a second language has described the process as a pidginization process. The pidginization hypothesis as developed by Schumann does not state that second language learners speak pidgins but that pidginization occurs as they are learning. Agnello (p. 6) clarified the distinction. "A pidgin may only exist in the absence of a target language, pidginization is a more general phenomenon and is exemplified by consistent reduction and simplification in a second language learner's interlanguage." Agnello's findings of the development of correct English noun plurals and possessives in the speech of three adult second language learners make an interesting comparison with loss of these inflections in language death settings. Table 6 is the summary of Agnello's analysis of these constructions in the speech of an Italian, Greek, and Japanese acquiring English. Dorian's summary of the retention of these forms in East Sutherland Gaelic is presented in Table 6.

From these tables it can be seen that plural marking is acquired earlier in the pidginization process and lost later in a dying language. Inflected possessives are acquired after inflected plurals in the pidginization process and lost earlier in dying languages. As more data is collected in language death and language acquisition, it is hoped that more similarities will become apparant.

Dorian (1981 p. 46) said that what is striking about the death of East Sutherland Gaelic is the complexity of the picture. Even among fluent speakers not all features show equal decay. The same might be said of pidgin languages and language acquisition. Linguistic features do not disappear in groups nor are they acquired in groups. Variation theory has enabled data of this type to be handled and understood better.

In language death according to Dorian the role of the semi-speaker seems to be the crucial one. She says (1981 p. 156) "Although SS's have both linguistic and sociolinguistic features in common with child speakers, with pidgin speakers, and with natural (as opposed to classroom) second language learners, they are at the same time unique in the particular configuration of their linguistic and sociolinguistic characteristics."

Continued study of both language birth and language death in varied settings will give not only a better understanding of the similarities and differences of the two processes and their relationship to other types of language acquisition and decay, but will also bring about deeper insights into the mechanism of language change and advance general linguistic theory.

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Table 1
Retention of Basic Lexicon among East Sutherland Gaelic (ESG) Speakers

	Percentage of retention (215 words)
all speakers	.55
all fluent speakers	.90

From Dorian, p. 145 (1981)

Table 2
Retention of Basic Lexicon among ESG Fluent and Semi-Seakers

	Percentage of retention (215 words)
lowest fluent speaker	.95
highest semi-speaker	.89

From Dorian, p. 145 (1981)

Table 3
The Arvanitika Verbal System

	Indicative		Subjunctive		Conditional	
	A	P	A	P	A	P
Present	U	U	U	U	M	M
Imperfect	M	M	M	M	-	-
Past definite	U	U	-	-	-	-
Perfect	U	U	U	S	U	S
Pluperfect	U	U	U	S	-	-
Future	U	U	-	-	-	-
Futurm exactum	U	S	-	-	-	-

A = Active U = In use M = Moribund
P = Passive S = Some loss

From Trudgill, p. 41

Table 4
Retention and Failure of Occurrence for ESG Verbal Categories

	Percentage of retention			Some failure of occurrence		
	OFS	YFS	SS	OFS	YFS	SS
Past tense lenition	100	100	90			
Future suffix	100	100	57		*	
Conditional	100	100	46		*	

OFS = Older fluent speaker SS = Semi-speaker
YFS = Younger fluent speaker

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Pluperfect	U	U	U	S	-	-
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From Dorian, p. 147 (1981)

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Table 5
Third Person Possession Constructions in Trinidad Spanish

	Percentage of retention	Group
Variant$_1$ N = 11	7	A
Variant$_2$ N = 26	17	A, B
Variant$_3$ N = 110	70	A, B, C
Variant$_4$ N = 10	6	A, C

Group A = Those born before 1910
Group B = Those born between 1910-1920
Group C = Those born between 1920-1940

From Moodie, p. 127

Table 6
Correct Noun Plurals and Possessive Forms for Second Language Learners

	Possessive	Plural
Italian speaker	$N = 4^{.25}$	$N = 271^{.53}$
Greek speaker	$N = 7^{.17}$	$N = 320^{.85}$
Japanese speaker	$N = 1^{1.00}$	$N = 123^{.58}$

From Agnello, p. 17

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Table 7
Retention of Possessives and Plurals
among ESG Speakers

	Possessive	Plurals
OFS	.44	1.00
YFS	.19	1.00
SS	.12	.92

From Dorian, p. 147 (1981)