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Between multiculturalism and globalisation

Considerations on language use, identity, and power

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1.   A CHANGING WORLD

The last few decades have been a time of rapid social and cultural changes for the western world in general and Europe in particular. Wave after wave of immigration – encouraged at first, then viewed with diffidence soon turning into open hostility – have altered dramatically the ethnic and social composition of cities and whole countries. Diversity has become a dominating feature of modern life, whether it is valued for its contribution to a truly supranational society, or opposed for its undermining effects on national identity. At the same time, the ever-increasing globalisation of economy and commerce has brought about a new type of colonisation, exporting (or, as some would argue, imposing) the western way of life to the rest of the world. Moreover, it has also promoted a growing homogenisation among western countries which, while being undoubtedly beneficial to business, has had the less welcome consequence of fostering a subtle anglicisation in a number of departments – from business to education – to the detriment of national culture [1].

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[1] The threat of Anglo-American hegemony is closely related to the rise of English as the normal language of communication in an increasingly large number of areas. On English as a hegemonic language see R. Phillipson, *Linguistic Imperialism*, OUP (1992). On the ideological implications of English language education see A. Suresh Canagarajah, *Resisting Linguistic Imperialism in English Teaching*, OUP (1999). For a different view see D. Crystal, *English as a Global Language*, CUP (1997). The issue has generated spirited debates within many institutions and international organisations. Among recent publications, see the articles in the *Guerre et paix des langues* dossier in "Le Courier de l'Unesco", (Apr. 2000), also available online at http://www.unesco.org/courier/2000_04/fr/doss0.htm. In particular, see R.L. Breto, *La suprématie de l'anglais est-elle inéluctable?*, pp. 23-24 (http://www.unesco.

While it has long been recognised that the two phenomena are mutually interdependent[2], this awareness has done very little to ease the tension between the opposing forces of multiculturalism and multiethnicity on the one hand, and globalisation on the other. In fact, conflicts and issues arising from both often encroach upon each other, so that it becomes almost impossible to determine their respective boundaries (if they do indeed exist). Take, for example, the perplexities expressed by some sectors of the population within European Union member states as to the extent of the power and authority that the Union itself should wield. Often this clamouring against the relinquishment of independence that too close an adherence to the principles of the European Union would imply is accompanied by an equally concerned attitude towards the lack of integration of immigrant communities (when in fact their existence is accepted at all) within the nation to whom the people expressing such perplexities belong. While integration within the European Union is viewed as potentially dangerous because it could undermine national and cultural identity (and is thus perceived as an instance of globalisation in its negative connotation), the integration of immigrant communities into mainstream society (at the loss of their cultural values) is considered an unnegotiable necessity.

At the core of both these attitudes is a fear of losing one's identity, whether by means of an intervention from the top or of an infiltration from the bottom. This 'conservationist' approach can be seen as the most recent manifestation of the age-long reluctance of western culture to deal with otherness, which has traditionally gone hand in hand with expansion policies combined with fears of misgenation and hybridisation[3]. Hence the attempt to

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org/courier/2000_04/fr/doss11.htm, and A. Chaudhry, *Babel Indienne: voie royale pour l'anglais*, pp. 33-34 (http://www.unesco.org/courier/2000_04/fr/doss24.htm. Conferences on these issues are being called with growing frequency. Cf. for example "The Fate of English in the Age of Globalisation: The Future of German" (April 4-6, 2002) held at the Deutsches Haus at NYU, New York, http://www.nyu.edu/deutscheshaus/futureofgerman/index.html.

[2] The study of the relationship between globalisation and migration has been on the agendas of international organisations for some time. ILO (International Labour Organisation) and OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development), in collaboration with other international institutions, have organised a number of colloquia and conferences on the issue. Materials on this topic abound. For an overview see P. Stalker, *Workers without frontiers – The impact of globalization on international migration*, ILO, Geneva and Lynne Rienner Publishers (2000).

[3] This is a wide-ranging phenomenon mostly based on notions of racial and/or cultural superiority, whose effects have manifested themselves in a variety of fashions through the centuries, ranging from the measures taken by colonist powers to prevent in-

protect what are perceived to be a nation's defining characteristics – its culture, its traditions, its laws, and its language.

Language especially plays a crucial role in the establishment and preservation of national and group identity, which is why, for instance, nationalist groups within Europe are so fiercely protective of national languages against the rise of English for transnational communication. Besides setting a community of speakers apart from the rest of the world by the sheer means of making them unintelligible to others, language constitutes the repository of their social and cultural values, and the medium of their historical memory. This was the view of language and culture at the core of 19th and 20th century nation-building processes [4], and while it coincided originally with the suppression of minority languages within nations for the sake of unity, it has more recently been employed to aid a re-evaluation of those very languages and cultures in the name of multilingualism and multiculturalism. The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (1992) published by the Council of Europe [5], for instance, has played a crucial role in promoting regional variants of multicultural language policies based on territorial factors. However,

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termarriage with the colonised populations, to all forms of discrimination against minority groups, to genocide.

[4] Cf. Koenig 1999 ('Democratic Governance in Multicultural Societies,' Management of Social Transformation – MOST – Discussion Paper No. 30, also available online http://www.unesco.org/most/ln2pol2.htm): 'The two main models for constructing modern nation-states, the civic and the ethnic model of the nation-state, have both supposed a strong degree of social cohesion on the societal level. The *political* (or contractual) model of the nation-state, typically formulated in Republican political theory, assumed that in the modern nation, bonds of particularistic solidarity would be replaced by formal citizenship and a legal system founded on universalistic norms, especially on individual rights. It was supposed that social integration could be achieved by establishing a de-ethnicized public sphere in which social conflicts would be resolved democratically and by recourse to constitutional provisions. In contradistinction to this concept of a political constitution of the nation, the *ethnic* (or descent) model of the nation-state, related predominantly to German Romanticism, assumed that social integration in the modern nation-state was based on the shared identity of a *Volk*. State formation was therefore considered an instrument for the self-articulation of a pre-existent national community, characterized by common historical origin and destiny, shared culture, mentality and custom and, not least, a common language. The mobilizing force of this model of the nation-state is proven by the success of nationalist movements in the 19th and early 20th century' (Koenig 1999:Part 1 Paragraph 2). In the German-Romantic model of the nation-state language played a crucial, symbolic role. Monolingualism, however, was also encouraged by the contractual model of nation-building, although this did not rely on a notion of collective identity as a precondition for the inclusion of all citizens in a common polity. In either case multilingualism was never an option.

[5] See full text on http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/EN/Treaties/Html/148.htm.

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its recommendations only apply to autochthonous language groups, or to linguistic communities whose establishment within a majority language area is so old as to be perceived as quasi-native. New immigrant groups are emphatically excluded by the Charter. This reflects a widespread attitude among European member states to ignore the linguistic rights of migrants. With few exceptions (most notably Belgium, Germany, and the Netherlands), cultural and linguistic assimilation of migrants remains the one and only language policy within the majority of European states [6].

These positions reflect the tension between globalisation and multiculturalism pointed out above. Again, the threat is perceived to be twofold: on the one hand, the growth of English as the language of international communication is interpreted as an attempt at linguistic (hence cultural) colonisation; on the other, the presence of separate linguistic groups within the national territory is felt as a disturbing and unsettling element in an otherwise harmonious society.

Both stances entail a degree of exaggeration, as is often the case with socio-political issues charged with strong emotional values. They do, however, reflect a preoccupation with the linguistic future of minority groups, nations and supra-national institutions that demands careful consideration on the part of language planners and the general public alike. Because of the socio-political circumstances that surround the issue (inability to sustain the present rate of immigration, internal diversification, reluctance to relinquish an absolute concept of national sovereignty on some aspects of community life), it is particularly important that this controversial topic be approached in as informed and neutral a manner as possible. Language death or survival are not simply the result of language policies. The factors which determine the occurrence of either are manifold: they cannot all be controlled (nor, in fact, are they always clearly identifiable), and while some of the conditions determining the outcome of a language's struggle for survival are unique to that particular situation, others appear to occur again and again. Models of language shift are unstable: they often develop alongside socio-economic patterns, and differ according to the patterns involved. They remain, however, historically identifiable phenomena, characterised by a complex combination of psychological,

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[6] For a thorough view of the topic see Koenig 1999. The issue is also considered in Walsh 2001; Walsh's article targets a non-specialised readership from the pages *The Guardian Weekly*, which suggests that the issue is starting to be given more thorough consideration from the media (J. Walsh, "Minority Voices Show Strong Instinct for Survival", *The Guardian Weekly*, 19 Apr. 2001, also available online http://www.guardian.co.uk/GWeekly/Story/0,3939,475288,00.html).

emotional and socio-economic causes and effects.

The intermingling of factors as diverse as nostalgia or simply love for one's native country/region and the desire for social advancement produces a very unstable balance that can easily topple one way or another, creating the conditions for language maintenance or loss. The planning and implementation of linguistic policies, therefore, must take into consideration all these factors, as well as including an awareness of the phenomenon in its historical and sociological significance.

2.   LANGUAGE SHIFT

Languages are living entities: they have an origin and sometimes an end, and changes in between. While some changes are part of the natural life of a language and do not affect its vitality (in fact, they are often a sign of it), others can be symptoms of decline. Language shift is generally considered one such symptom. It refers to the process whereby the language of a community is replaced by another language, and is generally regarded as a three-phase process: monolingualism in the native language gives progressively way to a situation of bilingualism, in which a language of higher prestige or greater value for social and economic advancement is spoken alongside the first language. Eventually the second language becomes dominant. The original one is abandoned, or its use confined to limited domains, and a situation of virtual or total monolingualism in the second language ensues[7].

The causes of language shift have been variously analysed, and attempts have been made to draw a typology of the phenomenon[8]. However, while some generalisations hold, there is widespread agreement that it is very difficult to make accurate predictions on language decline and death. Minority languages that appeared at one time to be in danger of extinction (such as Finnish, Turkish and Lavtian) have survived to become national languages, and even a 'dead' language such as Hebrew has been successfully resurrected, whereas Latin, which was once the language of widest currency and highest

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[7] The term 'language death' is commonly used to refer to the case when a language becomes totally extinct, while 'language shift' is preferred when the original language survives elsewhere, but is no longer used in the community considered. In the course of this essay I will use both terms synonymously to indicate loss of language in a community.

[8] See Holmes 1992:65-67; Hoffman 1991:175-193; Romaine 1995:40 for a survey of the factors considered to play a significant role in situations of language shift.

prestige in Europe, was unable to withstand the growth of the vernacular. While it is possible to identify tendencies, forecasting their ultimate result is a much more delicate affair, and one that requires in-depth analysis of a great number of concurrent features.

3.   A QUESTION OF VALUE

In order to account for the different outcomes of apparently analogous situations (encroaching of a high prestige, high currency language on a low prestige, minority one), scholars often make distinctions between what are perceived to be two distinct sets of factors – one pertaining to the socio-economic, political and demographic conditions of the situation considered, and the other one related to the attitude of the community involved. So, for instance, Romaine distinguishes between 'external' and 'internal' factors (Romaine 1995:40), while Schilling-Estes and Wolfram talk of 'socio-economic' and 'socio-psychological' components (Schilling-Estes and Wolfram 1999), and Edwards – with a different emphasis, but on the same line of argument – of 'coercion' and 'volition' (Edwards 1985:48) [9].

Despite the differences in terminology, the core concept of these distinctions is the same: they emphasise that beyond the inevitability of the political and/or socio-economic conditions that put a language in danger, its survival or demise is ultimately determined by its speakers' choice to use or relinquish it. Thus Edwards points out that 'in condition of linguistic coercion, there still usually exist elements of group volition' (Edwards, 1985:48), and Schilling-Estes and Wolfram insist that 'attitudinal factors are paramount' in language shift (1999:517). Schilling-Estes and Wolfram also stress that 'to maintain a minority language as a vital means of communication, speakers must be endocentric (that is, focused on their own internal norms rather than those of the encroaching majority) and they must place a high value on their

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[9] Edwards's use of the term 'coercion' can be quite misleading, in that it may seem to apply only to situations in which a language has been forcibly imposed on the population, eradicating the native dialect. In Edwards's book the distinction is made in the context of a discussion of language 'murder' and 'suicide', thus emphasising the pre-eminence of political concerns (Edward 1985:51-52). However, a more general interpretation of coercion as the collective factors which force a population to shift language (such as the need to speak the majority language in order to work) is also possible, and is the one that is favoured in the context of this essay.

language as a symbol of their endocentric culture' (Schilling-Estes and Wolfram 1999:517). In other words, for a minority language to be maintained it is necessary that it is perceived by its speakers as a core element of group identity, intended as the sense that a community has of itself as distinct from the majority [10].

This point has been discussed by Ryan (1979). The author quotes Brehem's theory of psychological reattance (1972) to explain why some minority groups exaggerate non-standard language varieties, arguing that 'threatened loss of freedom leads to behaviours such as choosing a threatened choice alternative as well as more favourable attitudes towards the threatened alternative' (Ryan 1979:149) [11]. More importantly, Ryan argues that 'non-standard speech varieties may have low prestige but are associated with other values of importance to an ethnic group' (Ryan 1979:152). She insists on the necessity of distinguishing between the *status* of a language ('the value of a speech variety for social advancement') and its *solidarity* value ('the value of a speech variety for identification with a group') (Ryan 1979:155) [12]. According to Ryan, a high solidarity value is directly associated to the maintenance of a speech variety, while a low value usually translates into language loss [13].

The concepts of solidarity and status are of crucial importance when considering the patterns of language use in a community. As one of the functions of language is, alongside the more obvious one of communicating, to make statements about the speaker (cf. Fasold 1984:ix), language choice in a bilingual/bidialectal community is often an accurate index of the relative values of the two speech varieties involved, and of the speakers' attitude towards them (cf. Milroy and Milroy 1991:56-60). Paraphrasing Milroy and Milroy, it can be said that to the extent that speakers choose to use the high prestige

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[10] This is particularly true when language is seen as a symbol of ethnic identity (Holmes 1992:69), but other kinds of group identity are possible (regional, religious, social etc.).

[11] Schilling-Estes and Wolfram take a similar position when they argue that, contrary to what is normally expected, increasing linguistic distinctiveness is often a characteristic of threatened languages. They believe, however, that such increasing distinctiveness, despite resulting in short-term maintenance, is a sign of a dialect's approaching demise (Schilling-Estes and Wolfram 1999:517).

[12] Ryan also notes that the contrast between status and solidarity is similar to that between instrumental and integrative motivation (Ryan 1979:152 quoting Gardner and Lambert 1972).

[13] This is not always the case. The symbolic and communicative aspects of language can be separated: a language can be lost for everyday communication, but its symbolic value may be maintained, as it has happened for Irish (see below and cf. Edwards 1985:61).

language as the normal language of social interaction, they are opting for status rather than solidarity, thereby taking their distance from the group in the interest of social mobility (Milroy and Milroy 1991:59). By converse, loyalty to the low prestige speech variety frequently signifies a preference for solidarity values, often at the expense of potential socio-economic benefits.

Language shift, then, can be seen as the result of a delicate balance between issues of power and identity. Wherever identity prevails, the minority language (provided it is integral part of that identity) will have a better chance of being maintained. Conversely, language shift is more likely to occur where the majority or high prestige language is perceived as a prerequisite for socio-economic or cultural empowerment, and these benefits are deemed more desirable than, or not conflicting with, group solidarity [14].

4.   MODELS OF LANGUAGE SHIFT

Examples of language shift due to a combination of socio-economic and political factors abound, and affect the languages of territorially isolated communities and immigrants groups alike. Consider, for example, the shift from Hungarian to German in Oberwart, an Austrian town located on the border with Hungary. In her study of the Oberwarter community, Gal (1979) points out that shift of the originally Hungarian monoligual and later bilingual (Hungarian/German) population to the latter language has been greatly influenced by its higher socio-economic value. Besides being the official language of bureaucracy and education, fluency in German is a necessary requirement for non-rural employment, and has come to be associated with upward social mobility. The prestige of the language among Hungarian-speaking Oberwarters is such that parents encourage their children to use it at all times, to the detriment of their native tongue [15].

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[14] Maintenance of group identity despite language loss is not impossible (see the already cited case of Irish). As Edwards points out, 'group identity is not indissolubly linked to any given marker, including language. Rather, since identity essentially depends on the continuation of boundaries which, in turn, depend upon a maintained sense of groupness, the erosion of an original language – at least in its ordinary communicative aspects – does not inevitably mean the erosion of identity itself' (Edwards 1985:48). On the same line of argument, Wardhaugh argues that 'a language may be lost, but that does not mean inevitably that the group that used it has lost its identity'. He adds, however, that 'such loss of identity often does follow' (Wardhaugh 1987: 20).

[15] Note, however, that the shift does not appear to have affected the Oberwarters'

Similar patterns of shift are to be found in many other areas. The anglicisation of Wales and Scotland, for instance, was promoted by means of political intervention, but owes its lasting effects primarily to socio-economic factors. Language shift on a large scale did not occur in Wales until the impact of industrialisation revolutionised the economy and caused an increase in non-Welsh immigration in selected areas (Williams 1990:19-47). Similarly, the decline of the East Sutherland variety of Gaelic in Scotland is due to the fact that 'in the local society there are no rewards for Gaelic-English bilingualism, either in economic terms or in terms of social approval' (Dorian 1981:94). Identity issues and local political intervention have partially stalled the shift in Wales, where knowledge of Welsh is actively encouraged; however, no such factors exist in East Sutherland, and the death of this dialect appears to be imminent. In fact, it is precisely because their language marks them as 'fishermen', thus placing them on an inferior cultural and socio-economic level, that the Gaelic-speaking inhabitants of East Sutherland have little interest in maintaining either their dialect or the identity it denotes.

The balance between the solidarity value of language and its socio-economic status is different still in Ireland, where almost total language loss has been accompanied by an undiminished sense of group identity of which the Irish Gaelic dialect remains an integral part. The imposition of English as part of a process of colonisation had the consequence of emphasising the identity value of the very language it suppressed, thereby enhancing its symbolic significance. Because enforced language shift was perceived as an attempt to erase group identity, language itself became the repository of all the values that anglicisation threatened to obliterate. Hence the efforts (largely ineffectual) to revive Irish as soon as independence from Britain was gained. The failure to restore it in its communicative functions is due (besides political coercion and the lasting effects of the 'plantation' policy of the Tudor, Stuart and Protectorate eras) to centuries of English language use as a prerequisite for any social advancement beyond rural labour. Its symbolic value, however, remains, as well as a deeply felt sense of national and ethnic identity.

The case of 'language loss *cum* identity maintenance' of which Ireland is an example is not unique, but it is quite rare (see note 13). More often, language shift goes hand in hand with partial or total loss of group identity. Consider, for instance, the case of the Arvanites in Greece, whose language (Arvanitika) is approaching extinction. Growing indifference towards the group's

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sense of identity – they consider themselves Austrian, regardless of the language they speak (see Gal 1979).

ethnic roots (which are Albanian) has accompanied its decline. This attitude is particularly noticeable among the younger members of the community (who appear to have begun to adopt Greek identity) and is 'reinforced by the Greek policy of disregarding minority languages, by the growing attractions of urbanisation, and by the Arvanites being completely cut off from Albania' (Wardough 1987:47, quoting research by Trudgill and Tzavaras 1977).

The position of the Arvanites in Greece is that of an immigrant ethnic minority that has adopted the language and identity of the host country. Their social and linguistic assimilation was delayed by their relative isolation, but their increasing involvement in non-endocentric activities precipitated both language and identity shift. Their situation is similar, in this respect, to that of numerous other immigrant communities around the world. Minority ethnic groups are faced with enormous pressure to achieve native-like proficiency in the language of the majority. This applies especially to economic migrants, who often arrive in the host country with little knowledge of its language, and frequently experience difficulties and social discrimination as a result of their imperfect bilingualism. Since native-like proficiency is for them an unattainable goal, they tend to attribute great importance to it, and encourage their children to speak mostly, when not only, the majority language. Their native idiom is neglected not necessarily because it has low prestige, but because it is perceived as a distracting element in the pursuit of socio-economic advancement. In cases like this, language shift is often completed in the course of two or three generations. This pattern is quite common in the United States, where in many instances second generation immigrants belonging to minority groups [16] have only a passive knowledge of their parents' native language. It should be noted, however, that in some cases (especially where the ethnic community is quite large or emphatically endocentric) a sense of group identity is preserved, although it is often altered to accommodate the immigrants' new status (for example Italian-American, Irish-American etc.). The majority language is favoured because of the status it confers, while the solidarity value of the native languages is transferred to other aspects of group identity (family values and structure, religion, eating habits and so on).

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[16] The situation of Hispanic immigrants is quite different owing to the sheer size of their community.

5.   DIFFERING PATTERNS

The existence of recognisable patterns of linguistic assimilation of immigrant communities does not mean that language shift always happens in the same way, or for the same reasons. Consider, for instance, the following two examples, one relating to Polish immigrants in Melbourne, Australia (economic migrants – low level of the social scale), and the other to Asian-Indian-Kannadigas in the New York area (professional workforce – medium-high socio-economic level).

In his study of language maintenance among Polish students at a Saturday School in Melbourne (1996), Janik found that language shift tended to set in quite rapidly among the children of first generation immigrants, and appeared to be driven by the girls' population. He discovered that as well as showing a preference for English, girls had a tendency to avoid engaging in activities that emphasised their ethnic identity, such as the Polish Saturday school. When making excuses for not attending, they mentioned reasons related to competing activities in the majority community, such as schoolwork. Even when they did go to Saturday school, they favoured English rather than Polish for peer interaction. Boys, on the other hand, seemed to have fewer concerns regarding the status of their native language, and were more willing to go to the Saturday school, as they saw it as an occasion for socialising. They were also more inclined to use Polish for peer interaction, which suggests that the solidarity value of their native language may have greater importance for them. Besides the relation of gender to language shift, which the results of this study seem to imply [17], what is interesting here is that the process of change is led by a portion of the population that also shows a marked interest in social integration. Being admitted to Australian society as equals is a priority which the girls in this research are willing to pursue at the expense of their language and ethnic identity.

A similarly rapid process of language shift characterises the Kannadiga community in the New York area (Sridhar 1988), but the pattern it displays is rather different. The members of this Asian-Indian community are generally university-educated professionals with jobs varying from medical doctor to engineer. Although their native language is Kannada, English has usually been

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[17] Janik's findings suggest that gender may affect language attitudes. The results of his research support the theory that women tend to be more concerned about the status of the language they speak. Note, however, that while this is often interpreted as linguistic conservativism, in this particular case they appear to be the first to embrace change. On this topic see also Woolard 1997, and works cited therein.

their means of education, and it is spoken alongside the native idiom in the household. Kannadigas are well integrated in American society. Their children have many American friends, whose lifestyle and habits they have adopted. Despite attempts to preserve their cultural identity (attendance to the temple, socialising with other families from the same ethnic background), it is becoming increasingly difficult for Kannadigas to maintain their language. In fact, the rapidity of shift is such that younger children in families with more than one child are often English monolingual. In the case of this community, loss of language and identity is not a means of integration, but one of its consequences. This distinction may appear scarcely significant in view of the similarity of outcome. It is very important, however, in terms of sociopsychological factors and attitudes towards language and identity, especially when one considers its possible employment in planning strategies of language maintenance, such as are being attempted by some European states.

6.   GLOBALISED MULTILINGUALISM: THE CASE OF SINGAPORE

The examples presented so far refer to language shift in bilingual situations, but this phenomenon also occurs in conditions of relatively unstable multilingualism. The case of Singapore is a particularly interesting one, and is proposed by way of conclusion because of its scope and the variety of phenomena it entails (all data come from Riney 1998).

Multiethnicity has been a characteristic of Singapore for a long time (in 1990 the population was made up of 76% Chinese, 14% Malay and 7% Indian, with the remaining 3% belonging to other minorities), and has been traditionally accompanied by multilingualism. In the first half of the 20th century three languages were used as lingua franca: English among the educated elite, and Bazaar Malay and Hokkien Chinese for the masses. With the separation from Malaysia in 1965, Malay was retained as the national language, while Mandarin Chinese, English and Tamil became 'official' languages. Mandarin Chinese replaced Hokkien Chinese as lingua franca among the ethnic Chinese following the 'speak Mandarin' campaign launched by the government in 1979 to overcome the problems caused by the coexistence in Singapore of a large variety of mutually unintelligible Chinese dialects. English was encouraged as the language of education and business, and Tamil was maintained as the idiom of the ethnic Indian community.

Riney individuates the following main areas of shift: to begin with, In-

dian dialects, including Tamil, are being abandoned in favour of English and Malay; in the second place, Malay, which used to be a lingua franca, has now become a minority language; thirdly, the various Chinese dialects have been replaced by Mandarin. Fourthly, English has moved from being a mere 'working language' for communication between the educated classes and the rest of the population, to being a super-ethnic lingua franca and, in many cases, a mother tongue; hence (shift number five), the situation has changed from one of non-standard bilingualism (for instance Indian dialect-literary Tamil) to one of 'English knowing' bilingualism [18].

These changes in language use have occurred for different reasons. The demise of Tamil has been caused by a combination of low prestige (Indians were originally imported to Singapore to work as servants in English households, and their language was associated with their servant condition) and lack of institutional support. In the case of the Chinese dialects, the shift to Mandarin was effected by means of governmental intervention, while the growth of English as first language is the direct result of an increase in inter-group marriages where English is the only common language between the partners, as well as of the prestige it enjoys as the language of higher education and international business.

The consequences of these processes are manifold, especially on the cultural front. The demise of Tamil and other Indian dialects means that the ethnic Indians have lost a marker of group identity. The position of Malay, despite its status as national language, has weakened, because it has lost its super-ethnic value and has become the language of a minority. In the case of the Chinese community, the shift from local dialects to Mandarin implies a partial loss of identity, as it has had the effect of homogenising local differences in favour of an artificial identity represented by the common language.

All this points in the direction in a decline of the importance of language as a marker of group identity, the most telling sign of which is the growth of English – the one language in Singapore that is not linked to an ethnic group – as a mother tongue. It is possible that this may contribute to the creation of a new, super-ethnic identity for at least a portion of the Singaporean population. It is more likely, however, that it will only affect patterns of language use, leaving identity issues aside. Although it may be true, as Riney suggests, that we are witnessing a process of linguistic homogenisation that places non-standard varieties under threat, ethnic identity is not necessarily endangered.

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[18] Sridhar also notes a change from non-literacy and semi-literacy to literacy and bi-literacy, but this aspect of shift needs not concern us here. See Sridhar 1998:16.

In Singapore as in other parts of the world, cultural diversity can – and does – survive linguistic conformity.

CONCLUSIONS

The case of Singapore is an example of preservation of cultural diversity within an increasingly linguistically homogenised (globalised) community. It is not presented here as a model to imitate, nor as a pitfall to avoid, but simply as an example of reasonably peaceful linguistic integration within a multicultural society. Albeit with all the reservations that a peculiar situation like the one of Singapore entails (especially by virtue of its geographical limitation and the size of its population), its case displays a number of interesting features. To begin with, it appears that language policies have indeed been able to affect patterns of language use, whether they promote a particular language (as in the case of Mandarin Chinese) or fail to provide means for the survival of another (as in the case of literary Tamil); secondly, language loss (or at least decline) has not implied identity loss, although in the case of the Indian community the demise of literary Tamil may have reflected negatively on the preservation of literary (as distinct from cultural) identity; finally, the growth of English does not seem to have fostered a linguistic identity separate from and in conflict with ethnic identities. This seems to me to suggest two things. First of all, language policies are a crucial part of a nation's (or of a supra-national organisation's) life, and play a fundamental role in determining its linguistic future. They should be considered with the utmost attention and with a sound dose of realism, without misleading simplifications nor unviable idealisations. Secondly, the existence of a language of communication above and beyond national or ethnic languages does not necessarily mean that the culture that is associated with that language must be considered hegemonic. English *is* a hegemonic language, and Anglo-Saxon culture *is* a hegemonic culture, but it is not impossible, in principle at least, to separate the two. Should English really become the unofficial language of the European Union, I doubt that British and/or American culture would be adopted wholesale[19]. National identities would be most probably maintained – perhaps with a certain degree of hybridisation. The same holds for minority languages within national communi-

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[19] On English as the lingua franca of a multilingual community cf. J. House 2001. "A Stateless Language that Europe Must Embrace," *The Guardian Weekly*, 19 Apr. 2001, also available online at http://www.guardian.co.uk/GWeekly/Story/0,3939,475288,00.html.

ties: their maintenance does not necessarily imply lack of integration on the part of the speakers, especially since the different domains of social and private life remain associated with different languages. Integration does not necessarily exclude difference. But having both may, again, cause hybridisation – which is, after all, what we fear.

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