Chapter 2
Literature review

2.0 Introduction

Over the last thirty years, many studies on language maintenance and language attitudes have been conducted. Each study has had its impact on sociolinguistics, defining both the causes of language shift, as well as the indicators for language maintenance. Issues such as language preservation, ethnic identity, multilingual education, and language planning have all been explored by linguists around the globe. This study is limited to language maintenance and language use among immigrant communities, with research on South Asian multilingualism. Also examined is the application of social network analysis, and its usefulness as an indicator of language maintenance. Language maintenance, language use, and language attitudes are discussed below.

2.1 Language maintenance

Many scholars have researched language maintenance issues. According to David Crystal, "language maintenance is the ability of an individual speaker or speech community to preserve the use of a language or the traditional form of a language" (1980:214).

Language maintenance is crucial to cultural preservation. Fishman (1991:24) writes,

> Parts of every culture are expressed, implemented and realized via the language with which that culture has been most intimately associated. So much of any culture is primarily verbally constituted: its songs and its prayers, its laws and its proverbs, its tales and its greetings, its curses and its blessings, its philosophy, its history and its teaching, and on and on, encompassing almost all of non-material culture.

This research, by examining a displaced community, sheds light on factors which lead to language maintenance or language shift. Fasold writes that, "Language maintenance and language shift are the long-term, collective consequences of consistent patterns of language choice" (1984:239). He also claims that when a speech community starts employing a new language in domains previously reserved

for the old one, language shift is in progress (1984:213). A domain analysis investigates the language use patterns of a person in a specific context (Davies and Elder 2006:723). The context can be an institution such as family, workplace, friendship, etc., in which one language is thought to be more appropriate than another.

2.1.1 Language maintenance in displaced people groups: A case study

There have been many excellent case studies among immigrant communities recently, such as the research conducted by Clyne and Kipp (2006). Michael Clyne is a linguist who has furthered the field of sociolinguistic research over the years, particularly focusing on immigrant communities in Australia. Clyne's research on Somali has certain similarities to the Nepali population in Chiang Mai.

According to Clyne and Kipp, the Somali community is new to Australia, having migrated in the last decade. The Somali population is still quite small. The language is considered exotic, and is shadowed by a layer of Islamic culture, as well as the Arabic language in religious domains. Clyne and Kipp state:

> Compared with some other ethnic groups, the Somali community has established relatively few language maintenance institutions. There is no Somali-specific mosque, but there are some social groups. The Somalis do not have an ethnic language newspaper but there are some moves to start one. Arthur (2003:262) draws attention to the fact that the spoken rather than the written word is of central importance in traditional Somali society, both communicatively and symbolically (2006:59).

According to the surveys conducted by Clyne and Kipp, the Somalis in Melbourne get their emotional support from their clans. The majority of those surveyed claimed that Somalis were supportive of language maintenance, and yet the parents of one focus group claimed that they encouraged their children to only speak English, since it is the language of status.

The general consensus posed by Clyne and Kipp is that Somali is being lost in Australia. Children shift to English in approximately three years. The youth only speak English with each other. There are very few Somali grandparents in Australia, so that generation does not have much opportunity to pass the language on to younger generations. Similarly, there are a limited number of Nepali grandparents in Chiang Mai, and a majority of Nepali children are reportedly shifting to Thai when they play with their Nepali friends (see chapter 4.2.3).

Religion plays an important role in cultural identification. In the same way, Somalis are bound by their adherence to Islam. As Arthur (2003:263) explains, "Religion can be seen as a core value of this minority community, central to the preservation of its cultural heritage." Hinduism is one force that unites the Nepalis in Thailand, and keeps them separated from the Buddhists. Adherence to the Hindu caste system means that Nepalis are unlikely to marry outside their caste. In an informal interview in Chiang Mai, one Nepali participant adamantly declared that he would never marry anyone who ate beef. That is an attitude held by many Nepalis encountered in this research.

Clyne and Kipp's survey results showed that religion was very important in all the groups and individuals surveyed. Yet, this can have a positive influence on language maintenance, or a negative one.

> Islam's emphasis on Arabic as the language of the Qur'an and the language of God, may in fact detract from an attitudinal focus on the Somali language in a country of migration where a third language (in this case English) enters the equation. The importance of Islam, and the establishment of mosques which take on educational and settlement functions, may, however, still lead to the bringing together of people of like background, which may in turn facilitate communication in the community languages of these groups (Clyne and Kipp 2006:78).

In the case of the Nepalis in Chiang Mai, they also network through the Hindu temple. The majority of the Nepali subjects claimed that they speak Nepali for religious discussions in the temple, or for prayer (see Chapter 4.2.1).

2.1.2 Language planning: Two case studies

Appropriate language planning can strengthen ethnic language use, or even reintroduce an ethnic language to a community who no longer speaks it.

Robert Cooper (1989) compared two case studies in his book, Language Planning and Social Change. One language, Irish, is compared to the Hebrew campaign in Israel. "The Irish campaign, when compared to the campaign on behalf of Hebrew, is often considered a failure. English, not Irish, remains the language of everyday Irish life, whereas Hebrew has replaced the languages of the Diaspora as the language of everyday life for contemporary Jews in their ancient homeland" (Cooper 1989:107).

These two comparisons are valid for Nepali people living in Chiang Mai for two reasons. First, they have a desire to ensure that the Nepali children, as well as future generations, continue speaking Nepali in the home domain. Second, the data from this research project indicates that many Nepali children are shifting to the LWC, even speaking it in the home (see chapter 4.3.1 for data analysis). Therefore it is important to note what enabled the Jewish language campaign to succeed, in the hopes that the Nepali community can benefit from that knowledge.

One reason why the Jewish campaign was effective was because, unlike the Irish, the Jews were linguistically diverse (Cooper 1989:107). The Jewish people needed an LWC for communication. They came from many different countries and linguistic backgrounds. The Irish already spoke English as their LWC, and had no felt need for another LWC.

Another reason for the success of the Jewish campaign was that most of the Jews already knew some Hebrew. According to Spolsky, "In fact Hebrew remained alive, widely known and used for a wide range of important functions throughout the centuries that followed its loss of native speakers" (1991:138). The Irish, on the other hand, were largely unfamiliar with their heritage language, and had to learn it from scratch (Cooper 1989:108). Finally, Hebrew became the language of commerce in Palestine. This scenario made it crucial for Jewish immigrants to learn Hebrew if they wanted good jobs. There were very few material incentives for learning Irish. For the Irish people, it was more valuable to speak English. However, there were some benefits from the Irish campaign. Spolsky claims that "Irish revival efforts have led both to an appreciable increase in the number of people who know the language and to a significant enhancement of its status."(1991:138).

The Nepali community in Chiang Mai needs to speak and understand the Nepali language, so that they have "a linguistic system which functions primarily as the normal medium of communication among the members of a single ethnic group, such as a settled group of foreign immigrants" (Cooper 1989:107). Nepalis in Chiang Mai usually come from different countries, namely, Nepal, India, or Myanmar. There are also many Nepalis who are born in Thailand. Like the Jewish people, these Nepalis need their language as a means of group identity, as well as to communicate with each other. Also similar to the Jewish scenario, the Nepalis either already speak Nepali or they have a passive understanding. There is no need for the whole group of Nepalis to learn it from scratch, as the Irish would have to do.

However, for material productivity, it is unlikely that Nepali would be the best choice for the market place. Nepalis recognize that they need other LWCs, like

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English, Burmese or Thai, to get good jobs. The main incentives for Nepalis to teach their children the language is for ethnic group identity and preservation of their culture.

2.1.3 Social network analysis and language maintenance

For this study, a brief examination of social network analysis (SNA) is helpful as an additional tool in analyzing language maintenance data (chapter 5 gives a more detailed discussion of social network analysis). Social networks have been analyzed since the 1930's in many fields of science. However, in the 1970's and 1980's linguists began to apply SNA to issues such as language use and language attitudes (Rueck 2005a).

A social network is a way of diagramming the interactions between people, communities, computers, or any other knowledge-based entity. The social network diagram is comprised of nodes (which are generally people or groups) that are tied by a given interaction or interdependency, like kinship, economics, friendship, or ideas. Nodes are the individual actors within the networks, and ties are the relationships between the actors. There can be a variety of ties between any of the nodes.

In its simplest form, a social network is like a map of the relevant connections between individuals being examined. See Figure 4. Note that 'nodes' are the circles, and 'ties' are the lines.
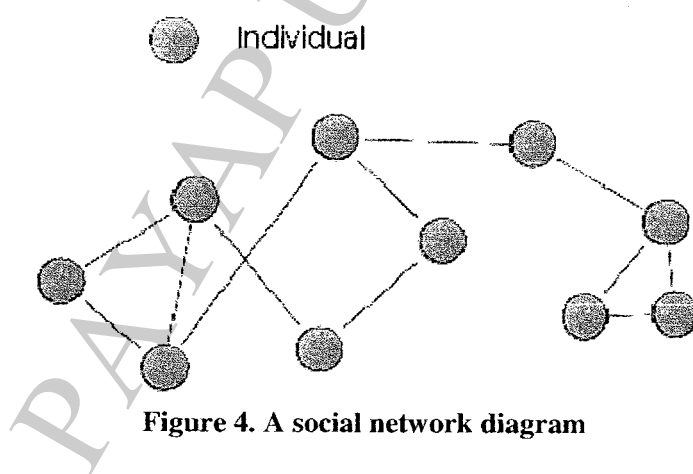

Figure 4. A social network diagram

In 1987, Lesley Milroy's book 'Language and Social Networks' claimed that a close-knit social network system was an important indicator of language maintenance, and that it could be applied universally. Govindasamy and Nambiar (2003:25) following Milroy (1987), state that the term *social network* refers to the informal social relationship contracted by an individual within his or her neighborhood.

Furthermore, these ties are divided into two kinds of systems, open or closed networks. "As those who have closed or dense networks reside, marry, and earn their livelihood among people of their kind, they tend to be linked to each other in more than one capacity – as co-employees, kinsmen, and friends" (Govindasamy and Nambiar 2003:26). Milroy (1987:50) describes this sort of network tie as 'multiplex', contrasting with the 'uniplex' network ties of elite people who usually associate with others in just one capacity.

2.1.4 Social network analysis in sociolinguistic communities

Many studies have indicated that a dense and closed network does actually support language maintenance. Yet, recent research has demonstrated that some communities have a closed and dense network, but are moving away from their ethnic language (Govindasamy and Nambiar 2003:25). See chapter 5 for a more detailed discussion. In a 2003 study of Malayalees living in Malaysia, Govindasamy and Nambiar detail just such a case. They claim that,

> In the present era where the priority is on economic advancement, patterns of social interaction such as the networks system is unable to act as a norm enforcement agent as the community, particular the immigrant minority, responds to the opportunities and pressures of its external environment (2003:25).

Furthermore,

> The situation appears to be different in this part of the world where other factors such as multiracial/multilingual settings, social economic mobility, level of education, etc., seem to have greater significance than social networks in facilitating language shift (2003:29).

In Khemlani-David's research (1998) on Sindhis in Malaysia, she indicates that their dense and multiplex networks simply reinforce Sindhi cultural identity, but not ethnic language maintenance.

The Malayalees in Malaysia need a language of wider communication to communicate with other ethnic groups, to secure jobs, or for higher education. Therefore, in Malaysia, English is replacing Malayalam, even between Malayalees. Govindasamy and Nambiar state that the Malayalees accept the fact that their ethnic language is not essential to maintain their cultural identity, and that they can

preserve their culture by using other markers, and even other languages (2003:26). In conclusion, a dense network is not the only factor for language maintenance.

2.2 Literature on sociolinguistic questionnaires

Not all sociolinguistic survey questions are good questions. Some questions only suit certain types of surveys. Therefore, it is important to choose sociolinguistic survey questions for a questionnaire very carefully. According to Catherine Showalter, "The results of a sociolinguistic survey are only as good as the questions used in the survey"(1991:1) Showalter's research on survey questionnaires led her to evaluate the quality of sociolinguistic survey questions that linguists were using. Fowler states,

> The mere fact that someone else has used a question before is no guarantee that it is a very good question or, certainly that it is an appropriate question for a given survey. Many bad questions are asked over and over again, because researchers uncritically use them over and over again (1984:101).

Before survey questions are selected, one can avoid many problems by setting objectives. In that way, one avoids choosing extra questions just because they seem interesting (Fowler 1984:99). After setting objectives, Fowler claims, "The second step is deciding what needs to be measured, in order to get at the answers to the objectives" (1984:99). Only then is it appropriate to select the sociolinguistic survey questions. Each question must correspond to the thing being measured, which corresponds to a survey objective.

When selecting questions for the sociolinguistic questionnaire (SLQ), Showalter's guidelines (1991) prove useful. She describes some bad questions, as well as compiling some good ones. Naturally, a useful survey question is one that subjects are able to answer. Showalter demonstrates an example of a bad question (1991:9):

"What percentage of your people understand a second language?"

Such a question is likely to confuse the subject, and not elicit a meaningful response.

Survey questions should be comprehensible, meaningful, and not too long. "Specific, concrete, contextualized questions are much easier to answer than abstract questions" (Showalter 1991:5). With regards to length, Showalter continues, "questions should be asked so that they can be answered by a single sentence, phrase, or word, and then elaborated upon. The more bits of information required in an answer, the more likely the respondent is to forget something, or be confused by

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the question" (1991:7). Additionally, it is important to include questions made for subjective evaluations, as well as objective information (1991:8). See section 3.1 for more information regarding the selection of the questions for the Sociolinguistic Questionnaire.

2.3 Language use and language domains

A Nepali, living in Chiang Mai, may use several different languages in the course of a single day. This study explores the patterns of language use among some of the Nepalis in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

Any analysis of a multilingual community must refer to the work of Joshua Fishman. He first posed the question, "Who speaks what to whom and when?" (Fishman 1965:67). Fishman initiated the study of language use in terms of domains. A domain refers to a context "in which one language variety is more likely to be appropriate than another. Domains are taken to be constellations of factors such as location, topic, and participants" (Fasold 1984:183). In order to study language shift and language maintenance, one must investigate the languages used in the most fundamental domains. The domains of home, family and friendship are considered crucial because they can indicate languages which are being passed down from one generation to the next.

An example of language use, according to domain, can be seen in Clyne and Kipp's study of Somali (2006). They incorporated the domains described by Fishman. For instance, under the domain of 'friendship', Clyne and Kipp asked Somali youth which language they spoke with each other. Their responses were consistently "English". The 'friendship' domain in Clyne and Kipp's research was one indicator of language shift among Somali immigrants in Australia.

2.4 Language attitudes

Language attitudes include the way a speaker perceives a specific language, and the opinion he has about the merit of that language.

> The attitudes people hold toward different language varieties and the
> people who speak them are important to sociolinguists. Whereas
> studies in language and social interaction investigate actual language
> interaction, language attitude studies explore how people react to
> language interactions and how they evaluate others based on the
> language behavior they observe (Eric Digest 1992:1).

There are direct methods and indirect methods for researching language attitudes (Fasold 1984). The direct methods often use questionnaires to ask individuals about their attitude toward a given language. The indirect methods, however, strive to make certain that an individual does not know her language attitude is being examined. The matched-guise test is a common indirect method (Wardhaugh 2006:112-114). The matched-guise test requires a subject to listen to a story in more than one speech style or dialect, and then asks the subject to report her opinion about the storyteller's personal characteristics.

A direct method is utilized for this study, using questionnaires and interviews for language attitude indicators. However, personal observations regarding language use and attitudes (an indirect method) have also been included (Walker 1982:15-25).

2.4.1 Language attitudes and multilingualism in South Asia

In current research, the term 'language attitudes' covers a plethora of issues. According to Baker, this term can refer to such diverse issues as the attitude toward language learning, or one's attitude towards an entire language community (1992:41-47).

It is worth noting the attitudes that South Asians have towards multilingualism. In India and Nepal, monolingualism is rare. There are hundreds of people groups speaking a variety of languages and dialects. Singh writes, "Another reason for language diversity in India is that Indians typically are not just bilingual but multilingual. South Asia has been able to retain its multi-ethnic and plurilingual character over many centuries" (2003:6).

Adding languages to one's repertoire is a natural element of life in India, and it does not necessarily indicate a high level of education. In fact, multilingualism is found among the uneducated or illiterate communities all over India.

Bilingualism in India is a stable and natural phenomenon. According to Annamalai, the acquisition of an additional language does not commonly lead to gradual loss of the first language. The possession of an additional language is like possessing an additional garment or tool, needed for a different situation or purpose. It is the expected behavioral norm when languages are in contact, and not an exceptional one (1990:25).

Nepali culture is quite similar to Indian culture and values in this respect. Linguists assert that the same attitude toward multilingualism exists among Nepali people groups (Webster 1995:33, Kilgo Boehm 1997:48) as is in India. Many of the Nepalis interviewed for this study reportedly speak four or more languages. Their attitude

about their own linguistic knowledge was fairly blasé. Additive bilingualism, for those Nepalis, is simply a way of life.