Language Endangerment: Problems and Solutions

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Language Endangerment: Problems and Solutions

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How do we count languages?

Overviews of the study of language endangerment usually start with a list of statistics about the number of languages in the world, the proportion considered endangered, etc. The usual source of statistics concerning the number of languages and their users is *Ethnologue*, subtitled 'An encyclopaedic reference work cataloguing all of the world's 6,909 known living languages' (Lewis 2009). Many people are surprised to hear that there are so many languages in the world.

However, this headline figure masks inherent problems in the counting of languages, as the Introduction to *Ethnologue* itself recognises. Many linguists use the criterion of mutual comprehensibility to distinguish languages: if users of two language varieties cannot understand each other, the varieties are considered to be different languages. If they can understand each other, the varieties are considered mutually comprehensible dialects of the same language. However, mutual intelligibility is to a certain extent a function of attitudes and politics – whether or not people *want* to understand each other. Such attitudes are, in part, linked to whether a community considers itself to have a distinct ethno-linguistic identity, but members of a community may not agree about this. Because of such issues, some linguists (especially sociolinguists and anthropological linguists influenced by postmodern theories) now question whether language boundaries can be identified at all.

Politics also plays an important part in language differentiation. Following the nineteenth-century philosophers such as Herder, language has been considered a crucial element of national identity, with 'one state, one language' being seen as the ideal. But languages do not necessarily follow political boundaries. For example, Quechua is often thought of as one language, the 'language of the Incas', but in fact this is an overarching name which denotes a group of related language varieties. Linguists distinguish between 27 Quechuan indigenous languages in Peru, but the Peruvian government only recognises six of these as languages (the official national language is the colonial language, Spanish). Minority groups may claim full 'language' status for their variety, especially if it has been disregarded as a 'substandard' dialect in the past (e.g. Aragonese in Spain). Separatist groups may highlight linguistic differences to support their cause, while national governments may play these down. Paradoxes such as the mutual incomprehensibility of Chinese 'dialects' compared to the mutual comprehensibility of Scandinavian languages are clearly motivated by political and nationalistic considerations rather than linguistic ones.

In addition, complete information on all of the world's languages is not available: the majority have not been recorded or analysed by linguists, have no dictionaries or even written form, and are not recognised officially in the countries in which they are spoken. What information there is, is often out of date: for example, for Dgernesiais, the language variety I will discuss later in this paper, the information in *Ethnologue* is based on a 1976 estimate and ignores more recent data such as the 2001 census.

The Introduction to *Ethnologue* admits that 'Because languages are dynamic and variable and undergo constant change, the total number of living languages in the world cannot be known precisely'

(Lewis 2009). Nevertheless, the traditional approach to counting languages is still followed by most field linguists, and also by the UNESCO *Atlas of Languages in Danger of Disappearing* (Moseley 2009). Despite their shortcomings however, at the very least these compendia provide a useful guide to relative levels of linguistic diversity around the world. Figure 1 shows the proportion of languages in each continent. It can be seen that Europe is by far the least linguistically diverse continent, which is worrying if other parts of the world continue to follow European trends.
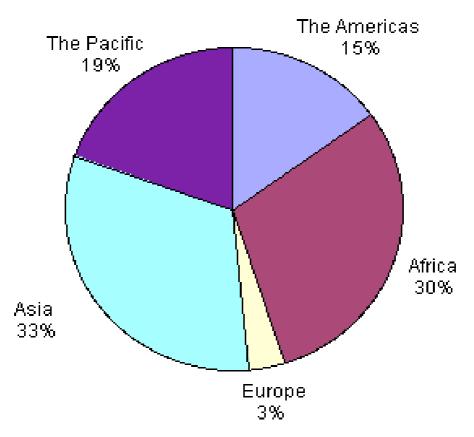

Figure 1 The proportion of languages in each continent of the world

Language endangerment

What this chart does not show is the relative number of users of each language. As only about 80 of the 6000+ languages in the world have more than 10 million users, it is clear that the vast majority of

languages are used by relatively small numbers of people. It is thought that 95% of the world's languages have less than 1 million native speakers/signers, with an average of approximately 6000 users per language. Again, this is only an estimate based on the pattern found in documented languages, but the number of speakers of major languages is relatively easy to ascertain, and any undiscovered languages are likely to only have a relatively small number of speakers.

Linguists are becoming increasingly alarmed at the rate at which languages are going out of use. A special issue of the journal *Language* (Hale et al. 1992), based on a colloquium held at an annual meeting of the Linguistic Society of America, drew attention to the scale of language endangerment, and called for a concerted effort by linguists to record the remaining speakers and to create linguistic archives for future reference (this is referred to as *language documentation*). In this issue, Krauss (1992) estimated that 90% of the world's languages would be severely endangered by 2100. According to more optimistic estimates such as Nettle & Romaine (2000) and Crystal (2000), 'only' 50% will be lost. A number of initiatives have been launched, including:

- the Hans Rausing Endangered Language Project,[1] which funds documentation projects, maintains an archive of recordings, transcriptions and metadata, and runs an academic programme to train linguists and researchers;[2]

- the Volkswagen Foundation's sponsorship of the DoBeS (Dokumentation Bedrohter Sprachen)[3] project;

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[1] www.hrelp.org/ This and all subsequent URLs cited in this article were accessed between 1 and 10 October 2009.
[2] This is the programme I work for.
[3] = 'Documentation of endangered languages', www.mpi.nl/DOBES/

- the US National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and National Science Foundation (NSF) Documenting Endangered Languages initiative (DEL), 'a new, multi-year effort to preserve records of key languages before they become extinct';[4]

- the European Science Foundation Better Analyses Based on Endangered Languages programme (EuroBABEL) whose main purpose is 'to promote empirical research on underdescribed endangered languages, both spoken and signed';[5]

- The Chirac Foundation for Sustainable Development and Cultural Dialogue Sorosoro programme 'so the languages of the world may prosper';[6]

- The World Oral Literature Project based at Cambridge University, 'to record the voices of vanishing worlds';[7]

- smaller non-profit initiatives, notably the Foundation for Endangered Languages[8] and the Endangered Languages Fund[9].

Intergovernmental agencies have taken on board the problem of the loss of linguistic diversity. The United Nations has a number of policy papers and guidelines for governmental action plans on the UNESCO website under the heading of safeguarding 'intangible cultural heritage' (UNESCO 2003a; 2003b). One of the tasks that UNESCO has tried to tackle is how to categorise levels of endangerment. Assessing levels of language knowledge and use is an

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[4] http://www.neh.gov/manage/fellowshipsgi_DEL_09_10.html
[5] http://www.esf.org/activities/eurocores/programmes/eurobabel.html
[6] http://www.fondationchirac.eu/en/sorosoro-program/
[7] http://www.oralliterature.org/, accessed 10 October 2009
[8] http://www.ogmios.org/
[9] http://www.endangeredlanguagefund.org/

important element of language documentation and planning because 'a language spoken by several thousand people on a daily basis presents a much different set of options for revitalization than a language that has a dozen native speakers who rarely use it' (Grenoble & Whaley 2006, p.3). Although numerous schemes have been proposed, the most comprehensive is UNESCO's Language Vitality and Endangerment framework[10], which is shown in Table 1. It establishes six degrees of vitality/endangerment based on nine factors. Of these factors, the most salient is that of intergenerational transmission: whether or not a language is used in the family. This factor is generally accepted as the 'gold standard' of language vitality (Fishman 1991).

Degree of endangerment	Intergenerational Language Transmission
safe	language is spoken by all generations; intergenerational transmission is uninterrupted
vulnerable	most children speak the language, but it may be restricted to certain domains (e.g., home)
definitely endangered	children no longer learn the language as mother tongue in the home
severely endangered	language is spoken by grandparents and older generations; while the parent generation may understand it, they do not speak it to children or among themselves
critically endangered	the youngest speakers are grandparents and older, and they speak the language partially and infrequently
extinct	there are no speakers left

Table 1 UNESCO's Language Vitality and Endangerment framework

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[10] http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00139

Causes of language endangerment

The causes of language endangerment can be divided into four main categories:

1. Natural catastrophes, famine, disease: for example, Malol, Papua New Guinea (earthquake); Andaman Islands (tsunami)

2. War and genocide, for example, Tasmania (genocide by colonists); Brazilian indigenous peoples (disputes over land and resource); El Salvador (civil war)

3. Overt repression, e.g. for 'national unity' (including forcible resettlement): for example, Kurdish, Welsh, Native American languages

4. Cultural/political/economic dominance, for example, Ainu, Manx, Sorbian, Quechua and many others.
   (synthesised from Nettle & Romaine 2000; Crystal, 2000)

Factors often overlap or occur together. The dividing lines can be difficult to distinguish, for example, in the Americas disease and suppression of Native cultures spread after colonization, and in Ireland many Irish speakers died or emigrated due to government inaction which compounded the effects of the potato blight famine in the nineteenth century.

The fourth category, which is the most common, can be further subdivided into five common factors:

- Economic: for example, rural poverty leads to migration to cities and further afield. If the local economy improves, tourism may bring speakers of majority languages

- Cultural dominance by the majority community, for example, education and literature through the majority or

state language only; indigenous language and culture may become 'folklorised'

- Political: for example, education policies which ignore or exclude local languages, lack of recognition or political representation, bans on the use of minority languages in public life

- Historical: for example, colonization, boundary disputes, the rise of one group and their language variety to political and cultural dominance

- Attitudinal: for example, minority languages become associated with poverty, illiteracy and hardship, while the dominant language is associated with progress/escape. More recently, there have been many community initiatives to revive or revitalise endangered languages (for examples see Grenoble & Whaley 2006; Hinton & Hale 2002).

Why worry about language endangerment?

Value to linguistic science

Throughout history languages have died out and been replaced by others through language contact, or through divergence due to lack of communication over distances (Dalby 2002). Until recently this was seen as a natural cycle. But the growing number of linguistic varieties no longer being learnt by children, coupled with a tendency for speakers to shift to languages of wider communication (especially varieties of English), means that unless the myriad inventive ways in which humans express themselves are documented now, future generations may not be aware of them: for example, Ubykh, a Caucasian language whose last fully competent speaker died in 1992, has 84 distinct consonants and according to some analyses, only two phonological vowels. This is the smallest proportion of vowels to

consonants known, and the possibility of such a language would have been unheard of if linguists such as Georges Dumézil, Hans Vogt & George Hewitt had not recorded the last fluent speaker (Tevfik Esenç) before he died and analysed the language. Krauss (1992, p.10) called for 'some rethinking of our priorities, lest linguistics go down in history as the only science that has presided obliviously over the disappearance of 90% of the very field to which it is dedicated'.

Several of the languages currently being documented are sign languages, some of which are still in the process of development and can thus shed valuable light on linguistic evolution. Ahmad (2008) points out that most overviews of language endangerment omit mention of sign languages (an exception is Harrison 2007). As well as facing similar problems to other minority languages, sign languages have to counter prejudice from those who do not recognise them as full languages.

Cultural heritage

UNESCO's website states that 'Cultural diversity is a driving force of development, not only in respect of economic growth, but also as a means of leading a more fulfilling intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual life.'[11] Linguistic diversity is cited as a 'pillar of Cultural Diversity': 'Languages, with their complex implications for identity, communication, social integration, education and development, are of strategic importance for people and the planet. […] When languages fade, so does the world's rich tapestry of cultural diversity. Opportunities, traditions, memory, unique modes of thinking and expression – valuable resources for ensuring a better future are also

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[11] http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-
URL_ID=34321&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

lost'.[12] This is also the theme of David Harrison's book *When Languages Die* (2007).

Language and ecology

A number of authors identify parallels, and even correlations, between cultural and linguistic diversity and biological diversity. Biological scientists, especially Sutherland (2003), have found that places such as Indonesia and Papua New Guinea which have a high number of different biological species also have a large number of different languages, compared to Europe, which has the fewest of both. This theme has been taken up enthusiastically by the organisation Terralingua[13] and some researchers and campaigners (e.g. Skutnabb-Kangas, 2002). It has also received considerable public attention, e.g. in a series of programmes on BBC Radio 4 entitled *Lost for Words* and the TV chat show Richard and Judy.

Does this mean, however, that there is a causative link? Are the causes of language death and species decline the same? Sutherland (2003) concludes that although there is a clear correlation between cultural and biological diversity, the reasons for decline are likely to be different. However, a number of 'ecolinguists' employ the tools of critical discourse analysis to claim that the endangerment of the natural environment is in part caused by language, pointing out linguistic practices which reveal an exploitative attitude towards the natural environment (e.g. papers in Fill & Mühlhäusler 2001). A more political interpretation might argue that the decline in both linguistic and biological diversity are by-products of globalisation and/or international capitalism.

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[12] http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-
URL_ID=35097&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html
[13] http://www.terralingua.org/

'Ecolinguistics' has a tendency to treat language as a living organism, which as Mackey (2001) reminds us is a fallacy: languages are human artefacts not species, and do not have a life of their own outside human communities. Human communities therefore need to be sustainable in order to maintain their languages.

Language and identity

Languages are often seen as symbols of ethnic and national identity. Many endangered language campaigners claim that when a language dies out, a unique way of looking at the world also disappears (for example, Fishman 1989; Nettle & Romaine 2000; Dalby 2002). This can be seen as a weak version of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which claims that our way of thinking, and thus our cultural identity, are determined by the lexicon and syntax of our language (Carroll 1956, Mandelbaum 1949). Discourse on endangered languages has therefore been criticised for being 'essentialist' and 'deterministic', especially by Duchêne & Heller (2007).

Many recent writers, influenced by postmodernism, see identities not as fixed, formal realities, but rather as fluid, constructed while people position themselves within and between the various social settings of their everyday lives (for example, Castells 2000; Omoniyi & White 2006): e.g. we may think of ourselves primarily as students at one point in the day, and as members of a sports team at another. This may help to account for the paradox whereby many endangered language speakers claim a strong identification with their language, yet do not transmit it to their children. As Le Page & Tabouret-Keller (1985, pp.239-40) note, feelings of ethnic identity can survive total language loss. Dorian (1999, p.31) comments, 'Because it is only one of an almost infinite variety of potential identity markers, [a language] is easily replaced by others that are just

as effective. In this respect the ancestral language is functionally expendable.'

Nevertheless, maintaining regional identity is seen as increasingly important in the era of globalisation. Language is one of the ways in which people construct their identities, and thus may be highlighted when it seems salient. As Lanza & Svendsen (2007, p.293) suggest, 'language might become important for identity when a group feels it is losing its identity due to political or social reasons'. Language planners and activists may promote symbolic ethnicity and 'localness' as means to encourage language revitalisation.

Linguistic Human Rights

The right to use one's own language, in public or even in private, is not universal. For example, in Turkey until recently, the existence of Kurdish was officially denied: Kurds were known as 'Mountain Turks', Kurdish names were not allowed, and there were no media or other services in the Kurdish language. In the last few years there have been some improvements in minority rights due to Turkey's application to join the European Union. The EU has declared overt support for linguistic diversity and minority rights, which has led to significant improvements in prospective member states (Commission of the European Communities 2004).

Even in the UK members of ethnic minorities may be encouraged to speak English with their children 'so as not to confuse them', thereby breaking the chain of intergenerational transmission. Although six indigenous regional minority languages are officially recognised (Welsh, Scottish Gaelic, Cornish, Irish, Scots, Ulster Scots) as well as British Sign Language, there are few facilities for speakers of community or immigrant languages, of which there are approximately 300 in London alone. The Chair of the UK Equality

Commission, Trevor Phillips, stated in a discussion panel on multilingualism at the British Museum in December 2008 that minority language speakers were free to use their languages in the home, but that public support for these languages was impractical and might be divisive. Nevertheless, people who are not fluent in national or official languages need access to services such as education, the media and the justice system, and inadequate translation might deny them access to justice. In many countries (e.g. Uganda, Haiti, the Seychelles) the vast majority of the population do not speak or read/write the official (usually ex-colonial) languages, and are thus denied the opportunity to participate in public life.

Romaine (2008) combines several of the above points by arguing that preserving linguistic ecology will ultimately benefit both human social justice and the natural world:

> The preservation of a language in its fullest sense ultimately entails the maintenance of the community who speaks it, and therefore the arguments in favor of doing something to reverse language shift are ultimately about sustaining cultures and habitats […] Maintaining cultural and linguistic diversity is a matter of social justice because distinctiveness in culture and language has formed the basis for defining human identities (Romaine 2008, p.19).

Education policy

Research has consistently found that education through the 'mother tongue' provides the best start for children (e.g. Baker 2006; Cummins & Swain 1986; Cummins 1979, 1991). Additive bilingualism correlates with higher general educational achievement, including in other languages. However, the full advantages are only reaped if both linguistic varieties are afforded equal (or at least respected) status, and full 'biliteracy' is developed (Kenner 2003; Hornberger 2003). Children from minority-language backgrounds

face disadvantages in 'submersion' situations in mainstream, majority-language classes where little linguistic support is provided (Edelsky et al. 1983). Subtractive bilingualism, where one language is replaced by another, can lead to loss of self-confidence and lower achievement. If we really want children from minority backgrounds to fulfil their full educational and economic potential, their home languages should be supported; the majority population would also benefit from multilingual and cross-cultural education.

It is often assumed that shifting language will bring economic benefits. But linguistic intolerance can mask other discrimination, especially racism. Blommaert (2001), Sealey & Carter (2004) and Williams (1992) see language minoritisation as a symptom of wider hegemonic ideologies and social and political inequalities. This point is echoed by Nettle & Romaine (2000), who note that linguistic minorities do not always benefit from shifting to a new language.

Wouldn't it be better if we all spoke one language?

Another common assumption is that using a single language would bring peace, either in a particular country or worldwide. Linguistic diversity is assumed to contribute to inter-ethnic conflict (Brewer 2001) and is seen as a problem rather than a resource (Ruíz 1988). But as noted above, language conflicts are very rarely about language alone. Some of the worst violence occurs where language is not a factor at the start of the conflict, e.g. Rwanda or former Yugoslavia. In the latter case, linguistic divergence was a consequence rather than a cause of conflict (Greenberg 2004): what was formerly known as Serbo-Croat is now split into Croatian, Serbian, Montenegrin, etc., with different writing systems and loan words which emphasise desired ethnic and religious affiliations. On the other hand, an increasing number of studies see recognition of linguistic rights and

ethnic identity factors as necessary for conflict resolution (e.g. Ashmore et al. 2001; Daftary 2000).

Language usefulness

Several people I have interviewed suggest that it would be "more useful" to teach a major international language than a "useless" endangered language:

> 'I think it would be more useful to teach a modern European language such as French or German.' (Dentist, 40s)

> 'If children are going to learn another language at school they should learn proper French or German or Spanish, or even an Eastern language – a language that's widely used.' (Retired teacher, 70s)

It is, however, a fallacy to assume that speakers have to give up one language in order to learn another. In fact, people who are bilingual find it easier to learn other languages.

Moreover, it is not only major foreign languages (even if less commonly taught) which may prove useful. Even indigenous languages with no apparent relevance to the outside or modern world can prove useful, for example the use of Navajo by 'code-talkers' in the Second World War. Moreover, a major international language does not necessarily fulfil the desire of many in endangered-language communities to get back to their perceived roots:

> Chaque village a son propre parler picard; en apprenant le patois d'un autre village, on ne retrouvera pas ses racines. (Pooley 1998, p.48)
> [Each village has its own variety of Picard; if you learn the dialect of another village, you won't find your roots.]

It can also be useful sometimes to have the option of saying things in a language that not everyone understands. Some teenagers that I interviewed expressed interest in having 'A secret language of your

own – cool'. This indicates the possibility of a different type of identity expression to the traditional "essentialist" type.

Researching an endangered language

I have been conducting research into my own 'heritage' language, Dgernesiais, since 2000. Apart from the very important tasks of recording and analysing the language as discussed above, it is important to discover the reasons for language shift and possible measures to reverse it. Research questions that I have addressed include:

- To what extent is the language currently being used and passed on?
- What are the attitudes of speakers and non-speakers towards it?
- What are the processes of language shift?
- What are the linguistic effects of language contact and shift?
- Can anything be done to stop it declining, or to revive it?
- Can measures undertaken elsewhere be applied here?

Language attitudes and endangerment

As noted earlier under the causes of language endangerment, attitudes are key to whether languages are maintained or abandoned. Negative attitudes are often internalised by speakers, and use of a minority language comes to be stigmatised, so that speakers feel ashamed of it. Speakers are then less likely to transmit the language to their children, leading to a self-perpetuating downward spiral. 'When the children object to speaking a language, gradually forget it or pretend to have forgotten it because they are ashamed of it, its future is much less assured' (Calvet 1998, p.75). However, ideologies are not inescapable, and attitudes and practice can be changed

through human individuality/agency: e.g. the move from using generic 'he' to 'he or she'. Kroskrity (2000) suggests that that the more aware group members are of ideologies, the more these can be challenged and contested.

As Garrett, Coupland & Williams (2003) note, common-sense and advertising commonly assume that influencing attitudes can alter behaviour. This is indeed the aim of much language planning and efforts to revive and revitalise languages. Nevertheless, there has been little research into "attitude shift": how attitudes towards many endangered languages have become steadily more positive over the last few decades, and the motivations of those involved. This therefore became the focus of my own research into the indigenous language of Guernsey.

Guernsey

Guernsey is an island in the English Channel, about 80 miles/130 km from Weymouth, the nearest British port, but only approximately 20 miles/32 km from Carteret, the nearest French port. At approximately 25 sq. miles (62 km^2) it is the second largest of the Channel Islands, which are semi-autonomous dependencies of the British Crown. The Bailiwick of Guernsey comprises Guernsey itself plus Alderney, Sark, and several smaller islands. Guernsey has a population of approximately 62,000.

Historically, the Channel Islands belonged to Normandy at the time of the Norman invasion of England in 1066, so some islanders claim that they won the Battle of Hastings and that England is their oldest colony. Guernsey is well-known for its cows, sweaters, and the German occupation in the Second World War (the Channel Islands were the only part of the British Isles to be occupied). Until recently the main industry was horticulture (especially tomatoes), but

this was overtaken in the 20ᵗʰ century by tourism and then by the finance industry (due to the islands' low taxation). The islands are not part of the United Kingdom and are associate members of the European Union. They therefore do not benefit from EU support for regional/minority languages, which have brought recognition and support to many indigenous minority languages in Europe.

The main language used nowadays is English. Each Channel Island has, or had, its own variety of Norman French, although only those of Jersey, Guernsey, and Sark are still spoken. These vernaculars have been (dis)regarded for much of their history as low-status, degraded or corrupted *patois* or dialects of French, although the degree of comprehension by French speakers is low. They do not have official status or names, but this paper will refer to Guernsey's indigenous language variety as Dgernesiais,[14] the name which the majority of native speakers interviewed claimed to prefer.

As noted earlier, Dgernesiais is categorised as 'highly endangered' by UNESCO. In the 2001 census 1,327 people reported speaking it fluently, i.e. 2.22% of the population. However, considerably more (1 in 7) have some understanding, a common situation in language endangerment. At the time of the last census in 2001, 70.4% of the fluent speakers were aged over 64, and only 31 fluent speakers were reported under age 20. However, language campaigners say they do not know these children, and the fact that only 19 children were reported to understand Dgernesiais fully casts doubt on the reliability of these reports, given the tendency for more people to understand an endangered language than to speak it. What can be said definitely is that there are very few children learning Dgernesiais in the home.

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[14] Dgernesiais has no standard spelling and the name is also spelt "Dgernesiais" or "Guernésiais". Each of these is usually mispronounced in various ways by non-speakers. Its correct pronunciation is /ˌdʒɛrnezˈjei/

Since 2001 the number of fluent speakers appears to have fallen
sharply. The Guernsey Language Officer estimates the number of
fully fluent speakers at just a few hundred, several of whom are very
old and frail; deaths are reported each week. Loss of fluency due to
loss of interlocutors is an increasing problem; there may also have
been over-reporting of active fluency in the census. Dgernesiais is
therefore much more endangered than previously realised. Table 2
relates the common factors in language endangerment discussed
earlier to Dgernesiais.

Economic	Cultural	Political	Historical	Attitudinal
Dependence on UK for imports and exports	Almost completely anglicised	Self-governing since 12th century	Formerly a high-status inter-national language	Low status, peasant language, poverty
Tax haven, banking industry	Language not a symbol of identity	Not full member of EU	Emigration and immigration	English = progress/ escape
Tourist trade	Indigenous language and culture folklorised	British system of education	1940s: German occupation, evacuation of children	Recent revitalisation initiatives
	Religion: Methodism strong	No official support or recognition, no use in education		

Table 2 Common endangerment factors related to Dgernesiais

As with many other minority vernaculars, until the late 20th century
Dgernesiais was perceived as an impediment to social advancement, a
low-status non-language (*patois*). In Guernsey the cycle of low
prestige, which both reinforced and was reinforced by negative
attitudes and lack of official support, has led to an ideology of deficit

and to shift to English. The old language and culture were associated with backwardness and poverty; English was seen as the route to economic advantage.

Studies of attitudes towards language minority typically focus on the attitudes of speakers and the relationship of these attitudes to ethnolinguistic vitality and language maintenance (e.g. Schlieben-Lange 1977; Dorian 1981; Priestly 1989, Williamson 1991; House 2002). But given that they are a minority, speakers' attitudes do not necessarily carry weight with decision-makers. For language maintenance and revitalisation measures to gain the support of gate-keeping and funding authorities, they need to be accepted by the majority community, who by definition do not speak the language. I therefore circulated a questionnaire aimed specifically at eliciting the attitudes of Anglophones, the majority community in Guernsey. This survey investigated whether anecdotal reports of increasingly positive attitudes towards Dgernesiais were accurate, and whether non-speakers view the indigenous language as important for Guernsey identity.

The questionnaire consisted of attitude statements with a five-point scale of responses from 'agree strongly' to 'disagree strongly', plus open questions. Surveys based on self-reports have been criticised because respondents do not necessarily reveal private attitudes when directly questioned, but may try to project attitudes they feel are more socially acceptable or which they presume the researcher is looking for (Potter & Wetherell 1987; Dauenhauer & Dauenhauer 1998). However, quantitative studies are more highly respected by officialdom than ethnographic or qualitative research. The questionnaires were supplemented by interviews with respondents who indicated their willingness to provide more background. The questionnaire was circulated via contacts' social and

work networks to improve response rates, and 209 responses were received. The respondents' demographic profile matched the census in that only 2.26% reported speaking Dgernesiais fluently compared to 2.22% in the 2001 census and one third were non-Guernsey-born. I was concerned that the sample should be as representative as possible due to the "observer's paradox" difficulty of eliciting responses from those with no interest in language issues, so primary contacts were instructed to find respondents who were not committed language revitalisation enthusiasts but preferably people who had not thought much about language issues. However, these concerns were allayed by analysis of the profile of the respondents: statistical analysis revealed that in most cases demographic variables such as age, gender, origin, occupation, and education level did not have a statistically significant effect on attitudinal responses.

The strength of support for Dgernesiais maintenance in the questionnaire results was surprising, even given the previous anecdotal reports. Overall, 56.2% of respondents agreed strongly that 'Guernsey Norman French[15] is an important part of our heritage', with a further 27.9% agreeing mildly. Only 2% disagreed strongly. Responses to this statement were not distinguished significantly by educational level, occupation, sex or origin, although those born outside Guernsey were slightly less likely to disagree strongly. Ability to speak or understand Dgernesiais also made no difference: 75 out of 152 respondents who spoke no Dgernesiais agreed strongly, and 53 of the 115 who reported not understanding any. Some examples are given in Figures 2–9.

It can be seen in Figure 2 that the distribution of responses to the statement 'Guernsey Norman French is irrelevant to the modern world' (front row) was more even than to 'It doesn't matter if

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[15] The survey used the term "Guernsey Norman French" following the example of the Census, to avoid ambiguity.

Guernsey Norman French dies out'(back row), to which the vast
majority of all respondents disagreed (50.5% disagreeing strongly and
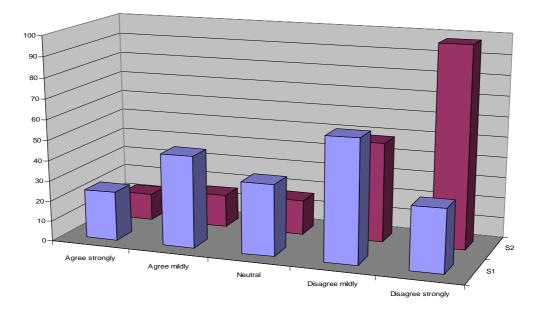25.3% mildly).

Figure 2 Responses to 'Guernsey Norman French is irrelevant to
the modern world' (front row) compared to 'It doesn't matter if
Guernsey Norman French dies out' (back row).

The vast majority of all respondents disagreed with the statements
'Guernsey Norman-French is just corrupt French' and 'You can't
speak English properly if you speak Guernsey Norman-French',
which were included because such attitudes had been cited by earlier
interviewees as reasons for language shift. The responses to these
questionnaire items are compared in Figure 3. Such views are clearly
no longer seen as rational: only four respondents agreed strongly and
6 mildly with the former statement and just one strongly and two
mildly with the latter. Interviewee GF39 commented:

> That was the perception that if you learnt this language
> you were going to be stupid – you know you wouldn't
> be able to manage in English and you wouldn't be able
> to learn at school and so on. I mean nowadays being
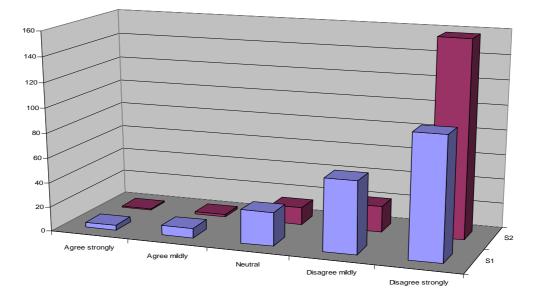> bilingual is something to be proud of but in those days…

Figure 3 Responses to 'Guernsey Norman French is just corrupt French' compared to 'You can't speak English properly if you speak Guernsey Norman French'.

As shown in Figure 4, backing for general government support for Dgernesiais was higher than the more specific statement 'Guernsey Norman French should be taught in schools', indicating that campaigners might benefit from focusing on other areas of language planning. Support was strong across factors such as gender (with 62.2% of men and 67.2% of women agreeing either strongly or mildly) and origin (58.2% of non–Guernsey-born and 69.7% of Guernsey-born respectively). Once again, proficiency in Dgernesiais seems to have no bearing on the generally positive attitudes.
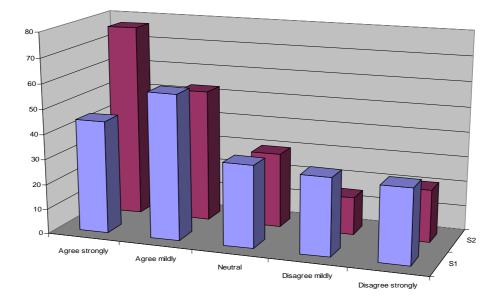
Figure 4 Responses to 'Guernsey Norman French should be taught in schools' compared to 'The States should support Dgernesiais'

Analysis of the questionnaire indicated that for most statements age was not a statistically significant factor, although under-18s showed a slight tendency not to respond as positively as others to some statements, which might prove worrying for future revitalisation efforts. As shown in Figure 5, respondents under 18 were the least likely to agree with the statement 'Speaking Guernsey Norman French is an important part of Guernsey identity' and those over 60 most likely: for once, this difference is statistically significant, with a Pearson regression analysis score of 0.03. The change in responses once respondents reach 18 is notable. However, the under-18 age group was the most likely to want to know Dgernesiais, with 42.9% agreeing strongly; next came the over-60s, 37.5% of whom agreed strongly and 29.2% mildly (see Figure 6); this is however not statistically significant.
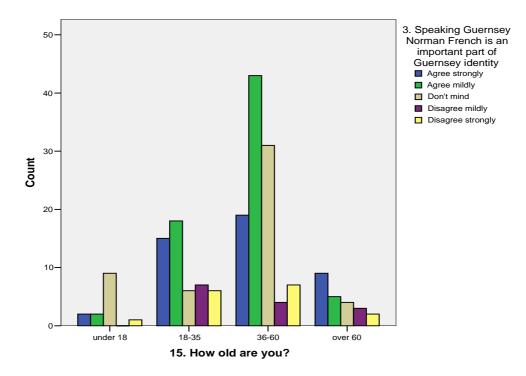
Figure 5 'Speaking Guernsey Norman French is an important part of Guernsey identity' analysed by age group
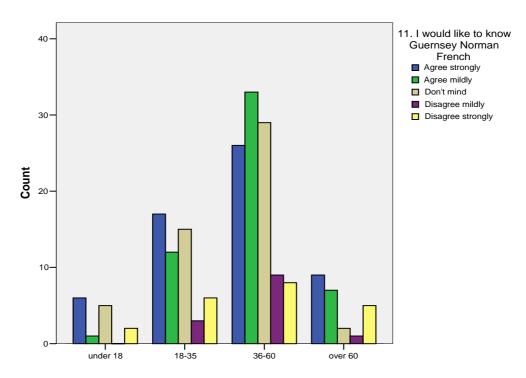

Figure 6 'I would like to know Guernsey Norman French' analysed by age group

With regard to occupation, profession, people working in education and IT were the most likely to support the proposition 'Guernsey Norman French should be taught in schools', while students were the least in favour; once again however, the difference is not statistically significant (Pearson *r* = 0.782). What is more, educationalists are the profession most likely to come from outside the island, yet they also tend to be pro-Dgernesiais, whereas the students questioned were all Guernsey-born.

In the 2001 census, 36% of the population reported being born outside the island. Of the remaining 64%, a considerable proportion must have (mainly British) immigrant backgrounds: there has been a continuous and substantial influx of outsiders since the mid-18th century (Crossan 2007). This proportion was reflected in the questionnaire respondents, and it is noteworthy that incomers from the UK are included in the general trend towards positive attitudes, as their presence is often cited as an influence in language shift. A common-sense generalization is that descendants of immigrants are less likely to speak Dgernesiais, and a number of respondents felt that people not born in Guernsey were less likely to be interested in revitalising Dgernesiais. However, as illustrated in Figure 7, the overall attitude questionnaire statistics show no significant difference in responses between natives and non-natives. Incomers are often keen to protect Guernsey's distinctiveness, which in many cases first attracted them to Guernsey (the other main 'pull' factor being pay in the finance sector). Indeed, there is anecdotal evidence that incomers send their children to Dgernesiais classes, and sometimes attend themselves, in order to get in touch with local culture and traditions. One respondent added a comment that teaching Dgernesiais could be a positive way of creating an 'inclusive' Guernsey identity.
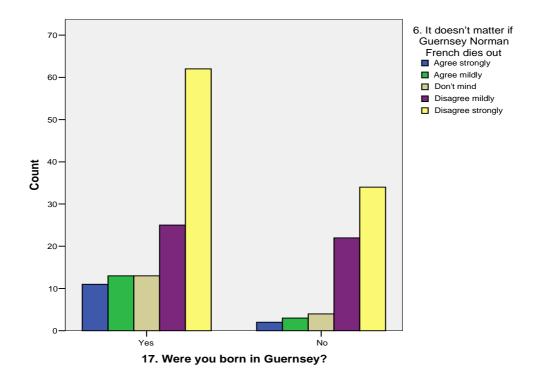
Figure 7 'It doesn't matter if Guernsey Norman French dies out' analysed by origin

The responses to the question 'It doesn't matter if Guernsey Norman French dies out' demonstrated the generally positive tendencies most strongly, and also indicated a strong emotional attachment to the idea of the language. The same distribution is seen across the variables of gender, job sector and geographical origin, as well as proficiency in Dgernesiais (see Figures 8 and 9).

Some authors, such as Freeland & Patrick (2004, p.8), seem to assume that 'folk ideologies', non-specialists' perceptions of language varieties (Nieldzielski & Preston 2003), will challenge essentialist/Whorfian views of language and identity. Yet many of my survey respondents took for granted the view of language as intimately linked to culture and identity. Even those who embrace a postmodern-style, fluid identity on a personal level do not necessarily reject traditional culture. One informant had had a sex change operation ('when you live in a small place it's not so easy to come

through') but was very proud of Guernsey heritage and in favour of Dgernesiais revitalisation, despite not speaking it. Research participants' own ideologies and perceptions of their identity are fundamental to an understanding of language endangerment and revitalisation processes, even if they do not agree with currently fashionable theories.
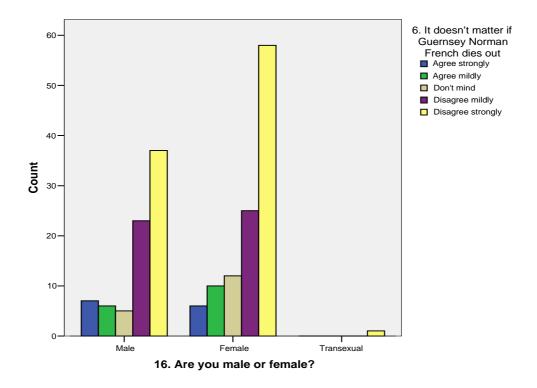

Figure 8 'It doesn't matter if Guernsey Norman French dies out' analysed by gender

As shown in Figure 9, proficiency in Dgernesiais likewise seems to have no bearing on the generally positive attitudes. The questionnaire and interview data substantiate increasingly positive attitudes towards Dgernesiais among the majority community (Anglophones). Although no comparative surveys were carried out 20/30 years ago, respondents consistently report that attitudes then were much more negative:

> I think that was the thing – that's how we started to lose
> it after the war…er…it wasn't the in thing – to speak

Guernsey French and that is right that in certain company you didn't speak it – because it made you feel a bit inferior but now it's the other way round – you don't feel at all inferior if you know it, it's completely the opposite you know?'

'I'd like all the family to speak it because I was embarrassed when I was young – but I'm not now, I'm proud'
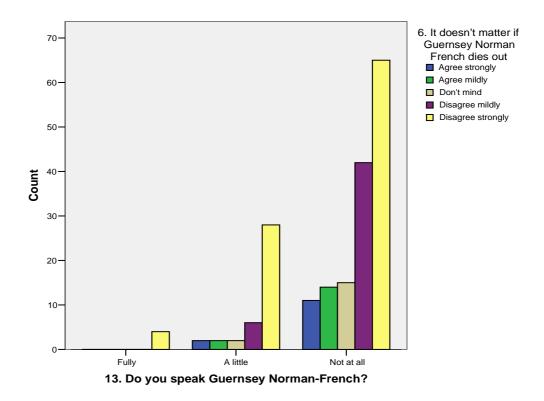

Figure 9 'It doesn't matter if Guernsey Norman French dies out' compared to ability to speak Dgernesiais

I term this phenomenon *attitude shift* to echo *language shift*, although the direction of attitude shift tends to support a reversal of language shift. It could also be referred to as *ideology shift* because it seems to be happening on a society-wide basis. It has been identified as common in other endangered language contexts among the generation whose parents shifted language for economic reasons (Crystal 2000, p.106). My research, however, has found that this attitude shift has affected all generations: even those who taught their

children English for economic reasons now regret not having preserved bilingual competence and a link to their heritage for their children. Positive attitudes towards Dgernesiais have even reached the stage of being perceived as the majority view, with the result that few people, especially public figures, are now prepared to make on-the-record statements against indigenous language revitalisation.

This shift in attitudes has been achieved largely due to the efforts of voluntary activist groups, which have raised awareness with public relations-type activities such as festivals and performances, which are termed 'prestige planning' by language policy theorists (Haarmann 1990; Kaplan & Baldauf 1997), although most grass-roots campaigners are not aware of language planning terminology. Other awareness-raising activities have included a series of articles written by members of a language revitalisation group in a local weekly free newspaper (with English translations). The subject-matter of the articles provided a showcase for demonstrating that non-traditional topics could be addressed in Dgernesiais: for example, the bombing of Afghanistan, traffic congestion, holiday homes in France, my own research, and ways to replenish stocks of the ormer (a shellfish unique to Guernsey). A more recent newspaper initiative took a different approach: regular cartoons giving dialogues in Dgernesiais with pictures, English translations and 'phonetic' pronunciation. These were seen by the initiators as less challenging than longer articles. The stated aim was to raise the profile of Dgernesiais and attract people not originally interested in language issues.

Cooper (1989, p.161) raises the issue of grass-roots versus government involvement when contrasting the levels of success of language planning for the revitalisation of Māori and Irish. He comments that in New Zealand 'the initiative for the revitalisation program has come from the Māoris themselves', whereas in Ireland

at first 'the government promoters of maintenance made no serious attempt to promote the enthusiasm of people of the Gaeltacht themselves. The initiative came from outside'. Nevertheless, Spolsky (2004, p.198 and p.c.), also commenting on Māori revitalisation, sees eventual government recognition and support as essential for success; it undoubtedly provides more time, funds and resources than private groups and individuals have at their disposal. Until recently most language campaigning efforts in Guernsey were bottom-up, by groups and individuals with little knowledge of linguistics, sociolinguistics or language planning theory.

Attitudes are not actions, and prestige planning is not enough on its own to increase a language's vitality. Some speakers whose performance in festivals is high in terms of accent and accuracy, or who teach Dgernesiais in voluntary lessons, lack the confidence to speak it in their everyday life or to transmit it to their own children. But it can be argued that awareness-raising is a prerequisite for the acceptance and success of more concrete measures, as publicly funded measures require the support of the Anglophone majority. The island government has responded to the shift in public opinion demonstrated in my research with the appointment of a Language Officer for Dgernesiais in January 2008. A Language Strategy has been written, which it is hoped will provide a focus for voluntary groups. Awareness-raising activities continue, with weekly phrases on local radio stations and in the main newspaper. An interesting recent development has been a desire on the part of local companies to brand their wares using Dgernesiais, e.g. a coffee company which markets 'L'Espresso Guernesiais' served in 'La Coupaïe' ('the cupful')[16] or texts on beer bottles and beermats from a local brewery. Clearly stressing local identity thorough being associated with the

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[16] See http://lacoupaie.com/

language is now seen as a commercial asset. There is also increased interest from the Education Department, indicating that acceptance in the school system, seen by many as key for both status and transmission of the language, is within sight. To date Dgernesiais lessons in schools have been extra-curricular and run on a voluntary basis, and demand is outstripping the supply of teachers.

Language revitalisation in Guernsey still has a long way to go before it can claim the success of Welsh or Māori, and it is likely that the current older generation will be the last fluent native speakers. But people are coming to recognise what is being lost, with the Anglophone majority also seeing Dgernesiais as an important part of local distinctiveness.

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