

CHAPTER 3

An Introduction to Sociolinguistics By Janet Holmes

Darene Almalki

Language Shift And Language Maintenance

Language Shift

- ❑ It happens when the language of the **MAJORITY** displaces the **MINORITY** mother tongue language over time in migrant communities or in communities under military occupation.
- ❑ Therefore, when language shift occurs, it shifts most of the time towards the language of the **dominant group** and the result could be the **eradication** of the local language.

What factors lead to language shift?

- A. Economic, social and political factors:

- 1-The **dominant language** is associated with **social status** and **prestige**.
- 2-Obtaining **work** is the obvious economic reason for **learning another** language.
- 3-The **pressure** of institutional domains such as **schools** and the **media**.

- B. Demographic factors:

- 1-Language shift is **faster** in **urban** areas than **rural** ones.
- 2-**Intermarriage** between groups can **accelerate** language shift.

- C. Attitudes and values:

- 1-Language shift is **slower** among communities where the **minority language** is highly **valued**. Therefore when the language is seen as an important symbol of **ethnic identity**, it is generally **maintained longer**, and visa versa.

Language Death/ Language Loss:

- *When all the people who speak a language **die**, the language **dies** with them.*
- So, with the **spread** of a **majority** group language into more and **more domains**, the number of **contexts** in which individuals **use** the ethnic language **diminishes**.
- The language usually **retreats** until it is **used only at home**, and finally it is **restricted** to such **personal activities** as **counting**, **praying** and **dreaming**.

Language Revival

- It is the **attempt** of the interested parties (individuals, cultures, governments) to **recover** the **spoken use** of the language.
- The process is also referred to as **Language Revitalisation**.
- It happens when a **community** becomes aware that its language is in **danger** of **disappearing** and takes steps to revive it.
 - **Example:** In 1840, **two thirds** of the **Welsh** people spoke *Welsh*, but by 1980, only 20% of the population spoke *Welsh*, therefore the Welsh people began a **revival process** of *Welsh* language by using a *Welsh-language* **TV** channel and bilingual **education** programmes that used *Welsh* as the medium of instruction at schools.

How can a minority language be maintained?

- 1- A language can be **maintained and preserved**, when it is **highly valued** as an important symbol of **ethnic identity** for the **minority group**.
- 2- If families from a minority group **live near** each other and **see** each other frequently, their **interactions** will help to **maintain the language**.
- 3- For **emigrants** from a **minority** group, the frequency of **contact** with the **homeland** can contribute to **language maintenance**.

How can a minority language be maintained?

- 4- **Intermarriage** within the same **minority** group is helpful to maintain the native language.
- 5- **Ensuring** that the **minority group language** is **used** at **formal settings** such as **schools** or **worship places** will increase language maintenance.
- 6- **Institutional support** from **domains** such as **education, law, administration, religion** and the **media** can **make a difference** between the success and failure of **maintaining** a **minority** group language.