CHANGING PATTERNS OF COMMUNITY, FAMILY AND ECONOMY: THEIR IMPACT ON LANGUAGE REVITALISATION

Wilson McLeod
Huw Lewis
Elin Royles

REVITALISE
Language Revitalisation
and Social Transformation

Aims of presentation

- overview of themes and issues arising out of the first three Revitalise workshops, followed by case studies and discussion

- mobility, territory and language use

- intergenerational language transmission and the evolution of the family unit

- international migration, multiculturalism and language revitalisation

- globalisation and the link between language revitalisation and contemporary economic development models

Changing patterns of mobility: implications for language revitalisation

- key underlying issue: people live increasingly mobile lives that span ever-wider geographic areas

- what implications for how people interact with one another from day-to-day?

- what implications for the design and implementation of interventions that aim to promote minority language use?

- (previous assumption: relatively tight, bounded geographical [rural] communities)

Trends in relation to mobility

- recent decades see important changes in spatial organisation of societies: counter-urbanisation of 70s/early 80s reverting to urbanisation

- especially among younger age groups, leading to increasingly polarised rural-urban population profiles

- spatial changes lead to changes in patterns of social interaction

- e.g. increased personal mobility (wider car ownership, better infrastructure) leads people to live their lives across wider geographic areas

- affects patterns of engagement with core services (e.g. education and health), particularly when services in peripheral areas reduced, rationalised in urban centres

Trends in relation to patterns of engagement

- mobility and technology prompt changes to the nature of civil society

- overall trend: declining engagement in civic life and informal, localised social interaction, move to thinner, more formal, more individualistic forms of engagement, based on communities of interest

- spread of ICT encourages new forms of social interaction in which geographic location is less determinative

Challenges for language revitalisation strategy

- traditional emphasis (in academic work and policies/strategies) on need to promote local, neighbourhood-based networks, with focus on specific territorial communities

- alongside this, now need greater attention to language promotion strategies tailored to contemporary urban/mobile lifestyles

- everyday social practices now being stretched across wider areas, thus influencing where, when and how people interact with each other (and use their languages)

- changes affect both children and adults

- e.g. re engagement in extra-curricular activities, participation in recreational activities, use of public services, consumer behaviour

Section conclusions and recommendations

- interventions aiming to promote use of regional/minority languages need to recognise different forms of language communities (geographical, interest-based, online)

- need to emphasise interventions that recognise the more networked nature of contemporary life and target communities of interest

- extent to which the neighbourhood remains the main influence on day-to-day language use practices should be reassessed

- need to give greater consideration to the potential of interventions that recognise the increase in personal mobility

- community/national-level approaches to language planning need to be supplemented by a regional-level approach

Intergenerational language transmission and the evolution of the family

- strong emphasis in language revitalisation research and policy on the role of the family – especially on intergenerational language transmission

- but project findings suggest intergenerational transmission not yet been conceptualised in a satisfactory manner

- relatively little known about how the process works – and thus how to influence it

Steps to improved understanding of language transmission

- need to acknowledge the 'messy' nature of intergenerational transmission – important not to conceive the process in binary terms (either it's happening or it's not)

- intergenerational transmission often stems from unplanned/unconscious behaviour (particularly within linguistically endogenous contexts) rather than a series of rational/intentional decisions

- intergenerational transmission not controlled solely by factors internal to the family home – complex interaction between home-based factors and external factors

Language in increasingly diverse families

- analysis of intergenerational transmission should give greater consideration to increasing diversity in family composition

- research on language use within families tends to focus on a narrow range of family circumstances (two-parent, heterosexual)

- need better understanding of e.g. single-parent families and gay-parent families, consequences of relationship breakups and more complex domestic arrangements

- thus little known about how different family circumstances influence language acquisition, or how strategies to improve intergenerational transmission might be reworked

Section conclusions and recommendations

- research on intergenerational language transmission should give greater consideration to the increasing diversity in family composition

- policy interventions seeking to improve intergenerational transmission should recognise that parental actions will seldom be based on wholly rational and intentional decisions

- practitioners in the field of language revitalisation should draw on new 'behaviour change' techniques that stress the emotional and affective nature of social behaviour

International migration, multiculturalism and language revitalisation

- many European societies becoming more multi-ethnic and multi-cultural, with increasing proportions of international immigrants

- thus some language revitalisation efforts now take place within increasingly multilingual contexts, rather than traditional binary context of majority-minority bilingualism

- trend most obvious in large urban areas (e.g. Barcelona) but increasingly apparent in peripheral rural areas too (e.g. NW Wales, NW Scotland)

Policy challenges

- international migration gives rise to various challenges for proponents of minority languages

- generally: how to allow for maintenance of plural linguistic identities while also ensuring sufficient spaces where the minority language can be normalised as main medium of interaction?

- how do (state-level) citizenship and integration policies reinforce or undermine language revitalisation goals?

- how is minority language education planned, delivered and promoted among linguistically and culturally diverse populations?

- given structure of labour market, how can immigrant communities engage with programmes aimed at promoting minority language acquisition and use?

Section conclusions and recommendations

- need more attention to how language revitalisation strategies are impacted by citizenship/integration policies

- international migration likely to become increasingly important to particular aspects of language revitalisation (e.g. re education: pedagogical approaches, kinds of teaching resources required, staff training)

- responsibility of civil society organisations to ensure that immigrant communities are able to contribute to and help shape the language revitalisation effort

Language revitalisation and contemporary economic development models

- general trends: decreasing ability of national governments to control the economy, increasing international interconnectedness, growing power of transnational corporations

- widespread consensus regarding the centrality of economic factors for the prospects of minority languages, but need greater analytical clarity of how structural changes in the economy and patterns of employment impact (either positively or negatively) on the vitality of minority language communities

Language and economy: policy problems

- project suggests insufficient attention to the question of how economic processes influence language vitality

- how do economic changes/development strategies impact upon minority languages, in terms of numbers of speakers, their geographical concentration or their propensity to use the language?

- do governmental economic development strategies interconnect with official strategies seeking to promote minority languages, or take language issues into account?

- less attention to factors such as peripherality, rurality and economic weakness that are often associated with minority language communities

- some minority language revitalisation initiatives (e.g. in government and media) may generate employment in urban areas and weaken the economic basis of traditional rural communities

General conclusions

- very general overview here; more detail in the four workshop briefings (http://revitalise.aber.ac.uk/en/events/)

- book arising from Revitalise project forthcoming from Palgrave Macmillan (late 2020/early 2021)

- case studies from Wales, Basque Country and Catalonia