

Language Shift on the Individual Level*

Orsolya Fazakas
(Eötvös Loránd University)

■ ABSTRACT ■

This paper focuses on a sociologic approach, the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen 1991) and a sociolinguistic field, the language shift (Fishman 1991, Crystal 2000). It describes the theoretical background of language shift and briefly mentions the history of Hungarian language and Romanian language contacts. After presenting language use of the Hungarian minority students and explaining the theory of planned behavior, it turns to apply the theory of planned behavior to the language shift from the view of bilingual speaker(s). This paper wants to propose the application of the theory of planned behavior in language shift and open new perspective in bilingual research.

Key Words

bilingualism, language use, minority, language shift, theory of planned behavior

* I would like to express my special thanks to the MÖB (D/2A mpt.) and the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs Cultural and Scientific Department for the scholarship. I also thank the Tel Aviv University's Department of Linguistics (Israel) and its members for their constructive suggestions.

Introduction:

What is a border? Is it a frontier of languages? Human languages arise through a combination of universal shared capacities (Chomsky 1957), and the social interactions of individuals and communities. The goal of the study is to understand the mechanism and motivation of language contact on individual level that leads to language shift. This paper presents an analysis of a sociolinguistic field, the language shift and a sociologic approach, the theory of planned behavior. Language shift necessarily requires bilingual or multilingual communities, as there are at least two languages involved (the language shifted to and the language shifted from). Hence, Romanian language and Hungarian language are target languages. The aim of this paper is not to choose a side in a sensitive topic, as the Hungarian and Romanian bilingualism, but to offer a new point of view in bilingual research. This paper aims to apply the theory of planned behavior to the language shift from the view of bilingual speaker.

Literature Review:

Language shift (Appel & Muysken 1987, Hamers & Blanc 1989) has been a research topic within linguistics for approximately half a century, but a clear and universal definition seems to be lacking. However, there are three issues that frequently come up in discussions of language shift.

The first is 'changing patterns of language use'. This is based on the idea, that there are patterns of language variety and they are used according to the situation ('domains' cf. Fishman 1972:247-248). The second issue is the idea that language shift happens in a speech community. Language shift can be studied on the level of the individual speaker, but for sociolinguistic studies it only becomes interesting once the shift happens community-wide (Labov 1972:277). The third and final issue is that

language shift happens in a situation of language contact.

The process of language shift (Hamers & Blanc 1989:176):

Monolingualism → Bilingualism → Monolingualism
 $L_x \rightarrow L_x > L_y \rightarrow L_x < L_y \rightarrow L_y$

If we accept that the language shift can be seen as a process and can be divided into periods then there are three major periods: (1) initial, (2) intermediate or advanced and (3) ending.

All communities living in language contacts can be placed somewhere on the process of language shift:

- Monolingualism in the original language of the community (minority language) (L_x),
- Bilingualism with dominancy of the community's (minority) language ($L_x > L_y$),
- Balanced bilingualism ($L_x = L_y$),
- Bilingualism with dominancy of the majority language ($L_y > L_x$),
- Monolingualism in the majority language (L_y).

When talking about the causes of language shift we should consider the macro-level and the micro-level factors. When Fishman talks of 'dislocation' of speakers from their physical, demographic, social and cultural environments (Fishman 1991:57-65) he gives macro-level causes of language shift. Crystal mentions 'factors which put people in physical danger' and 'factors which change the people's culture' (Crystal 2000: 70, 76). The list of Hyltenstam and Stroud describes the social level as it determines the status of minority and majority speech community (ideology of the majority, education, labor market etc.). The group level refers to the characteristics of the minority group (migration, geographical distance, language characteristics, official language, degree of bilingualism, institutions etc.). The individual level refers to minority members' speech

behavior. Language shift ultimately lies on the individual level (micro-level). This level describes the speech behaviors of individual community members (e.g. language choice), and the transmission of these speech behaviors as norms to other community members (e.g. socialization) (Hyltenstam-Stroud 1996:569). Socio-psychological concepts e.g. attitude, identity, prestige, stigma and ideology (Irvine & Gal 2000, Schieffelin & Woolard & Kroskrity 1998) are resources of language shift's literature.

The theory of planned behavior was designed by Icek Ajzen to predict and explain human behavior in specific contexts. The theory of planned behavior is an extension of the theory of reason action. The central factor in the theory is the individual's *intention* to perform a given behavior. Intentions are assumed to capture the motivational factors that influence behavior. Intention is an indication of how hard people are willing to try, of how much of an effort they are planning to exert, in order to perform the behavior (Ajzen 1991:181).

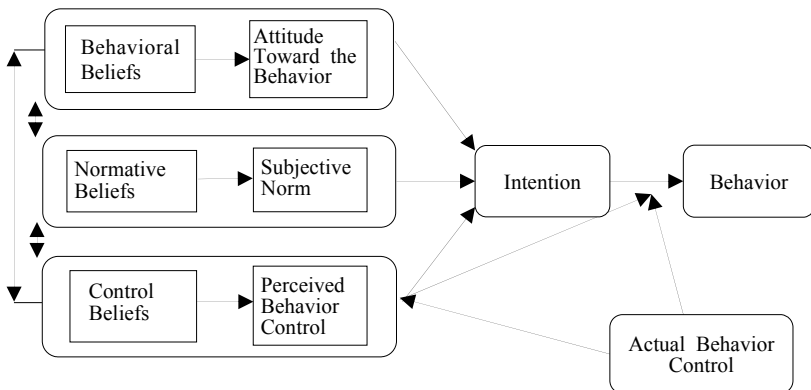


Figure. 1. Theory of planned behavior (<http://people.umass.edu/aizen/tpb.diag.html>)

The intention is based on *attitude toward the behavior*, *subject norm*, and *perceived behavioral control*.

Attitude toward the behavior is the degree to which performance of

the behavior is positively or negatively valued. Attitude toward a behavior is determined by the total set of accessible *behavioral beliefs* linking the behavior to various outcomes and other attributes (Ajzen 1991:188). Behavioral beliefs link the behavior of interest to expected outcomes. A behavioral belief is the subjective probability that the behavior will produce a given outcome. Although a person may hold many behavioral beliefs with respect to any behavior, only a relatively small number are readily accessible at a given moment (Ajzen 1991:191).

Subjective norm refers to the perceived social pressure to perform or not to perform the behavior. Subjective norm is determined by the total set of accessible normative beliefs (Ajzen, 1991:188). *Normative beliefs* refer to the perceived behavioral expectations of such important referent individuals or groups as the person's spouse, family, friends, and - depending on the population and behavior studied - teacher, doctor, supervisor, and coworkers (Ajzen 1991:188-89; 195-96).

The third antecedent of intention is the degree of *perceived behavior control*, which refers to the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behavior and it is assumed to reflect past experiences as well as anticipated impediment and obstacles. It is determined by the total set of accessible *control beliefs*. Control beliefs may be based in part of past experience with the behavior, but they usually also be influenced by second-hand information about the behavior, by the experiences of acquaintances and friends, and by other factors that increase or reduce the perceived difficulty of performing the behavior in question (Ajzen, 1991:188; 196-98). The *actual behavioral control* refers to the extent to which a person has the skills, resources, and other prerequisites needed to perform a given behavior.

Successful performance of the behavior depends not only on a favorable intention but also on a sufficient level of behavioral control. To the extent that perceived behavioral control is accurate, it can serve as a proxy of actual control and can be used for the prediction of behavior.

Analysis:

Historical background:

The national ideologies of the 19th century led to monolingual state pursuit in Central Europe during the 20th century. The countries were regionally and socially rearranged by that conception (e.g. Hungary, Romania, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia etc.) (Lampe & Mazower 2004). According to the 1910 Hungarian census, the total population of Transylvania was 5,259,918 people, of whom 2,829,389 were Romanian, 1,661,987 were Hungarian, and 565,004 German. After World War I, Transylvania was ceded to Romania under the Treaty of Trianon (1920) and Hungarians lost their previously dominant social position. The ethnical face of Transylvania was changed by the reshaped borders. Hungarian language was no more official language in Transylvania. In 1940, to partly compensate Hungary for the territories lost under the Trianon Treaty, the second Vienna Award briefly returned Northern Transylvania to Hungary until 1947 (Péntek & Benő 2003).

The history of this part of Europe is still cause of dispute, because the Hungarian and Romanian version of history can present different point of view over the matter. The historical events that took place in Eastern Europe in 1989 gave a chance to this part of the world for a new beginning. Political agreements gave official status of the Hungarian language in all localities where it is spoken by more than 20% of the population. Hungarian newspapers, books, broadcasting hours on public television exist in Romania. The Hungarian-speaking minority has chance for sending the children to elementary schools, high-schools, colleges and universities where the teaching is in Hungarian. There are cultural institutions such as Hungarian theatres and opera houses. Most ethnic Hungarians (approx. 90%) live in Transylvania, where they make up approx. 19% of the population. In 2002, 1,443,970 people declared Hungarian as their mother tongue. Hungarian-speaking minority of Romania decrease slowly

according to the census. The steady decreases due to low birth rates, emigration and assimilation (Benő & Szilágyi 2005).

The Education law was modified in 1999, and it is allowed to found Hungarian-language departments and faculties in universities. In the field of Hungarian-language higher education, the establishment by the Hungarian government of the Sapientia Hungarian Private University in Transylvania represented a big step forward. Instruction in the Hungarian language is given in four state universities: the Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj, the University of Medicine and Pharmacology of Târgu Mureş, the Drama University of Târgu Mureş, and the Faculty of Hungarian Studies of the University of Bucharest. Denominational institutes include the Hungarian-language university level Protestant Theological Institute of Cluj, The Catholic Theological University of Alba Iulia, and the Partium Christian University of Oradea.

Principles of the language practice and shift and their empirical base:

Hungarian students in Romania are shifting from Hungarian language to Romanian language. Their case illustrates the important role of language shift's factors.

The data of this study were collected from two sources, the written (questionnaire) source and oral (interview) source in Partium. I got the exact number of the Hungarian minority students from the Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sport of Romania in December 2010, and approximately 3% of them participated in the research. 750 students filled in the questionnaires from Primary Schools to High Schools; 100 students filled in the questionnaires from the University of Partium. Totally I have 850 questionnaires. I collected 25 interviews from each level (totally 75 interviews). In this paper I present preliminary results of the research,

the data of 100 questionnaires.

There are two Romanian and two Hungarian ethnic blocks in Transylvania. Thus there are mixed ethnical zones between these blocks. The dominant language of families is Hungarian (80%). When students start conversations with their families they use their mother tongue more often than when their parents start a conversation (the result is 5% higher). The Hungarian minority must know the majority language, Romanian, as well as the minority language. The decisions of those parents, who belong to the Hungarian minority, are led by rational economic considerations. Self enforcements of the minority inside the Romanian majority society are important factors of the decision. What language is used by friends or neighbors will be used by students as well. The students use to speak with Hungarian schoolmates in Hungarian and with Romanian schoolmates in Romanian. The teaching programs of minority and majority students have different syllabuses and books until they start the high school. The materials of the exams are similar, and the syllabuses become similar only in high school. The church is a typical social context where the Hungarian language is the dominant language. Language use is more divided in formal communications. The minority group can't avoid the majority and the official language in public events. Language use is controlled by the majority in formal scenes (Post office, Medical center, Office, Pharmacy, and Police). The minority group and its members must use the languages according to the scenes. One question was that: "What language do you use in the pharmacy?" and they also had to write a typical dialogue that might happen in a pharmacy. 50% of the students used both languages in the pharmacy, 35% spoke Romanian and only 15% used Hungarian. Even though 37% of the students did not write dialogue, 44% of the students wrote it in Romanian and 19% in Hungarian. Minority languages cannot compete with official languages in the interior market of the languages (De Swaan 2002).

The participants had to answer the following question: „Do you consider

your sentence in Hungarian before you tell it in Romanian?" The eighth grade students' answers were: 24% „yes”, 30% „frequently”, 32% „rarely” and 14% „no”. After two years in the education system, the tenth grade students' answers were: 8% „yes”, 18% „frequently”, 32% „rarely” and 42% „no”. The language use is divided by functional utility. Thus the bilingualism is asymmetric and it doesn't necessarily lead to language change but it causes assimilation. 56% of the students think that if someone speaks only Hungarian it will be hard for him to succeed and 44% think that he can have difficulties in Romania. If someone knows only Romanian, 76% of them think that it will be easy for him to succeed and 24% think that he can have difficulties.

During the education the students from the bilingualism with dominance of the community's (minority) language ($L_x > L_y$) get to the bilingualism with dominance of the majority language ($L_y > L_x$) (Hamers & Blanc 1989:176). The language of education, the bilingual environment and the labor market have important roles in the dominance change of the speakers. The restricted platforms of language use are due to the dominance of the official language.

Language shift and choice:

Self-enforcing is well-known terms of the minority social discourse, it refers mostly to the choice of language of education. One of the most important tools of a minority to succeed is a high-level competence of the official language in the daily life. The Romanian language has high status in the society and the Hungarian language has low status.

According to the theory of planned behavior there is a speaker (e.g. a young adult, a student) who belongs to the Hungarian-speaking minority. The given behavior what this speaker, the member of the minority group, should perform, if the speaker wants to succeed, is that the speaker must

know the majority language on high-level.

The speaker's intention depends on the attitude toward the behavior. The speaker's attitude is positive or at least not negative toward the given behavior. Although the speaker holds many behavioral beliefs towards the given behavior only a relatively small number activate and make his attitude more positive than negative (example: if he knows the majority language very well he will get a better degree, job, bigger salary, he will be more integrated to the society etc). According to the subjective norm and the normative beliefs mean, that those persons who are important to the speaker, have expectations and pressures on him to perform the given behavior. The speaker's teachers, classmates, parents, and friends, etc. want him to know the majority language on a high level, and he is also motivated to perform this behavior. The third element of intention is the degree of perceived behavior control, which is determined by control beliefs. The speaker thinks that he can solve all problems and difficulties (knowing the majority language on a high level, identity's problems what are caused by the language shift, etc.) that are against the language shift. The speaker thinks that the planned behavior, the language shift, can be fulfilled relatively easily. According to the actual behavioral control the speaker has all skills and recourses what are needed to perform the given behavior (he is able to study the majority language on a high-level). Successful performance of the behavior, in this case the language shift depends not only on a favorable intention but also on a sufficient level of behavioral control.

Conclusion:

A community is the center of language shift (see literature review). Researches examine communities, external and objective (society, politics, etc.) factors and effects of these factors on language choice of the

communities. The center of socio-psychological researchers is the person, the individual (Fasold 1984:187) as it was shown by the theory of planned behavior. Izek Ajzen's theory can be applied not only in psychology and sociology but also in a special field of linguistics, in sociolinguistics.

The theory of planned behavior helps understanding human behavior in context of language shift. It can be a key to understand the decisions of the bilingual speaker: when and how he makes his decisions on languages.

❖ References

- Ajzen, Icek, "The theory of planned behavior", *Organizational behavior and human decision processes*. Vol. 50, 179-211, 1991.
- Appel, Rene & Muysken, Pieter, "Language contact and bilingualism", New York: Edward Arnol, 1987.
- Benő, Attila & Szilágy, Sándor, "Hungarian in Romania", *Hungarian Language Contact outside Hungary*, Fenyvesi Anna ed., Amsterdam-Philadelphia, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2005.
- Crystal, David, *Language death*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Chomsky, Noam, "Syntactic Structure", Berlin, Werner Hildebrand, 1957/2002.
- De Swaan, Abram, "The world language system; A political sociology and political economy of language", Cambridge, Polity Press, 2002.
- Fasold, Ralph W. "The Sociolinguistics of Society", Oxford-Cambridge, Blackwell, 1984.
- Fishman, Joshua A. "The relationship between micro- and macro-sociolinguistics in the study of who speaks what language to whom and when", *Language in sociocultural change*, Anwar S. Dil ed., Stanford, Stanford University Press, 244/267, 1972.
- Fishman, Joshua A., "Reversing language shift: theoretical and empirical foundations of assistance to threatened languages", Clevedon, Philadelphia, Adelaide: Multilingual Matters, 1991.
- Hamers, Josiane F. & Blanc, Michel H. A., "Bilinguality and Bilingualism", Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- Hyltenstam, Kenneth & Stroud, Christopher. "Language maintenance", *Contact linguistics*, 567-578, Berlin, 1996.
- Irvine, Judith T. & Gal, Susan, "Language ideology and linguistic differentiation", *Regime of Language: Ideologies, Politics, and Identities*. Kroskirty, Paul V. ed., Santa Fe, School of American Research Press, 35-83, 2000.
- Labov, William, "Sociolinguistic patterns", Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972.
- Lampe, John R. & Mazower, Mark, "Ideologies and National Identities. The Case of Twentieth-Century Southeastern Europe", Budapest-New York, Central European University Press, 2004.
- Péntek, János & Benő, Attila, "Nyelvi jogok Romániában", *Kisebbségek, nyelvpolitika Kelet-Közép-Európában*, Nádor, Orsolya & Szarka, László ed., Budapest, Akadémiai Press, 123-147, 2003.

Schieffelin, Bambi B. & Woolard, Kathryn A. & Kroskrity, Paul V. „Language Ideologies: Practice and Theory”, New York, Oxford University Press, 1998
<http://people.umass.edu/aizen/tpb.diag.html> 2013.07.14.