15 Language Contact and Language Degeneration

COLETTE GRINEVALD CRAIG

1 Introduction

Although the phenomenon of language death is as old as the recorded history of the languages of the world, its systematic study is a relatively new field of linguistics and sociolinguistics. A series of important publications clustered around the mid-eighties has confirmed its having become a recognized concern and field of study (Dressler, 1972; Dorian, 1981, 1989; Schmidt, 1985; Hill and Hill, 1986; Taylor, 1992, from an SSILA conference in 1985).

For linguists, the scientific interest of the process of language death resides in the fact that many obsolescent languages undergo structural changes, thereby offering more data for the study of the general process of language attrition, which itself should turn out to be telling of the nature of human languages in general. For sociolinguists, the interest resides more in the study of the causes and circumstances of language death, a topic addressed in Brenzinger's contribution (see chapter 16).

The linguistic documentation of dying languages is sometimes labelled as "salvage linguistics." This type of research raises issues of fieldwork methodology, in that standard quantitative studies may be severely constrained by the very nature of the situation and qualitative studies require sensitivity to the particular relation of the last speakers towards their stigmatized obsolescent language. In addition, fieldwork on obsolescent languages raises all the questions of ethics inherent to research on marginalized and dominated populations, issues which are best addressed before and monitored during the time of fieldwork. Work on endangered languages also raises the issue of the position of academics towards efforts aimed at counteracting the process of language death, including their role in language preservation and language revitalization projects.

2 Labelling and Defining the Subject and the Field of Study

The phenomenon of language death has been considered under a number of labels; some studies address the issue under the specific label of "language death" or sometimes "language demise," but much of the relevant literature can be found under the labels of "language drift," "language shift," or "language replacement."

Language death refers to the complete disappearance of a language. Only in extreme cases will the death of a language be the result of the sudden death of a whole community of speakers. More often, death comes by in a situation of languages in contact and shifting bilingualism. Although the process of progressive language death often shares much with the process of historical linguistic change, it differs from it in the speed and the scope of the change, and ultimately in its final outcome. In this sense, Latin is not a dead language, because it did not disappear but rather changed enough to be considered to have given rise to new languages. But dead are the hundreds of languages that have vanished in the Americas since colonization, for instance, many of them without leaving more than a topographical trace, as well as the hundreds that had vanished before colonization, under the dominion of powerful indigenous invaders, such as the Aztecs in Middle America or the Incas in the Andes.

The metaphor of death brings with it the idea that death is a process. One talks of "dying" or obsolescing languages when death appears to be imminent, and of "endangered" and "threatened" languages when their fate seems sealed but their death less imminent. Languages, like people, may succumb to slow or sudden deaths, and how much impact the process of death has on the structure of the language is in part a matter of the conditions of the dying process.

The most extreme case of "sudden language death" occurs in the course of rapid and total annihilation of a population, an example of which is the case of Tasmanian. A particular case of sudden death is also when the last speaker of a language which had survived among a very small group of very isolated speakers dies, as was the extraordinary case of the death of the Yana language at the time of the death of Ishi, "the last wild Indian in North America" (Kroeber, 1961). In such cases of sudden death, linguists have relatively little to say, as the last speakers carry into death a fully functional language.

The case of "radical language death" is similar to that of sudden death in that it involves massive dying or killing of the speakers, but there are survivors, who opt to abandon their language for being too much of a liability for their survival. Such is the story of the deaths of Lenca and Cacaopera and the near death of Pipil in El Salvador in the thirties, as a result of the genocide of the indigenous populations at the hand of governmental forces recorded in history as "la matanza" (Campbell and Muntzell, 1989: 185).

the Field

er a number of
l of "language
vant literature
shift," or "lan-

guage. Only in
idden death of
a situation of
process of pro-
is of historical
of the change,
dead language,
considered to
languages that
many of them
hundreds that
powerful in-
he Incas in the

a process. One
o be imminent,
e seems sealed
umb to slow or
n the structure
process.

the course of
ich is the case
e last speaker
very isolated
ana language
rth America"
latively little
guage.

den death in
re are survi-
liability for
pera and the
genocide of
recorded in

The most common case of language death is that of a gradual one that spans various generations; it is the most likely type of language death to be accompanied by linguistic change. Various cases of this type of death have been documented, for instance, Eastern Sutherland Gaelic in Europe (Dorian, 1981), Mexicano (Nahuatl) in Latin America (Hill and Hill, 1986), Norwegian in the US (Haugen, 1989), and Dyirbal in Australia (Schmidt, 1985).

Language death may appear to be sudden but may in fact occur as the result of a long period of gestation, a situation discussed by Dorian (1981: 51; 1986: 74) under the label "language tip." It typically involves a case of sudden shift from a minority language to a dominant language after centuries of apparent strong survival. The loss of the ethnic language, Dorian argues, is the result of a long-standing assault on the language which has eroded its support from the inside. It can be traced through the evolution of the patterns of language use in specific families, ones in which parents and older siblings speak an ethnic language while younger siblings suddenly do not acquire it.

Sometimes the process of death affects first the lower registers of the language, leaving for last a few pieces of the most formal register. This type of bottom-to-top death has also been referred to as the "latinate" pattern. This is the case of the Yaqui of Arizona, for instance, which is surviving only in ritual contexts but which crucially marks membership in the ethnic community (Hill, 1983).

To the variety of language death patterns mentioned above corresponds a variety of types of speakers that can be plotted on the continuum of the process of language death, from native fluent speakers to nonspeakers (Schmidt, 1985; Dorian 1981, 1985, 1989; Campbell and Muntzel, 1989; Dressler, 1991). Among the native and fluent speakers, one distinguishes between older fluent and younger fluent speakers; the latter typically speak a somewhat changed form of the language which is still accepted by the whole community. This distinction between older and younger speakers is found, for instance, in the Dyirbal situation documented by Schmidt (1985).

A category of speakers most typical of the situation of language death is that of the "semi-speakers," defined by Dorian as imperfect speakers "with very partial command of the productive skills required to speak it, but almost perfect command of the receptive skills required to understand it" (1983: 32, also 1977, 1981). Although considered members of the linguistic community, their deviations from the linguistic norms of the community are considered as mistakes and they typically exhibit insecurity about their knowledge of the language. This category of speakers is broad enough to accommodate a range of people from relatively fluent speakers to very limited speakers sometimes referred to as "terminal" speakers.

Another category of speakers that needs to be included in the study of dying languages is that of "rememberers." These are speakers who may have been, at an early stage in life, native fluent speakers, or who may simply have learned only some elements of the language a long time ago, and who, in either case, have lost much of their earlier linguistic ability. Rememberers are typical of a situation of fairly advanced stage of language death, and are found

in relative isolation. Sometimes the language memory of such speakers can be triggered enough for them actively to participate in salvage linguistic projects, but at times such speakers have been so traumatized about their speaking a stigmatized language that nothing can help them recall much of it.

3   Theoretical Approaches to the Study of Language Death

The process of language death itself has received numerous labels, such as language obsolescence, loss, decay, decline, attrition, contraction, or deacquisition. These labels reflect a general search for the similarities and the differences that relate it to other types of linguistic dynamism, such as first and second language acquisition, creolization and decreolization, aphasia, weakening of a first or second language, and historical change. Ultimately the goal is to discover what clues to organizational principles in language and in human cognition generally all these manifestations of language dynamism may provide. The assumption behind such concerted effort is that all cases of language change involve "the same functional and formal parameters of linguistic structure and [are] embedded in the same matrix of socio-cultural and neuropsychological determining factors irrespective of the direction of change" (Hyltenstam and Viberg, 1993: 25).

The putative relation between language death and language acquisition has been articulated in the "regression hypothesis" which claims that the process of language loss is a mirror image of that of language acquisition, i.e., that what is lost first is what is learned last. The original hypothesis was presented by Jakobson (1941) on the basis of phonological materials only. While this "regression hypothesis" has not been upheld in recent research on language acquisition and aphasia, it has not been adequately tested yet for the case of language loss, mostly for lack of sufficient research (de Bot and Weltens, 1991). The regression hypothesis presupposes that the processes of language acquisition and language loss are both gradual and patterned in identifiable sequenced steps, but research in the field of language death has not produced enough data yet to establish such patterns with any certainty (Dorian, 1989).

As for what could be learned from a comparison of language death with the other language in contact processes of pidginization, creolization and decreolization (see chapter 14), the assessment is the same, that there has not yet been enough systematic research on language contact phenomena to produce data comparable enough to, for instance, prove or disprove Bickerton's bioprogram hypothesis. Drawing a parallel between obsolescent language and pidgin language reveals common monostylism and reduced grammar, but the two differ in major ways, in the use of the languages and in the attitude of the speakers, as well as in the modes of acquisition.

ipeakers can be
juistic projects,
ieir speaking a
ɔf it.

.anguage

labels, such as
ction, or deac-
arities and the
n, such as first
ation, aphasia,
 Ultimately the
inguage and in
age dynamism
:hat all cases of
 parameters of
f socio-cultural
he direction of

acquisition has
hat the process
sition, i.e., that
 was presented
ıly. While this
:h on language
 for the case of
: and Weltens,
ies of language
 in identifiable
s not produced
Dorian, 1989).
 death with the
:ion and decre-
ere has not yet
ena to produce
Sickerton's bio-
: language and
ammar, but the
: attitude of the

Language death can also be studied as a special case of language attrition, a general term that includes different manifestations of language loss, such as aphasia and first or second language attrition, but productive hypotheses about the possible linguistic attributes of linguistic attrition are still in need of being generated (Andersen, 1982; Menn, 1989).

In sum, theorizing about language death has been largely articulated in the context of comparing it to other instances of language dynamism somewhat better known, as evidenced by several recent collections on the subject (Dorian, 1989; Seliger and Vago, 1991; Hyltenstam and Viberg, 1993). Ultimately, the goal of such research is to identify linguistic attributes of language progression and language regression in the hope that research on these dynamisms will have a bearing on the formulation of current linguistic theories, be they of a formal or a functional leaning.

4 Effects of Language Death on Language Structure

The process of language death affects all aspects of language use and language structure. Although the types and extent of language change depend on the sociopolitical and sociocultural context of the language death situation, it has not been possible so far to establish any more causal relations between context and linguistic changes in the case of language death than in the case of other situations of languages in contact. A good place to start an overview of the linguistic attributes of language attrition is Andersen (1982) and Campbell and Muntzel (1989), both of which are meant to be blueprints for research which promote cross-linguistic and cross-disciplinary perspectives.

4.1 Loss of registers and language forms associated with them

In a larger sociolinguistic and ethnolinguistic perspective, the first level of linguistic loss correlates with the loss of certain functions of the language. The most widespread case is that of the loss of higher functions, such as the use of the language in the public arena, including the sociopolitical and religious traditions which necessitate the handling of some formal style of language.

A case in point is the monostylism of terminal speakers of Breton who control only casual styles for intimate routine interactions (Dressler and Wodak-Leodolter, 1977; Dressler, 1991: 101). Another reported instance of reduction of language due to loss of register is the loss of frequency of use of subordinate clauses in Cupeno and Luiseno from southern California – languages for which subordinate clauses were a mark of the most highly valued style of language, the one used in public speeches.

Although the loss of some styles of language implies the loss of some specific discourse patterns characteristic of them, it is worth noting that such a loss in

the obsolescent language may be partially compensated by the transfer of characteristic discourse patterns into the new dominant language of the speakers' community. Such a case of transfer is documented for Koyukon Athabaskan, which appears to be dying fairly suddenly but being replaced with a very specific community-wide variety of English which provides a strong sense of Koyukon identity for its speakers (Kwatcha, 1992).

Sometimes also, as mentioned in the discussion of the different types of language death, the pattern of loss is the reverse, with the more informal registers being lost and the more formal aspect of the language being the last one preserved, such as the formal language of prayers and incantations. This kind of latinate pattern is described for Southern Tzetal of southern Mexico, for which only four prayers were preserved that could be recited from memory by only four men, who could not give more than broad paraphrases of their meaning (Campbell and Muntzel, 1989: 185).

4.2 Lexical loss

The investigation of lexical attrition in cases of language death is not a straightforward matter of observation, as the general strategy of semi-speakers with limited linguistic resources is speech avoidance. Absolute lexical loss predictably involves words for objects that are not culturally relevant anymore. The case of body parts is interesting, because in some situations it is said to be an area of the lexicon resistant to loss, while it is specifically noted as one of loss in other situations. The loss of body-part lexicon is reported for a semi-speaker of Ontario Cayuga who, for instance, gave the word "foot" for "thigh," "buttocks" for "hip," and could not supply terms for "ankle" or "toe," "eyebrow" or "cheeks" (Mithun, 1989: 248).

In situations of long-term language contact and widespread bilingualism, one of the strategies to compensate for the widespread loss of native lexicon is one of replacement with vocabulary from the dominant language, referred to in the literature as the process of "relexification." Relexification has been much discussed in the context of creolization and decreolization, but it is also found in instances of language shift which lead to the death of a minority language, such as the situation of Tlazcalan Nahuatl documented by Hill and Hill (1977).

4.3 Loss in phonology

Three basic principles underlying observed phonological changes in cases of language attrition were proposed by Anderson (1982). The first one is that change results in fewer phonological distinctions, as amply demonstrated for

the transfer of
inguage of the
d for Koyukon
but being re-
English which
kers (Kwatcha,

:ferent types of
more informal
uage being the
:s and incanta-
Tzetal of south-
that could be
1ot give more
Muntzel, 1989:

is not a straight-
i-speakers with
cal loss predict-
t anymore. The
is said to be an
·d as one of loss
· a semi-speaker
r "thigh," "but-
oe," "eyebrow"

d bilingualism,
native lexicon is
age, referred to
ation has been
on, but it is also
1 of a minority
.ted by Hill and

nges in cases of
iirst one is that
:monstrated for

East Sutherland Gaelic (Dorian, 1981) or Breton (Dressler, 1972). An example from Pipil of El Salvador is the loss of contrastive vowel length which has no counterpart in Spanish. The second principle is that this simplification of the phonological system is counteracted by a pressure to preserve distinctions which are common to both languages in contact. The third principle is that distinctions with a high functional load will also be preserved, even if they do not exist in the other language.

Discussion about the weight of external factors (influence of dominant language) vs internal factors (principles of markedness) in changes observed remains inconclusive. In some cases, like the merger of the postvelar /q/ to velar /k/ in Tuxtla Chico Mam, the change could be attributed to either external or internal factors: Spanish does not have postvelars, and postvelars are more marked phonologically than velars (Campbell and Muntzel, 1989: 186). Such situations also point to the possibility of language change being the result of multiple causation, a principle found at all levels of language, not just in phonology.

Relaxation of phonological rules also creates new variations in the obsolescent language, when the application of rules becomes optional. Such is the relaxation of the final devoicing of l in Pipil which results in the free variation of l/l [devoiced] in final position (Campbell and Muntzel, 1989: 189). Another mark of dying language phonology is the occasional excessive use of some marked feature due to imperfect learning and probably also to the value given to the feature as a marker of identity. An example is the excessive glottalization reported in the speech of a speaker of Xinca (Campbell and Muntzel, 1989: 189).

4.4 Loss in morphology

Loss of morphology, in the form of reduction of allomorphy and levelling of paradigms is relatively well-documented and the object of reasonable hypothesizing by Andersen (1982: 97). Semi-speakers of Southern Sutherland Gaelic for instance were insecure about the gender and appropriate case of nominals, as well as the future and the conditional suffixes, while preserving the past tense better (Dorian, 1977). Obsolescing Dyirbal was also shown to have lost several of its morphological characteristics, including its original ergativity (replaced with an SVO nominative–accusative pattern) and set of case markers, and its very complex noun classification system (reduced to a simple gender system based on animacy and sex) as documented in Schmidt (1985, 1989). In Oklahoma Cayuga, a polysynthetic language at a stage of incipient obsolescence, language attrition takes the shape of a reduced productivity of the system of affixation which cumulates elements of background information on verbs. Even if the speakers still know all the suffixes, they may hesitate to combine several within a single verb form (Mithun, 1989: 248).

4.5 Loss in syntax

Losses in syntax are most often cases of attrition in the use of certain syntactic construction rather than the actual reduction of particular syntactic patterns. It is commonly reported that morphological tense/aspect or voice forms (such as future or passive) are dropped in favor of periphrastic ones, which become overused.

A classic example in this category of language loss is the demonstration of the loss of subordinate clauses in Cupeno and Luiseno already mentioned in section 4.1 (Hill, 1973). The same reduction in frequency of subordinate clauses is also documented for obsolescing Dyirbal. In Dyirbal, other syntactic signs of attrition include a breakdown in agreement rules operating in noun phrases and verb complex, a rigidification into SVO pattern of the tradition- ally extremely free word order, as well as a loss of the S-O pivot clause linking device that made Dyirbal a key language in the investigation of syntactic ergativity (Schmidt, 1985, 1991).

4.6 Articulating language structure and language use

To close the section on the impact of language death on language structure a reminder may be appropriate: Research on language shift and language death should always combine ethnographic and linguistic dimensions if it is to address the key problem of such situations, which is the articulation between the structure that dying languages may take and the use that is made of such languages. Such studies of the speech of the types of speakers associated with linguistic changes – younger fluent speakers and semi-speakers – should ideally include both language comprehension and language production, oral and written language where relevant, and all parts of grammar, including discourse structures.

5 On Fieldwork Methodology for Work on Endangered Languages

A traditional "field methods" course of the kind offered on many university campuses as part of graduate training programs in linguistics does little to prepare one for the realities of a field situation in general, and falls even shorter of preparing one for fieldwork on a dying language, an inherently more complex situation. Even if all fieldwork situations are essentially unique, it is still possible to outline some of the characteristics of fieldwork on obsolescing languages that make such experiences particularly challenging.

5.1 The responsibility of the field linguist

One of the burdens of fieldwork on endangered languages is to face the fact that in all likelihood one is and will be the only linguist ever to document this language, in view of the shortage of trained field linguists to attend to the documentation of the thousands of languages and dialects rapidly vanishing around the world today. Owning up to being "the" linguist for a dying language implies a particular approach to the work to be carried out in the field. For the sake of the field of general linguistics, the documentation must be both as reliable and as complete as possible in all areas of language structure, a task which necessitates adequate training in all subfields of general linguistics. For the sake of contributing to the advancement of the relatively new field of language death, the documentation of language structure must also be done in the context of a broader documentation of the language in use. This means paying particular attention to sociolinguistics while attending to grammar.

Working on a dying language also means being particularly careful not to filter out any information on the language and its use on the basis of theoretical prejudices, in view of the fact that the process of language death itself has not yet been documented adequately enough to be understood well in its specificity, and that one cannot anticipate the questions linguistics will ask in future of the data gathered. All this to say that the field linguist working on a dying language may feel competing pressures between the demands of an academic research career (focused and currently theoretically relevant work produced within time limits) and a responsibility to the field in the longer run for as complete and accurate a record as possible, to say nothing of the responsibility to the community of speakers, which will be addressed below.

5.2 Working with speakers of dying languages

It is one thing to talk academically about the different kinds of speakers found in a situation of language death, quite another to work with that reality. Field linguists usually seek out totally fluent speakers with some native linguistic talent and interest, but the more dire the situation of the language, the less choice the linguists have. A dying language means fewer speakers to choose from, and sometimes no choice at all. Working on the process of language obsolescence itself means by definition working with marginal speakers overlooked in the usual linguistic fieldwork, the semi- and terminal speakers mentioned above. And one characteristic of such speakers is their lack of linguistic confidence; this often translates into a heightened tension in the process of data gathering which is not to be underestimated and which has been widely reported in the literature on language death (Dorian, 1977, 1981, 1986; Schmidt, 1985; Dressler, 1991; Craig, 1992).

5.3   *Field methodology*

To talk about language obsolescence, one would ideally need to establish a linguistic norm or base from which to evaluate the type of change induced by the process of language death. However, the same reasons that hasten the demise of the language make establishing such a base often difficult if not downright impossible. Dying languages are usually the languages of very marginalized populations whose language has not received linguistic attention previously, hence it is common not to have materials that reflect the past "healthy" state of the language. An advanced stage of obsolescence also means that few speakers are left and the common impossibility of any standard quantitative research. The social marginality of the communities of speakers, and within them of the last speakers, also severely limits the possibilities of experimental methodologies.

"Real time" studies in which older documentation of the language is compared to the present state of decay are rare in the literature, but a good example is Hill (1973) in which textual material on Cupeno and Luiseno from southern California was available over a span of 50 years. The data were abundant and varied enough to show that the reduction in the use of subordinate clauses was an attribute of the process of language death, independent of speaker, style, topic, or recording technique.

More available is the possibility of a compensatory type of study referred to as "apparent time" study, in which the speech of older, and supposedly more traditional and "better" speakers, is compared to that of younger speakers who may be fluent and have acquired full communicative competence but who are also agents of language change. This is the major strategy of the two most comprehensive studies of the process of language death to date: that of Eastern Sutherland Gaelic (Dorian, 1981) and that of Dyirbal (Schmidt, 1985). Otherwise, information on language death comes from the kind of informal comparison made post facto with data collected not with a study of language death per se in mind, as in Mithun (1989).

The main methodology in which students receive some training in the traditional university linguistic field methods courses, that of direct elicitation, is also about the most delicate to use in situations of language obsolescence. First conjure up the image of a work session somewhere in the tropics with an illiterate rain-forest dweller, a fluent speaker of his/her language with whom one shares a shaky knowledge of a working language, then imagine yourself asking this speaker to translate something like "If I had known that he was not going, I would have stayed" to check on conditionals in the language. Chances of the linguist getting anything close to an actual translation of this sentence are actually very very slim, as experienced fieldworkers know. And turning to asking about grammatical judgments is even less reliable, since the concept of grammaticality is a very elusive notion for speakers of unwritten, nonstandardized, and generally stigmatized languages. A safer route to the documentation of such languages is to collect samples of natural

. to establish a
induced by the
n the demise of
not downright
y marginalized
ion previously,
ealthy" state of
it few speakers
e research. The
hem of the last
thodologies.
iguage is com-
e, but a good
l Luiseno from
The data were
ise of subordi-
ndependent of

idy referred to
iposedly more
nger speakers
impetence but
egy of the two
:o date: that of
chmidt, 1985).
id of informal
ly of language

raining in the
direct elicita-
juage obsoles-
: in the tropics
language with
then imagine
id known that
tionals in the
actual transla-
l fieldworkers
i even less re-
in for speakers
uages. A safer
iles of natural

speech, narrative texts being a standard type of text collected, to work out with bilingual speakers a transcription and a translation for them, and then to tackle the morphemic and syntactic analysis through controlled direct elicitation from the texts themselves. There is another way around the problem, one few linguists have the genius, the inclination, or the time for, which is for the linguist to learn to speak the language to be able to conduct interviews in it (Ken Hale being one of the most famous for doing this). But obsolescent language means limited exposure to the language to be learned and even more limited opportunities for practice.

Now what happens when the language investigated is a dying language and the language is not spoken in the community anymore, and the older speakers can't or won't tell stories to a tape recorder, or some will but they can't help transcribe and translate them, and the semi- and terminal speakers available can't do it either or won't do it because it would look like disrespect toward the elder to give one's personal interpretation of someone else's account? What about "methodology" then? One hears about linguists in the US who participated in the survey of Californian languages sitting next to stricken older last speakers for hours waiting for them to provide some trickle of information, a few lexical words, a truncated verbal paradigm.

Methodologically one is better off studying the process of language death if one deals with a less terminal stage of it (but one cannot always choose), and studies a situation more likely to be referred to as one of language shift. In such a situation, there is enough of a population of fluent elder speakers, fluent younger speakers and semi-speakers to be able to turn to quantitative methodologies, based on the collection of data through surveys and questionnaires (Dorian, 1981; Schmidt, 1985). But rarely will it be possible to model research on dying minority/ethnic languages after the type of research done at present on the language shift of immigrant populations of Europe or the USA, such as the ones discussed by De Bot and Weltens (1991) or Silva-Corvalán (1991), for instance.

As for an experimental approach of the type used in the studies of language loss presented in Lambert and Freed (1982) or De Bot and Weltens (1991), which were based largely on grammatical judgments, it would seem unlikely that it would be even conceivable in many actual field situations of language death.

Salvage linguistics, as fieldwork on dying languages is sometimes called, is therefore characterized by field conditions which are not often amenable to the research methodologies taught in field methods and other methodological academic courses in linguistics departments.

6 Fieldwork Ethics for Work on Endangered Languages

As work on endangered languages is becoming an acknowledged priority of the linguistic profession, it also becomes necessary to develop a more con-

sciously ethical model of field research in the face of increasingly more complex field situations.

6.1   *Response of the profession to the situation of endangered languages*

There are signs of an increasingly orchestrated response of the linguistic profession to the issue of the rapid decline of the vast majority of the languages of the world. Linguists are becoming engaged in the debate of whether and how to document, protect, and maintain endangered languages, much as biologists before them became engaged in the protection of endangered animal and plant species (Wurm, 1991; Krauss, 1992).

In the US, the debate has progressed through a chain of events in the Linguistic Society of America, starting with a special symposium on endangered languages in 1991, which was followed by the LSA resolution to respond to the situation by "encouraging the documentation, study, and measures in support of obsolescent and threatened languages" (LSA Bulletin no. 131), and by the creation of the LSA Committee on Endangered Languages, which established special sessions on endangered languages at the 1995 LSA meeting (Ken Hale, president). The debate on the position of field linguists working on endangered languages can be partly followed in a series of "Language" publications, starting with Hale and others (1992), debated by Ladefoged (1992), and refuted by Dorian (1993a).

Meanwhile the Permanent International Committee of Linguists sponsored the publication of a state of affairs study of endangered languages (Robins and Uhlenbeck, 1991) in time for the 1992 International Congress of Linguists in Quebec, which focused on the case of endangered languages.

The earliest and most intense scene of debate however was Australia, where field linguists were confronted in the 1980s with the issue of what constitutes responsible linguistics in the context of work on endangered aboriginal languages. In response to the statement of "Linguistic Rights of Aboriginal and Islander Communities" formulated by the Aboriginal Language Association in 1984, the Australian Linguistic Society endorsed in 1990 a statement of professional ethics which makes explicit the responsibility of the linguist toward the linguistic community studied (Wilkins, 1992: 174).

The issue of endangered languages is being raised in most parts of the world today by indigenous communities of speakers. In the US a move to protect Native American languages from the dangers of the English Only Movement led to the Native Language Act of 1990, which establishes the right of native communities to protect, maintain, and develop their ethnic languages. In Latin America it was a central theme of all the protests of indigenous peoples against the 1992 quincentenary celebrations of the supposed "discovery" of the Americas. A place to sense the new relation being established in much of the Americas between linguists and indigenous speakers is Guatemala, where

gly more com-

ndangered

the linguistic
ity of the lan-
ate of whether
tages, much as
idangered ani-

events in the
um on endan-
solution to re-
n, study, and
(LSA Bulletin
langered Lan-
iguages at the
psition of field
wed in a series
2), debated by

ists sponsored
es (Robins and
of Linguists in

istralia, where
nat constitutes
tboriginal lan-
iboriginal and
ie Association
i statement of
of the linguist

ts of the world
ove to protect
nly Movement
right of native
languages. In
enous peoples
'discovery" of
ed in much of
temala, where

Mayan speakers have been articulating their expectations of linguists working on Mayan languages (Cojti, 1990; England, 1992).

An important point to make is that the responsibility toward endangered languages, as spelled out in the LSA 1992 resolution, encompasses "fostering the granting of degrees, positions, and promotion in academic institutions for such work," which is to say that the responsibility is not limited to linguistic fieldworkers. All faculty members, independent of their own sphere of specialization, can therefore contribute to minimizing the academic dissonance often noted between the demands of work on endangered languages and the demands of traditional academic careers, and make the work possible.

6.2 Fieldwork framework for fieldworkers: responsibility to the people studied

The complexity of research based on fieldwork resides in part in balancing multiple responsibilities toward various constituents, such as the people studied, the academic profession, and the sponsors. There is no tradition in the field of linguistics of discussing such issues of ethics, although a fairly ample literature on the matter exists in other fields that also rely on fieldwork, such as various branches of sociology or anthropology. Recent debates on the topic of fieldwork ethics are partly reflected in the updated versions of a number of professional codes of ethics in the social sciences, one particularly relevant for linguists being the 1990 revision of the American Anthropological Association code of ethics, for instance.

Doing fieldwork today is clearly not what it was at the turn of the century, or 50, or even 20 years ago. This evolution of a fieldwork framework is well captured in a recent work by Cameron and others (1993) which focuses on the issue of the power relationship between the researcher and the researched and outlines three frameworks. The "ethical framework" is the traditional academic framework of research ON the people, that of the time of the first codes of ethics of the profession; the "advocacy framework" which emerged in the seventies in the midst of social movements is about research ON and FOR the people, while the "empowerment framework" is a framework in the making that responds to the social conditions of present-day field situations and is about research ON, FOR, and WITH the people.

This last framework is characterized by a basic collaborative approach which establishes reciprocity between researcher and researched. Models of such collaborative relationships between academic linguists and indigenous communities are the Hualaapai project described by Watahomigie and Yamamoto (1987) and the Yipirinya Aboriginal project described by Wilkins (1992).

Working FOR and WITH the people means linguists getting involved in language maintenance and language revitalization projects. It also means building into the work the training of native and regional linguists whenever possible, as recommended in the LSA resolution too. Language revitalization

of obsolescent languages is an issue of debate well articulated by Fishman (1991) who argues that it is a matter of ideology whether the attempt is even considered desirable (see also Dorian, 1987, for reasons for it). For those of the linguistic profession who believe it is, the question then turns to whether "reversing language shift" is possible, and if it is, what the responsibility of the linguists in the process might be.

An example of such a project which combines academic salvage linguistics and community language management is the Rama Language Project, a case of language revitalization of a very obsolescent language for ethnic identity purposes, led by a fluent semi-speaker language rescuer, and described by Craig (1992a, b).

7   Conclusion: Setting an Agenda

Priority should be given to the documentation of endangered languages, for the intrinsic scientific value of the knowledge encapsulated in those languages, for the human value of their role in cultural identity, for the scientific interest in the process of attribution of which language death is a case, for what aspects of human cognition are reflected in language structure.

There is a need for linguists to couple salvage linguistics and archiving efforts with their participation in efforts at revitalizing or maintaining threatened languages. The linguistic research must be as comprehensive as possible and address the issue of the articulation of language structure with language, as much remains to be understood about the actual process of language death. On the other hand, the demands of coupling academic research and language revitalization work is best handled by teams of academics in negotiated fieldwork and collaborative projects in which the participation of the affected population is effective and real.