

11 Language death

11.1 Introduction

Language death occurs in unstable bilingual or multilingual speech communities as a result of language shift from a regressive minority language to a dominant majority language (Dressler 1988: 184)

Dressler's definition immediately allows us to link the special social context of language death with its linguistic consequences: as we shall see below, language death essentially involves 'normal' linguistic changes, but occurring at an accelerated rate for particular sociolinguistic reasons. Language death consequently resembles pidginisation and creolisation, which together contribute to language birth, in several respects: all these processes involve linguistic contact; all are partly motivated by social factors; all involve characteristic subsets of linguistic changes; and all, although our knowledge of them is still rather limited, seem to have important implications for linguistic theory, language acquisition, and language change.

Although the study of language death as a field in its own right is very recent (the first major study is probably Dorian 1981), people have been aware that languages disappear for much longer. For instance, Swadesh (1948) is one of the earliest commentators on language death, although he concentrates almost exclusively on the social context of disappearing languages, rather than on structural changes which might result. Some early comments on dying languages are also judgemental in tone, condemning the speech of residual informants: we shall reject this evaluative approach, especially since, as Swadesh (1948: 234-5) notes, it seems that '... the factors determining the obsolescence of languages are by nature incapable of surviving changed social conditions.' However, in Chapter 12 we shall review nineteenth-century theories of language change which saw certain language types as more suited for survival than others, and discuss the suitability of biological terms like language death for the description of linguistic changes.

The definition of language death we shall adopt essentially involves a transfer of allegiance of part of a population from a language which has been native in the area, to a more recently introduced language in which the indigenous population has become bilingual. The new language is generally spoken natively by more powerful speakers, who may also be more numerous, and is typically associated by speakers of the minority language with prestige, wealth and progress. The minority language is then effectively deserted by its speakers, becoming appropriate for use in fewer and fewer contexts, until it is entirely supplanted by the incoming language. Although terminology in this area is not yet settled, I shall call this sociolinguistic change *language shift*. However, there are also linguistic consequences for the dying minority language. Parents will typically stop passing this language on to their children, who will not use it enough to become fully fluent speakers; the minority language will therefore die over several generations, with items of vocabulary and constructions gradually falling out of use. I shall use the term *linguistic obsolescence* for these gradual changes which are the linguistic concomitant of language shift. It might be argued that obsolescence is not a particularly felicitous term, given the connotational connections of 'obsolete' with objects which are old-fashioned and out of date, and which have generally been replaced by better models. I have already said that I do not intend any categorisation of Language X as better or worse than Language Y; but it might be noted that the use of the term 'obsolete' in its less impartial sense accords well with native speakers' judgements of their obsolescing language, which they typically regard as being of little practical use in the modern world, and often of purely sentimental value.

It is not yet clear whether obsolescence can be arrested or even reversed once it has begun (see Fishman 1991), or whether eventual death will ultimately be predictable from signs of obsolescence. However, for present purposes, we might tentatively accept that language shift and linguistic obsolescence together entail eventual language death.

This preliminary definition of language death is, however, intended to be exclusive as well as inclusive. Most readers will probably have encountered the phrase 'dead languages' in connection with Latin or Ancient Greek (often as part of a query as to why one is studying them). However, what has happened to Greek or Latin is not death, but metamorphosis; the normal processes of linguistic change have affected these systems, transforming Ancient Greek into Modern Greek, and causing Latin to diversify into its present-day Romance descendants, including French, Catalan, Italian and Portuguese. Since modern forms of Latin and Greek are still in everyday use, the languages have not died.

Three further situations, involving the actual loss rather than change of

a language, are to be excluded from our study of language death; these are described by Campbell and Muntzel (1989). The first is sudden death, which involves the loss of a language through the death of all its speakers, as happened following the European colonisation of Tasmania in the nineteenth century: the last speaker of Tasmanian died in 1876 (Swadesh 1948). The relative shortness of this period means that there was effectively no obsolescing stage. A similar situation is that of radical death, which is again rapid but is typically motivated by political oppression. For instance (Campbell and Muntzel 1989), an uprising of peasants in El Salvador in 1932 was put down by a massacre of at least 25,000 Indians. Speakers of Indian languages like Lenca and Cacaopera stopped using these as a form of self-defence, so that they would not be identified as Indians. Again, the rapidity of the death of these languages has stopped any gradual structural decay. Finally, we shall not be dealing with 'bottom-to-top death', which involves the loss of a language from casual contexts first, with retention longer in ritual contexts – the opposite of the norm in language death, where, as we shall see, minority languages tend to be retained longest in casual, intimate, in-group exchanges. Campbell and Muntzel (1989) describe various cases of 'bottom-to-top death': one involves a 'speaker' of Chiapanec who knew only a few residual words, plus a long religious text called an *alabanza*, or 'hymn of praise', which he had memorised to perform on ritual occasions, although he did not know what the text meant. Similarly, although less radically, Huffines (1989) notes that Pennsylvania German is now predominantly used only in church.

These special cases will not be discussed further here. Instead, we shall consider two commonly distinguished subtypes of gradual language death (see Aitchison 1981), which rejoice in the names of language suicide and language murder. Again, these terms are not altogether settled, although they appear fairly regularly in the literature; and in fact, they are arguably not entirely appropriate. As we shall see below, the criteria for distinguishing between the two types of language death have not been clearly established: they are largely based on the degree of relationship between the two languages involved, in that language suicide typically involves a creole and its superstrate, while in language murder the dying language and the new language need not be related at all. Obviously, this is not a rigid definition, and might in practice be rather hard to apply. Furthermore, the terms could be misleading if we take them to refer to the attitudes of the speakers of the dying language, since we might suppose that in a case of suicide the speakers voluntarily abandoned their language, while in murder they were forced to do so, despite resistance. In fact, this is not the case at all: as we shall see, one of the main factors involved in language murder is the marked reluctance of many dying language speakers to use their native

variety, and their willingness to embrace the newer and more prestigious language in the community. Instead, suicide and murder must be construed as referring to the effect on the dying variety – in cases of suicide, it absorbs a considerable quantity of material from the more prestigious language, while in murder, it is simply ousted by the newcomer, without necessarily undergoing much borrowing.

In a new subfield, these preliminary terminological difficulties are inevitable; and in the rest of this chapter, I shall adopt the terms language suicide and language murder, but with the above caveats in mind. Language suicide will be discussed in 11.2, and four case-studies of the more common language murder in 11.3; and in 11.4 we shall attempt to isolate some common features of language death and compare these to pidginisation and creolisation.

11.2 Language suicide

In language suicide, the less prestigious of two closely-related languages co-existing in a community progressively borrows words and constructions from the more prestigious language, until the two eventually become almost indistinguishable. The less prestigious language consequently appears to commit suicide by absorbing more and more material from its socially superior neighbour. The few studies of language suicide which have appeared (see especially Aitchison 1981) have tended to concentrate on situations where a creole 'gets devoured by its parent' (Aitchison 1981: 210), to the extent that language suicide has become almost synonymous with decreolisation.

Decreolisation is apt to begin when a creole remains in contact with its superstrate language. The superstrate is often the medium of education, government, commerce and the professions, reinforcing an assignment of prestige: as Todd (1990) notes, decreolisation among the English-based creoles is furthest advanced in the West Indies, since English-medium education has been compulsory there for much longer than in West Africa or Papua New Guinea. Under these circumstances, there is a strong social motivation for creole speakers to learn the superstrate, and they will therefore tend to avoid particularly stereotyped features of the creole, and to introduce features of the superstrate into their speech.

However, the creole does not immediately disappear, leaving the superstrate as the sole language of the area. Instead, a creole continuum develops; in the speech community, a continuum of varieties will come into existence, with the superstrate, or *acrolect*, at one end, and the 'deep' creole, or *basilect*, at the other. In-between are a number of varieties,

implicational scale for six features is given in (2). If features A-F are all acrolectal, then speaker 1 uses the acrolect consistently, speaker 7 uses the basilect, and speakers 2-6 speak mesolectal varieties.

(2)

Speaker	Feature					
	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	y	y	y	y	y	y
2	y	y	y	y	y	n
3	y	y	y	y	n	n
4	y	y	y	n	n	n
5	y	y	n	n	n	n
6	y	n	n	n	n	n
7	n	n	n	n	n	n

y = feature found; n = feature not found

The next question is how the superstrate influences the creole, or how acrolectal features are introduced into the basilect to produce the creole continuum. Aitchison (1981) makes some suggestions based on the decreolisation of Tok Pisin in urban areas of Papua New Guinea. Tok Pisin is one of the official languages of Papua New Guinea, but English is also widely used, for instance in commerce and as the medium of university education; contact with the superstrate is therefore maintained. Tok Pisin is the language of government and is used in parliament in Port Moresby, the capital; however, paradoxically, this official recognition provides the main motivation for the first step in decreolisation, since Tok Pisin lacks vocabulary for parliamentary topics. Many words in the creole already have English models, and consequently there is no particular difficulty about borrowing more: for instance, Aitchison (1981: 212) quotes a radio broadcast in which English-derived words and expressions like *oposisen* 'opposition', *palamen* 'parliament', *mosin ov nou konfidens* 'motion of no confidence', *praim ministia* 'Prime Minister' and *konstitusin* 'constitution' are extremely prevalent and, despite their minor adaption to the creole spelling and sound systems, extremely obvious.

As we saw in Chapter 8, large-scale lexical borrowing may be the first stage in a far-reaching set of contact-induced changes, and this seems to be the case in Tok Pisin. Borrowing is now widespread for at least some urban creole speakers in other semantic fields; for instance, the system of temporal expressions in Tok Pisin is being replaced by English forms. Thus, the English-based phrase *de bihain long tumoro* 'day after tomorrow' is replacing the earlier pidgin *haptumora*, while expressions like *foa klok* 'four o'clock', *hapas tri* 'half-past three' are becoming common even in rural areas, instead of the pidgin terms which typically refer to the position of the sun or the amount of light so that 6 p.m. is *taim bilong san i godaun*. These temporals seem rather easy to borrow because the days of the week,

collectively known as the mesolect. The two end-points of the continuum are likely to be mutually unintelligible, and will not both be used by the same speaker; but each speaker will typically control various adjacent points along the continuum. Crucially, then, the creole continuum does not represent a model of a single speaker, but of language use in a speech community. It is also both synchronic and diachronic; for instance, Bickerton (quoted Romaine 1988: 165) reports on the basis of his work in Guyana that 'a synchronic cut across the Guyanese community is indistinguishable from a diachronic cut across a century and a half of linguistic development.' In other words, diachronic changes are preserved in synchronic structure. An example of a partial continuum is given in (1) below; the basilect is Guyanese Creole, while the acrolect is clearly a dialect of English.

(1)

Guyanese Creole:	
<i>mi gi am</i>	
<i>mi bin gi am</i>	
<i>mi bin gi ii</i>	
<i>mi bin gi ii</i>	
<i>mi di gi ii</i>	
<i>mi di gi hii</i>	
<i>a di gi ii</i>	
<i>a di gi ii</i>	
<i>a did gi ii</i>	
<i>a did gi ii</i>	
<i>a did gi hii</i>	
<i>a gi ii</i>	
<i>a gi im</i>	
<i>a gi him</i>	
<i>a geev ii</i>	
<i>a geev im</i>	
<i>a geev him</i>	
<i>I gave him</i>	

English:
(Romaine 1989: 158-59)

Finally, early work assumed that the creole continuum resulted from random mixing of the acrolectal and basilectal grammars, giving rise to an unprincipled jumble of varieties in between. However, the continuum seems to be much more structured than this, and can be analysed and formally described using a technique known as implicational scaling. We need not pursue this in detail here (see Romaine 1988 for details), but the basic idea is that linguistic change from the basilect towards the acrolect will proceed in a particular order, with certain features changing before others in the community. Consequently, a synchronic scale can be created to show that, if a certain speaker uses a particular feature, he will also use certain others; while a feature located near the basilectal end of the scale will be incompatible with one close to the acrolect. A schematised

and words like *wik* 'week', *yia* 'year' already have English models; and they bring with them the English plural affix *-s*, giving *tri des*, *wan an haf awas*, *wikends* and so on (Aitchison 1981: 214). Although we cannot predict this with any certainty, it seems likely that the *-s* affix will now spread to other constructions. Furthermore, the volume of English loans is also affecting the Tok Pisin sound system; for instance, the introduction of *after* and *afternoon* instead of pidgin *apinun* has legitimated the previously disallowed medial cluster [ft].

Two caveats must be borne in mind in connection with decreolisation. First, we should not automatically assume that all change in a creole system is in the direction of the superstrate; the basilect may also act as a model for change in some circumstances. This is the case in recreolisation, which Romaine (1988: 192) describes as a 'refocussing of norms in the direction of basilectal speech'. For instance, in London, young black British people descended from West Indian immigrants are now tending to use overtly creole forms in adolescence as a method of reinforcing and stating their identity. This does not involve simply an exaggerated use of the language of the parents – as is shown by the fact that Jamaican Creole forms are used even by speakers whose parents come from other islands – but rather a conscious choice of maximally basilectal forms. The resulting system, London Jamaican, is neither standard English nor Jamaican Creole; it relies predominantly on those forms which are most different from standard English, and is therefore to some extent stereotyped, lacking the usual range of stylistic options of the creole.

Secondly, the frequent association of language suicide with decreolisation should not lead us to assume that only creoles and their superstrates can be involved in this type of change. For instance, the characteristic continuum found in decreolisation is mirrored in the range of varieties which can be found in an area where a non-standard local dialect and a more prestigious standard variety are spoken: an example is given in (3), which shows a continuum of forms which might be found among Catholic speakers in Northern Ireland. The top, or basilectal end of the continuum shows rather strong Irish Gaelic influence, whereas the final, acrolectal example is indistinguishable from standard English, except for the colloquial *buyin'* form; and of course, in performance this would be produced with a Northern Irish accent.

- (3) *Yiz is buyin' bread that biz kyoch*
Yiz is buyin' bread that diz be kyoch
Yiz is buyin' bread that biz raw in the middle
Yiz is buyin' bread that diz be raw in the middle
Yiz are buyin' bread that does be raw in the middle
Youse are buyin' bread that does be raw in the middle

You're buyin' bread that's usually uncooked in the middle
 (Romaine 1988: 160)

There might well be another parallel here, since non-standard dialects are characteristically evaluated as less prestigious and desirable than standard varieties, even by their own speakers; consequently, language suicide might be an appropriate description of the loss or reduction in use of a dialect in favour of a standard. Hoenigswald (1989) bemoans the lack of studies on dialect death; but this is now being partially remedied. For instance, Jones (1992) argues on the basis of extensive fieldwork in two Welsh communities that Welsh dialects are becoming increasingly mixed and standardised, to the extent that young Welsh speakers can no longer reliably identify features as belonging to their own as opposed to another dialect. Jones concludes that this dialect suicide may strengthen allegiance to standard Welsh and perhaps enable Welsh to combat the threat of murder by English; but if so, the language will survive at the cost of dialectal diversity.

11.3 Language murder: four case-studies

11.3.1 Hungarian in Austria: Gal (1979)

Although language suicide may be more common than has hitherto been thought, if standardisation and dialect loss are included under this heading as well as decreolisation, language murder arguably still represents a more typical pattern. In language murder, the two systems involved will not be so closely related as a creole and its superstrate, or a dialect and standard, and in fact need not be related at all; and the gradual loss of the less prestigious, minority language does not necessarily follow massive borrowing from the dominant language, or involve the formation of a continuum of structures. On the contrary, the majority of changes during obsolescence do not involve borrowing of dominant language structures, and may not even follow patterns in the dominant language; and to the extent that a continuum exists at all, it is a continuum of proficiency in the obsolescing language, rather than a scale of varieties linking the two polar systems. In this section, we shall consider four case-studies of language murder, before attempting a partial summary in 11.4.

Gal (1979) represents one of the earliest detailed studies of the social circumstances in which a language may be lost. In this case, the language is Hungarian, as spoken in the village of Oberwart (or Felsőőr) in the Burgenland of eastern Austria. Of course, even if Hungarian should be entirely lost from Oberwart, and from Austria, it is likely to survive in Hungary as the national language; and even if it does not, its death there

will be a separate matter from its 'murder' by German in Austria. However, the context and consequences of language shift and obsolescence seem much the same regardless of whether an entire language or a residual or immigrant variety outside the indigenous area is involved, so that we may refer to both as *language death*.

Oberwart is one of five Hungarian-speaking villages in the Burgenland; all were settled around 1,000 years ago as Hungarian guarding communities. An influx of German speakers between 1200 and 1600 has left the former guarding communities as 'speech islands' surrounded by German and not directly in contact with other Hungarian speakers. Oberwart itself has been a bilingual community for at least 400 years: however, in 1921, when the village was granted to Austria, 75 per cent of the population spoke Hungarian, whereas in 1971 only 25 per cent did, and these were all peasants or the children of peasants. Language shift is clearly well under way – the question is how and why this shift has happened.

Oberwart expanded greatly in the nineteenth century from a mainly Hungarian-speaking peasant community to a small city with an increased population and a thriving commercial centre. The newcomers were predominantly German-monolingual Lutherans, who became a new, richer class of merchants and artisans. However, a counterbalancing influx of Catholic, Hungarian-speaking professionals also entered the town in the later nineteenth century, leading to a policy of Magyarisation, whereby Hungarian increasingly became the language of the professional élite and of higher education, although German was retained in the Lutheran community. Magyarisation was effectively halted when Oberwart became part of Austria in 1921; the Hungarian élite mainly fled to Hungary, and those Hungarians left were almost exclusively peasants, who gradually became bilingual. Ties with Hungary were considerably loosened by the German Anschluss in 1938, and by the Communist regime in Hungary thereafter, meaning that Hungarian has gradually become less prestigious. This is especially true since Hungarian is strongly associated with peasant life, which is now seen as undesirable. More German monolinguals have settled in the community, and German is being used in progressively more contexts, while Hungarian speakers now tend to assert that you can't go very far, either geographically or socially, with Hungarian. Children are tending not to learn Hungarian unless both their parents are Hungarian speakers, while parents are proud if their children speak German with no Hungarian influence. In short, German is seen as the language of education and of the wage-earning future, while Hungarian is the language of the peasant community and of the past.

Since all Oberwart Hungarian speakers are now bilingual, it is also interesting to see when they tend to use Hungarian, and when German is

favoured. Gal argues that the single most important factor in language choice is the speaker's age and peasant status: young people rarely speak Hungarian, sometimes leading to unreciprocal communication where parents or grandparents address a child or grandchild in Hungarian, but the child answers in German. The other crucial factor is the identity and status of the interlocutor. When a German monolingual is present, all Hungarian speakers will use German. German is also typically used to young people, government officials, and the doctor, while Hungarian is most frequently used when talking to God, grandparents, and black market clients; these are friends or acquaintances who visit the informant's house to have unlicensed carpentry, hairdressing or some similar service done.

However, identity of speaker and of interlocutor are not enough to predict language choice: we must also take account of each informant's social network (see Chapter 9). Gal assessed network structure by asking thirty-two informants, fourteen men and eighteen women, to give an account of their day-to-day contacts, then determined whether each informant's contacts were predominantly with peasants or non-peasants. Status as a peasant depended on eleven criteria: these included ownership of animals, especially cows or pigs; possession of an inside toilet; and wearing of traditional clothes, aprons for men and kerchiefs for women. In short (Gal 1979: 141), 'the statuses of the speaker's social contacts predicted language choice at least as powerfully as the speaker's own status'. For instance, Gal interviewed two men, János Vonatos and Sándor Acs, who were much the same age, were both workers, and were of the same 'degree of peasantness'. However, their social networks differed, and this correlated highly with the amount of Hungarian spoken. János Vonatos interacted mainly with non-peasants, and spoke Hungarian only to his grandparents, while Sándor Acs had most contacts with peasants, and spoke Hungarian to everyone except his children, to whom he spoke sometimes German and sometimes Hungarian.

Gal's investigation suggests that German is being introduced gradually into Oberwart, encroaching progressively on linguistic territory once occupied by Hungarian. Thus, although Oberwart peasants probably spoke little German before the 1920s or 1930s, all are now bilingual and typically use German to more categories of interlocutors in each generation. Hungarian is now a mark of peasant identity or peasant ancestry, and is used predominantly in in-group usage, among people with a high degree of peasantness. It is illuminating that Hungarian alone tended to be used in black market dealings, a risky business requiring trust from all parties; the use of a system affirming group membership would be particularly appropriate in such a context.

Gal's study concentrates on language shift; she does not comment in detail on any signs of linguistic obsolescence. There is a good deal of unidirectional lexical borrowing from German into Hungarian, although Gal's (1979: 81) comment that 'virtually any German word equipped with Hungarian suffixes and grammatical markers can appear in a Hungarian sentence' suggests that Hungarian grammar is not being affected. We shall now go on to look at another case of language shift, this time with more documentation on the linguistic changes involved.

11.3.2 *East Sutherland Gaelic: Dorian (1981)*

Nancy Dorian's pioneering fieldwork on Scottish Gaelic, reported in Dorian (1981) and in several papers (Dorian 1973, 1977a, 1977b, 1978), represents the first attempt to study intensively both the social motivation for language shift and the linguistic changes which follow in the dying language. Although Dorian concentrates on one dialect of Gaelic, namely that of East Sutherland, she still refers to her findings as indicating language death since East Sutherland Gaelic (ESG) is in fact under threat from a distinct language, English, rather than a related dialect. Furthermore, although Dorian investigates only this one variety, the fate of Scottish Gaelic in general is uncertain, and it is almost certainly dying as a whole, albeit at a rather slower rate than is the case for ESG.

Dorian has been carrying out fieldwork in the three villages of Brora, Golspie and Embo since the early 1960s, working with speakers from all areas of the proficiency continuum. There are now no Gaelic monolinguals in the area, rather an increasing number of English monolinguals, especially among the younger people; 100 out of 202 of Dorian's fluent Gaelic speakers died during the course of her fieldwork between 1963 and 1978, underlining the fact that it is now the language of the old. In Brora and Golspie, there are still some Gaelic-dominant bilinguals, all over seventy years of age. In Embo, a smaller and more isolated village, Gaelic has survived further down the age scale, and there are still some younger fluent speakers in their forties; 30.4 per cent of the population of Embo claimed to speak Gaelic in 1972, compared to 1.6 per cent in Brora and 3 per cent in Golspie. In all three communities, there are also semi-speakers, usually younger people who understand Gaelic well and speak it to a limited extent, but in a much-reduced form; Dorian was the first to identify this semi-speaker phenomenon, and we shall return to it below.

Gaelic was almost certainly spoken in East Sutherland before AD 900 (Dorian 1981). Sutherland was probably bilingual during the Viking period, but Gaelic regained the ascendancy in the thirteenth century. It was common with most of the Scottish aristocracy of the time, the Earls of

Sutherland used Latin, French, English and Scots, but not Gaelic; and gradually Gaelic became confined to the poor, with English or Scots the prestigious language of the ruling class. From the eighteenth century, after the Act of Union joining Scotland and England, the Earls of Sutherland lived mostly in London, and attempted to discourage the use of Gaelic (and Scots) among their tenants by requiring such education as there was to be through the medium of English. Highland chiefs, attempting to live the expensive life of the Court, forcibly removed the peasants and small farmers from their land in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in what have become known as the Highland Clearances, making way for intensive and profitable sheep-farming. The displaced tenants were frequently forced into emigration; in East Sutherland, they were also resettled on the coast, in communities like Brora, Golspie and Embo, and encouraged to take up fishing for a living; since they were typically given too little land to survive by farming, this opportunity was in the nature of Hobson's choice.

The arrival from around 1850 of numerous English-speaking sheep farmers, and of English-medium education, ended the centuries-old isolation of East Sutherland. Gaelic almost immediately began to decline rapidly. Dorian (1981: 51) argues that 'in terms of possible routes towards language death, it would seem that a language which has been demographically stable for several centuries may experience a sudden "tip", after which the demographic tide flows strongly in favour of some other language. In eastern Sutherland the end of a protective isolation precipitated this tip locally, exposing Gaelic speakers to the forces which had greatly favoured English nationally for several hundred years.' As English spread from the top of the social order downwards, Gaelic became restricted to the lowest members of the hierarchy; and these were the fishers.

It might be thought that the influx of cleared Gaelic speakers into the coastal settlements would strengthen the language, but in fact exactly the opposite happened. The newcomers, although Gaelic monolinguals, were looked down on by the existing inhabitants, partly because they were generally destitute, and partly because of their involvement with fishing which, although potentially lucrative, was seen as dirty and dangerous. The fishers in Brora, Golspie and Embo represented an isolated social group; each village has an area called 'Fishertown', and fishermen and their families only very rarely settled outside this area. Inter-marriage among fishing families was the norm, with marriage outside the occupational group almost unheard of before the First World War. Furthermore, the fishers had gradually become linguistically isolated: they were the last group to become bilingual; their Gaelic remained free of

influence from English longer than that of other groups; they retained imperfect, Gaelic-influenced English for longest; and they are now the last people in the villages Dorian studied to retain Gaelic at all.

All Dorian's informants agreed that the fishers were stigmatised as a social group: for instance, an English monolingual from Brora told her in 1978 that "'a 'fisher' was a term of abuse, there's no question about that'" (Dorian 1981: 61). Only the itinerant tinkers came lower on the social hierarchy. The children of fishers could not find work in shops or offices; those seating areas in church were segregated. Many emigrated, and even those remaining began to abandon Gaelic along with other fisher behaviours, adopting English as one route to greater prestige and better employment. Many of the children of fishers are now English monolinguals; and it goes almost without saying that all of Dorian's bilingual informants had been fishermen themselves, or had spent their childhood in a fishing household.

Other factors similarly militate against the survival of ESG, one of the most prominent being education: the Scottish Education Act of 1872 actually fails entirely to mention Gaelic. There is now some Gaelic-medium primary education in the Western Isles, and one secondary school, the Nicholson Institute in Stornoway, conducts some classes in Gaelic. Even here, there are enormous problems, since English has for centuries been preferred to Gaelic for the discussion of technical topics and Gaelic therefore lacks much of the necessary vocabulary. Thus, Thomson (1979: 19) reports that, although there is a good deal of literature in Gaelic, there is little art, music or literary criticism, largely because the relevant terms simply do not exist: 'equivalents for *stream of consciousness*, *empathy*, *counterpoint*, *ambiguity*, even *symbol*, do not leap to mind'. Thomson himself translated a biology textbook for use at the Nicholson Institute, and admits to wrestling with the question of whether to adopt English terminology, or to attempt to translate it into Gaelic, perhaps 'using semantically related Gaelic forms. In the end, he sometimes chose the first solution, as with *chromosome* 'chromosome', *gamete* 'gamete' and *haidro-dean* 'hydrogen', which have only been altered to conform with Gaelic spelling, and sometimes the second, as with *cealla* 'cell', *searbhag* 'acid' and *gintail* 'genetic'. Unfortunately, the hope of having the book adopted by schools in large enough numbers to make the experiment worth the publishers' while repeating for other subjects, seems a faint one. In any case, many parents and children are likely to favour secondary education in English, partly because no university education is available through the medium of Gaelic. Furthermore, the initiatives in the Western Isles (which, laudable though they are, may themselves be too little and too late) are of no help to ESG: outside the Western Isles Region, there is almost no

provision for Gaelic-medium schooling, and very few schools even offer Gaelic as part of the curriculum. For many years, Gaelic was banned at school, and children speaking it, even in the playground, were likely to be punished. Dorian (1981) reports that Gaelic is now taught to a very limited extent in Embo, and there are also night-classes in the ESG area; however, few bilinguals persevere with these as the teachers almost invariably attempt to impose standard, textbook Gaelic and do not accept, or even actively denigrate, ESG. ESG is generally seen as a rather aberrant variety of Gaelic, an opinion shared by its own speakers; they feel that their Gaelic is inadequate and full of errors, complain that they have fewer 'words for things' than their grandparents, and sometimes argue that ESG is not a real language, partly because Gaelic literacy in the area is almost nonexistent. They also claim not to be able to understand other dialects of Gaelic, so that even the small amount of Gaelic television and radio broadcasting which exists is inaccessible to them. Speakers of other Gaelic varieties can generally understand ESG, since it is reduced in comparison to their dialects, but are highly critical of it; one Hebridean speaker told Dorian (1981: 87) that hearing ESG 'made his teeth hurt'.

Despite these problems, many of the speakers of ESG interviewed by Dorian felt more at home in Gaelic than in English, and more emotionally involved with it; they also condemned other bilinguals as 'proud' if they refused to speak Gaelic. However, these attitudes only hold within the older age-group; it is considered quite acceptable not to teach Gaelic to one's children, and those of school-age are now usually passive bilinguals at best. Consequently, even older people now have fewer and fewer opportunities to use ESG, and it is appropriate in a decreasing number of contexts. Gaelic is used in the domains of home life and religion, if at all; and it is also characteristic of joke-telling, and used on shopping trips as a secret language, since shop-keepers tend to be English monolinguals. However, even a large group of bilinguals speaking Gaelic will defer linguistically to an English monolingual who joins the conversation by switching to English.

Let us turn now to the linguistic consequences of this social movement away from Gaelic. Dorian, using a mixture of techniques, including recording conversations, administering questionnaires, and asking informants to translate sentences from English to Gaelic, discovered a continuum of proficiency in the communities she studied, whereby older speakers might still be very fluent, but those younger people who spoke ESG at all tended to use a reduced, simplified variety (except, as we have seen, in Embo, where there was also a group of younger fluent speakers, in their forties). Dorian christened the youngest group, with their aberrant Gaelic, semi-speakers, and found that these had typically had too little exposure to

ESG as children to learn it perfectly. Semi-speakers typically speak more slowly than fluent speakers, and their grammar and phonology will be aberrant from the point of view of the fluent speakers' norms; they also characteristically use more loanwords from the dominant language. Some of the semi-speakers Dorian identified admitted to speaking some Gaelic, while others denied that they could do so. However, all could understand more than they could speak, and many had a passive competence almost equivalent to that of a full bilingual.

Dorian's information on semi-speaker usage comes mainly from translation exercises (Dorian 1977a, 1978, 1981); although she was well-integrated into the communities she worked in, and could therefore obtain good casual continuous speech from her older, more fluent informants, she discovered free conversation to be extremely stressful to semi-speakers, who found that the attempt to consistently speak Gaelic made strong demands on their weak linguistic resources. Semi-speakers generally use little Gaelic, liberally interspersed with English, so that translating individual sentences resembles their normal usage much more; an interesting point when so much sociolinguistic investigation centres around encouraging natural conversation to elicit the vernacular! Fluent speakers similarly enjoyed giving translations, sometimes commenting that they felt they were taking part in a quiz.

In general, semi-speakers displayed the same linguistic behaviour as fluent speakers, but taken to extremes; in other words, ESG is undergoing certain changes for all its speakers, but these are progressing much more quickly in the speech of the semi-speakers. We shall now consider a number of these ongoing changes.

Grammatical information in Scottish Gaelic, and in the other Celtic languages, is often expressed by suffixation, as it is in English; but the Celtic languages also have a system of initial mutations, whereby the initial consonant of a word is changed. These mutations were originally sound changes occurring in particular phonological environments, but as the conditioning sounds were gradually lost, they became fossilised, morphological markers. The two initial mutations of Scottish Gaelic are lenition, which broadly speaking involves a change of voiceless stops to fricatives, and fricatives either to /h/ or to zero; and nasalisation, which primarily replaces voiceless consonants with voiced ones. These mutations are extremely important in verbal morphology: the root /pri/ means 'break', and the unmutated root with a pronoun, /prif a/ is the imperative 'break it!' However, the same form with lenition, /vri/ a/ expresses the past tense, 'it broke', while /brif a/, with nasalisation, is the interrogative future, meaning 'will it break?' These mutations are so common that it is hard to find a sentence without at least one; and any breakdown in the

system of mutations would clearly have profound consequences for Gaelic grammar.

Dorian (1977a) attempted to assess the retention of lenition in ESG by asking 8 fluent speakers and 7 semi-speakers to translate the same 115 English sentences. She concentrated on four contexts in which lenition would normally be expected in Gaelic: the independent form of the past tense; the vocative case; a feminine nominative or accusative noun following the feminine definite article; and an adjective or noun following the common adverbs *glé* 'very' and *ro* 'too' or the numeral *dà* 'two'. The past and vocative are marked solely by lenition, while feminine nouns following the definite article may be identified as feminine only by lenition, although there may also be a feminine diminutive suffix or a feminine pronoun in the next clause to help, so that this instance of lenition is less grammatically salient; finally, lenition after the adverbs and *dà* has no grammatical function whatsoever.

Dorian's results are given in (4) below; the tables show the number of opportunities for use of these types of lenition in her experimental sentences, and the number and percentage of failures for fluent and semi-speakers.

(4)a. Fluent Speakers			
Environment	Opportunities	Failures	%
1. Past	104	0	0
2. Feminine	80	1	1.25
3. Adv./Num.	104	2	2
4. Vocative	59	10	17
b. Semi-speakers			
Environment	Opportunities	Failures	%
1. Past	85	9	10.5
2. Feminine	91	42	46
3. Adv./Num.	70	34	48
4. Vocative	50	37	72

(after Dorian 1977a: 99)

As the percentage figures show, lenition is gradually falling out of use for both the fluent and the semi-speakers, and is following the same pattern in both cases, with strongest retention in the past tense, and weakest in the vocative. However, the loss is much more advanced for the semi-speakers; they retain lenition in feminines and after *dà*, *ro*, *glé* only at around chance level, and fail to mark over 70 per cent of vocatives. It might be expected that decay would be faster after the adverbs than in the vocative, since in the former case the mutation carries no grammatical information; however, Dorian notes that the leniting adverbs and *dà* are extremely common, and that failure to lenite forms following these has the status of a stereotype in the communities she studied, which might promote

retention. On the other hand, although lenition is the only segmental marker of the vocative, there is also suprasegmental marking, involving a change in intonation pattern, which is becoming the sole marker of the vocative for younger semi-speakers. Dorian notes that the presence or absence of marked grammatical categories in English may influence the retention of lenition in Gaelic. For instance, English has a grammatically marked past tense, and this is the context in which lenition is most consistently retained in ESG; however, English has no marking of the vocative case, unless we count an intonation pattern particular to terms of address – and it is in the vocative that the use of lenition has decayed most comprehensively, being replaced by a suprasegmental signal in ESG. However, the influence of the dominant language is insufficient to explain the developing hierarchy of mutation loss or retention, and language internal factors must also be invoked: for instance, Dressler (1988) suggests that lenition (this time a process of voicing) survives best of the three initial mutations operative in Breton because it applies in the greatest number of contexts, affects most consonants, and is a rather natural phonological process.

Dorian (1978) has also tested for loss or retention of morphological marking in the plural of nouns, which, as (5) shows, can be formed in eleven ways. Plurals also have the advantage of occurring very frequently, and hence of being easy to elicit. Again, Dorian asked speakers to translate sentences; this time, four were older fluent speakers, four younger fluent speakers, and between five and eight were semi-speakers – some of these could only cope with relatively simple test material.

(5) Noun Plurals			
	singular	plural	
1. suffixation	/pre: g/	/pre: ɡən/	'lies'
2. final mutation	/p'ū: ntʰ/	/p'ū: ntʰ/	'pounds'
3. suppletion	/tʰɛ/	/t'ro: r/	'houses'
4. quantity change + suffixation	/p'yu: r/	/p'ʰyuriçən/	'sisters'
5. final mutation + suffixation	/se: x/	/se: çən/	'dishes'
6. vowel alternation	/makʰ/	/milkʰ/	'sons'
7. vowel alternation + final mutation	/tʰəul/	/tʰwi: lʰ/	'holes'
8. vowel alternation + suffixation	/kʰu: /	/kʰɔnʰ/	'dogs'
9. vowel alternation + final mutation + suffixation	/yax/	/yɛiçu/	'horses'
10. vowel alternation + syncope + suffixation	/tarəs/	/tərsin/	'doors'

11. quantity change /in'an/ /in'an:/ 'onions' (after Dorian 1978: 595)

Fluent speakers employ suffixation and various quantity changes most frequently, with vowel alternations affecting few but common nouns. However, the semi-speakers use predominantly suffixation, which is now the only productive strategy with loans or new analogical forms. Furthermore, semi-speakers use one suffix, /-ən/, far more frequently than any other, although in Dorian's data nine different suffixes were produced by fluent speakers, and more certainly exist. In fact, use of /-ən/ increases by 17 per cent between the older fluent speakers and the semi-speakers. Finally, semi-speakers relatively frequently fail to mark plurals in any way; zero plurals are unknown to older fluent speakers and occur in only 0.5 per cent of cases for younger fluent speakers, but account for 9 per cent of semi-speaker plurals.

The strategies which seem to be disappearing most rapidly involve lengthening of final consonants, and vowel alternation with final mutation, and semi-speakers seem disinclined to use either vowel alternation or final mutation at all, whether alone or with other pluralising devices; however, these and other minority strategies do remain at a very low level even for the semi-speakers.

Part of the motivation for these developments may again come from English; semi-speakers do not tend to use phonemes which have no English equivalent, and are therefore losing distinctive consonant length, a feature of Gaelic but not of English. Similarly, semi-speakers are weakening the ESG vowel length distinction; and here it should be remembered (see Chapter 3) that Scots and Scottish English are unique among varieties of English in lacking contrastive vowel length. Furthermore, English tends to mark plurals by suffixation, and favours the single suffix /-s/; and although this morphological marker is not itself borrowed into ESG, the pattern of marking plurals in a unified way with a single suffix does seem to influence semi-speaker usage.

Dorian found similar results in a parallel experiment on gerund formation, where fluent speakers also tend to use zero rather frequently; suffixation is also relatively common, particularly involving /-u/, while suppletion affects few, but common verbs. Here again, semi-speakers are turning to simple suffixation, and again one suffix, this time /-əl/, has become very productive for them, moving from 9 per cent for older fluent speakers and 10 per cent for younger fluent speakers to 25.5 per cent for semi-speakers. Zero formations also increase, but only slightly, while final mutation and vowel alternation drop sharply. Again, this reflects to some extent the situation in English, where the gerund is formed consistently with /-ɪŋ/; however, most strategies are again retained, albeit at a very low

level, even by the semi-speakers. As Dorian (1978: 608) puts it, 'ESG might be said to be dying, at least with regard to noun plurals and gerunds, with its morphological boots on'.

Dorian (1973, 1977a, 1977b, 1978, 1981) provides data on many other decaying features of the ESG grammar. For instance, semi-speakers are beginning to fail to mark gender accurately; Gaelic has two grammatical genders, masculine and feminine, and semi-speakers are beginning to generalise the masculine pronoun /a/ to all inanimates, and losing feminine /i/. They also tend to use nasalisation, the mutation formerly appropriate to masculine nouns, after the definite article, rather than lenition for feminines and nasalisation for masculines; but they are generalising the feminine diminutive suffix to all nouns. Consequently, contradictory gender signals are appearing in sentences, and the gender system is breaking down. In terms of cases, the nominative / accusative and the dative are surviving reasonably well, but the vocative, as we have seen, is now signalled only by suprasegmentals for semi-speakers, and the genitive is moribund: Dorian found no genitive plurals from any of her informants, and very few genitive singulars, with all groups preferring to use a prepositional phrase instead. In the verb, the past tense is generally still preserved, although methods of marking it are changing; but semi-speakers no longer control the conditional well, and only five out of ten of Dorian's semi-speakers produced any recognisable conditionals at all. Of two passive constructions in ESG, only one is used by semi-speakers, and two out of seven semi-speakers actually used no correct passives. Finally, Dorian asked her informants for the ESG equivalents of 220 English words; fluent speakers succeeded in translating a minimum of 193 words, and often missed items which they were later heard using in conversation, while semi-speakers failed to produce between 29 and 70 words from the list.

In general, then, Dorian's data seem to suggest that the changes we find in this dying language at least are very like those found in 'normal' language change: for instance, cases are lost and replaced by prepositional phrases, and analogical levelling takes place. However, these changes occur much more rapidly in an obsolescing language, and often strategies for morphological marking are being lost and not replaced; in 'healthy' languages, reduction is often followed by reanalysis or grammaticalisation which produce a new marker. Although the changes found are not exclusive to linguistic obsolescence, then, the rate and the sociolinguistic context of these changes are unique. The swiftness of these changes also means that we should be very cautious in interpreting semi-speaker data; it is, of course, easy to recognise semi-speakers if fluent speakers are still available for comparison, but since semi-speakers often come from a

younger generation than the last fluent speakers, they are likely to be the last, residual speakers of a dying language, and data from them may consequently be used to reconstruct the lost system. However, in interviewing only semi-speakers, we may not know what we are missing; for instance, Dorian (1977b) reports that one semi-speaker from Embo, I. F., has almost entirely lost the mutation of nasalisation, so that if she were the last remaining speaker of ESG, and we had no written records or related languages or dialects to compare, we might not reconstruct such a mutation at all. Of course, this is a slightly far-fetched scenario, but the message is clear: 'It should probably be assumed, wherever a grammar is written or a proto-language reconstructed on the basis of materials gathered from a few last remaining speakers, that the stage of the language represented by those speakers is markedly deviant even in terms of the recent history of the language' (Dorian 1973: 438).

11.3.3 *Irish Gaelic: Hindley (1990)*

Dorian's work on ESG can profitably be compared with Hindley's sociogeographical research on Irish Gaelic, a closely related language facing many of the same problems and threatened from precisely the same direction. Like Gal, Hindley concentrates on the issues of language shift rather than linguistic obsolescence.

Hindley (1990) argues that no single factor can be identified as promoting a sudden 'tip' towards English and away from Irish in Ireland, but rather that the introduction of more prestigious English meant that Irish was gradually felt to be superfluous. English has been spoken in Ireland to some extent since 1170, and there have been occasional large-scale settlements of English speakers in the subsequent centuries. Bilingualism in the Irish people began in the north and east, and by 1800 monoglot Irish speakers were becoming increasingly rare in all areas: the people began to realise that English was the key to new opportunities, and parents encouraged their children to learn English and not to use their Irish. In the 1851 census, 1.5 million out of a total Irish population of 6.5 million people claimed to speak Irish, with approximately 300,000 being monoglots. The discouragement of Irish was helped by the devastating famines of 1845-9 and by subsequent emigration, which together halved the population by 1900.

In 1922, Ireland was divided into the southern Irish Free State, or Eire, and Northern Ireland. In the north, Irish is mainly used in the Catholic community, but it is no longer a native language on a significant scale. Irish is not compulsory at school, and is only relatively rarely an option; and even when offered, it is not overwhelmingly popular: in 1967-70, only

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about 25 per cent of pupils in the minority of schools offering Irish actually took it. Under the National Curriculum currently being introduced, children will have to choose one foreign language from French, German, Spanish, Italian and Irish, and the number studying the language therefore seems set to fall.

In southern Ireland, Irish speakers are now concentrated in the west and the south, in the Gaeltachtaí, or official Irish-speaking areas, established in 1926. Even here, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find habitual speakers of Irish. All Southern Irish children now learn some Irish at school, and it was for some time necessary to pass an examination in Irish to gain the School Leaving Certificate, but this requirement was abolished in 1973-4. In the Gaeltachtaí, teaching through the medium of Irish is also provided.

The compulsory teaching of Irish at school means that Irish has an odd age-profile of speakers for a dying language. Whereas in most obsolescing languages speaker numbers fall gradually with age, in Ireland the percentage of school-age children claiming to know Irish is higher even than for the over-60s. For instance, in the 1981 census, 50.8 per cent of 10- to 14-year-olds are declared as Irish speakers, but only 25.6 per cent of 45- to 64-year-olds. However, this high percentage rapidly tails off as school Irish is forgotten; and the rather artificial nature of these inflated figures is apparent since only 4.9 per cent of 3- to 4-year-olds in the same census are listed as Irish speakers, indicating clearly that Irish is no longer acquired at home, but taught at school.

An additional problem in interpreting census returns is that they involve self-declaration. The inevitable possibility of error is strengthened by the fact that children in the Gaeltachtaí who can demonstrate by their fluency in Irish that Irish is the language of their home can qualify for a small grant, the *deontas*. Furthermore, families can claim large housing grants if all their school-age children have earned the *deontas*, and since the Gaeltachtaí are frequently rather deprived areas economically, there is an obvious motivation for exaggerating the amount of Irish spoken. Although the *deontas* scheme is intended to encourage the use of Irish, Hindley (1990) argues that it is in fact rather divisive, since people in relatively strongly Irish-speaking areas see grants being awarded in other regions where Irish is almost exclusively taught at school, and may then feel that it is not worth trying to pass on the language to their own children. Furthermore, the Irish learned at school is only rarely kept up afterwards, especially among those who leave the Gaeltachtaí. It seems that neither making Irish a compulsory school subject, nor allowing for choice, has significantly helped preserve it: in short, 'the voluntarism of the North is as much a failure as compulsion proved in the South and there is no point

in either ... hoping to recoup its own disasters by emulating the failed policies of the other' (Hindley 1990: 160).

Irish nowadays seems to be supported by a wish to assert an Irish identity; the remoteness of the Gaeltachtaí has been another major factor in the retention of Irish. The compulsory teaching of Irish, Irish-medium teaching in the Gaeltachtaí, and the various grants based on Irish proficiency, have also played some part in maintaining the language. However, there is a much longer list of adverse factors. For instance, speakers of Irish tend to identify strongly with their own dialect, and not with standard Irish, so that the limited amount of Irish radio broadcasting may not be accessible to them; there are also relatively few textbooks for native speakers, most being designed for learners of the standard language. The isolation and poverty of the Gaeltachtaí has led to an association of Irish with deprivation, and inhabitants often speak English to distance themselves from this. Men from the Gaeltachtaí have also tended to move to other areas of Ireland or to Britain to take seasonal jobs, requiring English. As the population becomes more mobile, people leave the Gaeltachtaí to live in the towns, and speak English on return visits. Industrialisation has also introduced monoglot English speakers into the Gaeltachtaí, and intermarriage is becoming more common; and given the sparse population of these areas, a relatively small number of incomers could easily swamp the language. The Gaeltachtaí are also fragmented, so that each Gaeltacht has closer links with adjacent anglicised areas than with other Gaeltachtaí; and the omnipresence of English on television reinforces the message that English is needed for contact outside the Gaeltacht, and for mobility in world terms. In short, the prospects for Irish are not good: 'Large numbers of teachers and officials expect it to "see them out" but longer perspectives and expectations are rare' (Hindley 1990: 214).

11.3.4 *Dyirbal*: Schmidt (1985)

Of 200 or so languages spoken in Australia before the coming of the Europeans, Schmidt (1985) estimates that 50 are now dead and 50 in the process of obsolescing (see also Dixon 1980). The topic of her study is Dyirbal, which was once spoken over around 8000 km² of the rainforest area of North Queensland, but is now confined to a few communities near Murray Upper. Schmidt worked in the closed aboriginal community of Jambun, which has around 100 inhabitants, who mix with outsiders only irregularly. Even in Jambun, however, Dyirbal is being progressively replaced by English; and Schmidt's intention was to investigate the usage of young people aged between fifteen and thirty-nine, who were generally

semi-speakers and often criticised their own Dyrbal, and to compare their Dyrbal with an existing account of the Traditional Dyrbal still spoken by older people.

Dyrbal has progressively become associated with poverty and lack of education, and with an older way of life which tends to be stigmatised increasingly by both white and aboriginal society. English-medium education is compulsory, and the now ubiquitous television broadcasts only in English; there is also no literature in Dyrbal. Parents keen for their children to succeed at school discourage them from speaking Dyrbal, and English is fast becoming the language of primary socialisation in the home. No inhabitant of Jambun is monolingual in Dyrbal, and those aged under fifteen speak a few words of Dyrbal at best, although they may understand a limited amount.

Bilinguals tend to defer to white English monolinguals by switching to English in their presence, so that again the interlocutor factor is important in determining when Dyrbal is spoken. However, whereas normally an obsolescing language will be used more in vertical than in horizontal communication (that is, mostly to older people rather than to one's peers), Dyrbal is not typically used by younger, semi-speakers to their elders. Schmidt (1985) suggests that this is because, unusually in a dying language, older Dyrbal speakers still correct semi-speakers when they deviate from the grammatical norms of Traditional Dyrbal, and especially when they use English loanwords; since semi-speakers are already critical of their own Dyrbal, the fear of being corrected and even ridiculed by their elders seems to discourage them from using the language when older people are present. Consequently, parents often address their children in Traditional Dyrbal, but the children answer in English. Young People's Dyrbal has become an important medium of in-group communication among the 15- to 39-year-olds, but tends to be governed by peer-group norms rather than by those of Traditional Dyrbal, and includes 'morphological simplification and intrusion of English and pidgin-type forms' (Schmidt 1985: 131).

Traditional Dyrbal has a split-ergative system of inflection, so that nouns and their modifiers which are the subject of an intransitive verb or the object of a transitive verb appear in a case known as the absolutive, while subjects of transitive verbs appear in the ergative. The absolutive is unmarked in Traditional Dyrbal, while the ergative has the suffix *-ngu* and a wide range of other allomorphs. In Young People's Dyrbal, however, the better semi-speakers maintain the single suffix *-gu*, while others have lost the ergative – absolutive distinction completely and rely on an English-type system with the word order identifying subject and object; this is quite alien to Traditional Dyrbal, which has exceptionally free word order.

Marking for the locative case is also being lost for young speakers, who are instead introducing English prepositions like *in*, *on* to precede the Dyrbal noun phrase. Among the verbs, Traditional Dyrbal marks futures with the suffix *-ny*, and non-futures with *-nyu* / *-u*, but in Young People's Dyrbal either *-ny* alone is kept, with non-futures unmarked, or increasingly, *-ny* and *-nyu* are used interchangeably and a word like [ɟulga] 'tomorrow' must be introduced to signal futures. Irregular verbs like [yanu] 'go' have also been reformed analogically by semi-speakers. Finally, although the singular-dual-plural distinction is retained by speakers of Young People's Dyrbal, some 'pidgin-type pronoun forms' (Schmidt 1985: 88) are also being introduced: these include *wi-fela*, *yu-fela*, *alugeda* for first, second and third person plural. The first two of these forms also include [f], which has been borrowed from English; Traditional Dyrbal has no fricatives. Semi-speakers are also beginning to use *bin* to mark the past tense, another pidgin-like development.

Young People's Dyrbal has also decayed semantically and lexically with respect to Traditional Dyrbal. In Traditional Dyrbal, there are four classes of nouns: Class I contains human masculines and other animates; Class II has human feminines and nouns relating to water, fire and fighting; Class III has the names of edible fruits and vegetables; and Class IV contains the residue. However, nouns may turn up in an unexpected class for three reasons. If Noun B is mythologically connected with Noun A, it will fall into the same class as Noun A, so that birds ought to be Class I, but are thought to be the spirits of dead women, so that they belong in Class II instead. Secondly, class membership is ruled by concept formation, so that 'fish spear' falls into Class I since it is related to 'fish'. Thirdly, nouns denoting harmful things are placed in a separate class; thus, 'fish' is Class I, but 'stonefish', a dangerous variety, is placed in Class II to mark its harmfulness. In Young People's Dyrbal, less-fluent speakers have reorganised this system so that it is based only on animacy and sex. Classes III and IV are collapsed, using the markers from Class III, and the single resulting class contains nouns denoting inanimates; Class I is for masculine animates, and Class II for feminine animates. The rules for transferring nouns between classes have been lost entirely.

Finally, there is a great deal of lexical borrowing from English into Young People's Dyrbal. While older speakers object to this, and attempt to supply the appropriate Traditional Dyrbal forms, among young people there is little resistance to the intrusion of English forms... This indicates that, in the terminal phase of a language, the speakers come to rely on the linguistic resources of the replacing language' (Schmidt 1985: 189).

11.4 Language death, pidginisation and creolisation

We can now conclude that certain changes are consistently found in obsolescing languages (although many more case-studies are required before we can identify any change as an essential part of all language death situations). Prominent among these changes are the loss of irregularities and reduction of allomorphy, usually by analogy, and a movement from synthetic to analytic structures: for instance, morphological marking of nouns and modifiers as ergative or absolutive in Dyirbal is replaced by the use of word order to signal subject versus object, while the genitive case in East Sutherland Gaelic is being gradually replaced by prepositional constructions.

Some of these changes are motivated by the dominant language, but not all represent direct borrowing. The amount of lexical borrowing from the dominant into the dying language varies widely; there is a great deal in Young People's Dyirbal, but relatively little in dying ESG. Furthermore, it is often the patterns existing in the dominant language which exert influence on the dying language, rather than lexical material which is directly copied. For instance, the use of a single affix -s for the vast majority of English plurals may well be a factor in the increased incidence of a single plural suffix among semi-speakers of ESG; but the suffix is Gaelic -en, not English -s. Similarly, the ESG vocative is retained better than the genitive for Dorian's informants, although English has a genitive and lacks a morphologically marked vocative.

Language murder also has its own specific sociological context. Typically, a new language will be introduced into an area, entering into competition with an established, indigenous language. The speakers of the incoming language will tend to be more powerful socially and economically, and often more numerous, leading to an association of their language with wealth and power. Speakers of the indigenous language will become bilingual, and begin to absorb these judgements and denigrate their own language. Seeing the dominant language as a passport to greater prestige, parents will stop passing the minority language on to their children, who will become semi-speakers at best. There is also typically a lack of institutions to support or determine a norm for the minority language; it is often unwritten, as with Dyirbal and ESG (although other varieties of Gaelic are written) and is frequently banned or at best discouraged in the schools. Gradually, over several generations, the dying language will become associated with older people and an old-fashioned, vanishing way of life, and with poverty and lack of opportunities eventually surviving only in in-group usage. This rejection seems to accelerate the rate of change in the dying language, which is subject to

reductions without compensation in other areas of the grammar, making it ultimately inflexible and monostylistic. Thus, 'the reduction and adaption of linguistic structures are signs of threatening language death. But they also hasten language death, as an undermined, reduced and alienated language may seem to its speakers less worthy of being spoken, and is thus even less likely to be preserved' (Dressler and Wodak-Leodolter 1977: 9). The attitude of native speakers that their language is unsuitable for the modern world and in some sense dysfunctional and deficient therefore becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Furthermore, as the dying language loses its own resources, speakers turn increasingly to the dominant language. In Young People's Dyirbal (Schmidt 1985), large numbers of English loans are habitually used; in Oberwart Hungarian (Gal 1979) almost any German word, equipped with Hungarian affixes, is acceptable; and in Mexican Nahuatl, Hill and Hill (1977) recorded up to 40 per cent Spanish loans, including nouns, verbs, hesitation forms like *este*, *a ver* and common items such as *entonces* 'then', *pues* 'well', *para que* 'so that' and *porque* 'because'. Many of Hill and Hill's informants were proud of Nahuatl and of their Indian identity (as one man put it (Hill and Hill 1977: 60) "'after all, to whom did the Holy Virgin of Guadalupe appear? Not to some gringo, not to some millionaire, but to a Mexicano-speaking Indian like ourselves.'") However, they also felt that genuine Nahuatl, which they might have been motivated to preserve, is gone; the language which remains is regarded as *revuelta* 'topsy-turvy' and *mezclada* 'mixed', and they reject it.

Despite this distinctive sociolinguistic context, the changes involved in linguistic obsolescence are reminiscent of those found in other language contact situations. Comparisons of language death with pidginisation and creolisation are therefore inevitable. It has also been suggested that language death bears certain similarities to deacquisition (Giacolone Ramat 1983, Menn 1989); however, too little work has been done comparing obsolescence with normal acquisition or with language loss in aphasic or dysphasic patients, for instance, to substantiate this. Moreover, language loss typically takes place within an individual speaker, whereas in language death an entire community and a far longer time-span are involved. In view of these inclivities, we shall concentrate here on the claims that linguistic obsolescence is equivalent to pidginisation (Dressler and Wodak-Leodolter 1977) or to 'creolization in reverse' (Trudgill 1976).

Dressler and Wodak-Leodolter (1977: 8) argue that, in situations of language death, 'the non-dominant language often pidginizes in its last stages of existence'. Unquestionably, some similarities do exist between pidginisation and obsolescence: notably, both pidgins and dying languages have a limited vocabulary, relatively little morphology, simple syntax

characterised by a lack of subordination, and a general prevalence of analytic over synthetic structures. Both tend to have a single, rigid word order, and are simple, reduced systems (where simplification means increasing regularity, and reduction means the loss of some part of a language, along with some expressive capacity). Pidgin-like forms, such as *bin* and *wi-fela* in Young People's Dyrbal, may appear in dying languages. Both pidgins and obsolescing languages are also monostylistic, and are, or become, inadequate for use as the sole language of a speech community. Finally, in both cases, a large number of analogically regularised forms tend to appear. Romaine (1988: 372-3) attributes the retention of such forms to the amount of variability and uncertainty shown by adult speakers, and to the consequent lack of a corrective mechanism applied by adults to children, arguing that 'in normal communities the expectation is that adults act as brakes on the innovations produced by children so that analogical and other deviant forms like *foots* get corrected and do not persist. In the case of dying and pidgin languages it may be that children have greater scope to act as norm-makers due to the fact that a great deal of variability exists among the adult community.' This may seem to be refuted by the clear existence of a corrective mechanism for Dyrbal (Schmidt 1985); but it should be remembered that in this case young people, not wishing to expose themselves to the embarrassment of being corrected, have ceased to use Dyrbal in vertical communication with their elders and now reserve it for in-group communication with their peers, where the norms are largely English-based and the biggest sin is to speak in a way that is 'too flash' or too close to Traditional Dyrbal. Thus, both the presence and the absence of corrective mechanisms seem to contribute to linguistic obsolescence.

Not all the linguistic features of pidginisation are mirrored in language murder. For instance, areas of morphological complexity tend to remain in obsolescing languages: in ESG, the majority of the eleven pluralisation strategies attested by Dorian for fluent speakers were also found, albeit on fewer occasions, for semi-speakers; and derivational affixes, and suffixes showing aspect tended to be retained in Young People's Dyrbal. The same goes for syntax: thus, although semi-speakers knew only one of the two passive constructions of ESG, they could nonetheless produce this fairly reliably, whereas the category of passive is rarely expressed in pidgins, and only reconstituted at the subsequent creole stage. However, the main differences between language death and pidginisation concern the socio-cultural situations in which these processes occur. For example, a pidgin is the first stage in the development of a language, while language shift and obsolescence represent the last. Furthermore, 'pidgins typically begin in formal situations between strangers for purposes that often relate to

commerce and trade. In contrast, dying Dyrbal is spoken in informal situations between people sharing close personal ties' (Schmidt 1985: 217). Schmidt's assessment of Dyrbal can be extended to the other dying languages we have examined; and in general, it seems that the primary function of pidgins is communication, while that of a dying language is the assertion of in-group identity. The mode of acquisition of pidgins and dying languages also seems to be different (Dressler 1988). Typically, younger speakers of dying languages will have contact with more fluent older speakers, whereas the first generation of pidgin speakers will be the only users of the language. Language death occurs in bilingual situations, but pidginisation in trilingual or multilingual communities. Finally, while obsolescing languages have native speakers (albeit bilingual ones), a pidgin is not a native language at all.

In view of all these discrepancies, the similarities between pidginisation and language death seem to reduce to the occurrence of a few linguistic changes which are characteristic of languages in contact. Since pidgins arise and languages obsolesce only in contact situations, this is not altogether surprising; and, given the multitude of phenomena which can be described as contact-induced, it is certainly an insufficient basis on which to identify the two processes. If we equate language death with pidginisation, we are simply creating a vast category into which any contact-induced change can be placed, regardless of its individual context or characteristics; and such categories rapidly become meaningless.

Let us now turn to Trudgill's (1976) description of language death as 'creolization in reverse'. Trudgill seems to be considering primarily language murder; language suicide does indeed seem to be the reverse of creolisation in a limited sense, since it involves a movement away from a creole language towards its original superstrate. Trudgill considers the case of Arvanitika, a language descended from Albanian which has been spoken in villages around Athens for several centuries and which is now under threat from Greek. He argues that there is a case for considering the obsolescence of Arvanitika (and, by extension, that of other dying languages like Dyrbal, Gaelic and Irish) as creolisation in reverse. First, the sociolinguistic situation is a neat inverse; while creolisation involves the acquisition of native speakers by a language, language death is characterised by the loss or abandonment of a language by its native speakers. The proficiency continuum which develops in obsolescing languages can also be compared to the creole continuum which appears during decreolisation (Romaine 1988), provided that we do not take this comparison too far and equate the deep creole with the decaying, deviant performance of semi-speakers.

Trudgill also argues for language death as the linguistic reverse of

creolisation, on the grounds that creoles tend to be simplified (relative to their superstrate) but not reduced, and not restricted, since they can be used in any context; dying languages, on the other hand, are restricted and reduced but not, according to Trudgill, simplified. However, Trudgill is unable to justify this opposition fully: he certainly finds cases of straightforward reduction, such as the loss of the past definite versus imperfect tense distinction, in Arvanitika; but he also finds phenomena which could well be analysed as simplification. For instance, the conditional tense markers are being lost from Arvanitika, but are being replaced by periphrastic forms; since the meaning of the conditional can still be expressed, this is not reduction, but as analytic, periphrastic forms seem easier for language users than synthetic ones, it may involve simplification in the morphology, albeit with some cost in the syntax. Cases of loss of redundancy are also clearly simplification. Consequently, 'even if "creolization in reverse" is an accurate term sociolinguistically, it is much less so linguistically, since the parallels are by no means complete' (Trudgill 1976: 49).

Our tentative conclusion, then, is that the equation of language death with pidginisation is partly appropriate from a linguistic point of view but quite misleading in social terms; while its description as creolisation in reverse is appropriate sociolinguistically, but not linguistically. However, it should be noted that this is an interim assessment, not the end of the story: we need more studies of language death, and better comparisons with pidginisation, creolisation, other contact phenomena, first and second language acquisition and individual language loss before we can say with any certainty where language death fits in. For example, Romaine (1988: 370) notes that 'in some cases, a language may exist in pidginized or creolized form, in several immigrant varieties with differing degrees of vitality, as well as in its full form with social and regional variation. Spanish, French and Arabic are such cases.' A comparative study of the varieties of such a language, including obsolescing ones, would be of enormous value to the study of language death.

We are also unable at present to predict language death: reports of death may be greatly exaggerated for any or all of the languages considered here, and they may yet recover and surprise us all; Hindley (1990), recognising this possibility, subtitled his book on Irish 'a qualified obituary'. Hoenigswald (1989: 353) resignedly notes that 'demise can be predicted, it seems, only at the terminal stage, where it is obvious, what with a last speaker surviving in California or on some Dalmatian island'. The low prestige of a language alone does not guarantee its death (Giacolone Ramat 1983); rapid growth in the prestige of the dominant language is also a prerequisite. This is often the result of economic changes, and leads to the

sociolinguistic 'tip' (Dorian 1981) which accelerates shift and obsolescence. It is also unclear, in the absence of further individual and comparative studies, whether certain changes are invariably associated with language death, and can 'be taken as harbingers of impending language shift' (Woolard 1989: 356). Dressler (1988: 190), for instance, claims that 'there are inherent principles of language change that affect the way that languages decay and die, partially irrespective of the structures ... of the dominant language': we must hope that further research will help us find them.