

LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY: ETHNOLINGUISTIC VITALITY OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLES IN CANADA

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Abstract

This paper explores the dimensions of the ethnolinguistic identity and vitality of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Language data from the 1991 Canadian Census as well as other data from governmental, non-governmental and Aboriginal sources are discussed in the context of a social psychological framework of language maintenance and shift. It is concluded that societal empowerment of Aboriginal Peoples is urgently necessary and should include an explicit constitutional recognition of their **linguistic rights**.

Introduction

"...should be brought to compete with his fellow whites, but in order that this may be done effectually he must be taught the English language. So long as he keeps his native tongue...will he remain a community apart...with this end in view children...be taught in the English language exclusively..." (Department of Indian Affairs, 1895, cited in Gardner & Jimmie, 1989, p. 7)

"Language is our unique relationship to the Creator, our attitudes beliefs, values, and fundamental notions of what is truth. Our languages are the cornerstone of who we are as a People. Without our languages we cannot survive."(Assembly of First Nations, 1990, p. 39)

In precolonial times, Aboriginal languages flourished within the boundaries of what is now Canada (and U.S.A). Many Aboriginal people were multilingual (Hebert, 1984) and for several millennia, their languages were the main means by which culture, identity and spirituality were articulated, shared and passed on to successive generations. Late in the current millennium, in a relatively short period of European colonisation, a much cited recent study alarmingly concluded that only three out of fifty-three Aboriginal languages had an "excellent chance of survival" by virtue of having more than five thousand speakers, while the rest were endangered with some verging on extinction (Foster, 1982). Critiques of this narrow demographic approach have painted a more complex picture, arguing that the likelihood of survival of languages should not be based on the sheer numbers

of speakers, especially as small but linguistically thriving Aboriginal communities may be denied access to supportive resources (see Assembly of First Nations, 1990). The aim of this paper is to introduce a social psychological framework for exploring the identities and "ethnolinguistic vitalities" (Giles, Bourhis & Taylor, 1977) of Aboriginal groups in Canada using data from a variety of governmental and non-governmental statistical sources.

A vast amount of social psychological literature demonstrates that linguistic criteria function as important markers of social categories at all levels of linguistic variation (see Giles, Scherer & Taylor, 1979; Giles & Coupland, 1991 for reviews). In analyses of ethnic and national groups, there exists a substantial body of literature suggesting that language is among the most salient dimensions of group identity (e.g. Giles, 1977; Gudykunst & Schmidt, 1987; Sachdev & Bourhis, 1990; cf. Edwards, 1994). For instance, results of early studies using multidimensional scaling procedures have shown that ethnolinguistic group members identified more closely with those who spoke their native tongue than with those who shared their cultural background or geographic origin (e.g. Taylor, Bassili & Aboud, 1973; Giles, Taylor & Bourhis, 1977). That language is often *the* central criterial attribute for group identity is evident even from a cursory review of intergroup relations in numerous countries around the world including Canada, Russia, Spain, Belgium, India, Malaysia, Finland, etc (see Fishman, 1989; Giles, 1977; Ros, Cano & Huici, 1987; Liebkind, 1982; Bourhis, 1984). Moreover, much of the social psychological research cited above suggests that language use and identity appear to be related reciprocally: language use influences the formation of group identity and group identity influences patterns of language attitudes and usage.

It is not only actual language use and proficiency that is associated with identity. Ancestral languages may also be valued aspects of group identity despite not being spoken by most group members. The revival of ancestral languages may become a central issue around which group members mobilise to affirm or redefine their group identities (Ross, 1979; Bourhis, 1984b; Giles & Johnson, 1981). Perhaps one of most celebrated cases of successful language revival in the modern world has been that of Hebrew, considered by many to be a "dead" language just half a century ago in Palestine (Blanc, 1968; but see Edwards, 1985). However, by 1961, Israeli Census figures showed that 75% of the Jewish population had stated that Hebrew was their main or only language of daily communication (Blanc, 1968). The Hebrew language revival was directly related to the establishment

of the State of Israel (Fishman, 1989). In a related vein, Spolsky (1989) cites a more recent dramatic example of indigenous language revival, supported by favourable language planning within existing state boundaries:

Where six years ago a bare handful of children came to primary school with any knowledge of the Maori language, now each year between two and three thousand children, many of them fluent bilinguals, start school after having already been exposed to daily use of the Maori language for three or more years. (p. 91)

Like the other groups discussed above, language is also considered to be central to Aboriginal identity in Canada with many suggesting that fluency in Aboriginal languages is an essential contributor to self-determination in addition to being a consequence of by it (e.g. Brandt & Ayongman, 1989; Gardner & Jimmie, 1989; Kirkness, 1989; AFN, 1990 - quote above). Indeed, the fact that Aboriginal languages have not been completely eradicated despite the long-term and cruel enforcement of 'English - only' government educational policies is testimony not only to the depth of Aboriginal resistance, but also to the importance of Aboriginal languages to Aboriginal identity.

In order to place social identity (and other social psychological) processes underlying ethnolinguistic behaviour in their appropriate sociostructural contexts Giles et al (1977) introduced the notion of *Ethnolinguistic Vitality*. It was defined as "that which makes a group likely to behave as a distinctive and active collective entity in intergroup situations" (p. 306). Giles et al. (1977) proposed that groups' strengths and weaknesses on dimensions of institutional support and control as well its social status and demographic strength may be assessed "objectively" to provide a rough overall classification of ethnolinguistic groups as having low, medium or high vitality. It was argued that the more vitality an ethnolinguistic group has the more likely it would be to survive as a distinctive linguistic collectivity in intergroup settings. Conversely, groups that have little or no group vitality were expected to assimilate linguistically or cease to exist as distinctive groups.

Since its introduction, the construct of ethnolinguistic vitality has received a considerable amount of theoretical and empirical attention (see Landry & Allard, 1994a; Sachdev & Bourhis, 1993; Harwood, Giles & Bourhis, 1994). However, since no studies to date have applied this framework to Aboriginal contexts in Canada, this paper provides a preliminary vitality analysis of the Aboriginal language situation in Canada. In this exploratory analysis distinctions between Aboriginal languages are not made as the major aim is to consider their situation as a whole vis-a-vis non-

Aboriginal languages in Canada. Undoubtedly, future analyses would need to consider the distinctive vitalities of different Aboriginal groups across Canada. It should also be noted that this paper does not discuss the Inuit who have been the focus of some social psychological research (e.g. Taylor, Wright, Ruggiero & Aitchison, 1993). Before outlining a vitality analysis, some methodological points about the quality of available data are worthy of mention.

The 'objective' vitality of Aboriginal groups in Canada may be assessed from a variety of governmental and non-governmental sources. However, inferences from such available statistical data on Aboriginal peoples in Canada must be made cautiously (Wright, 1993). Although the precise reasons for this may vary depending on the data set, they are a function of factors associated with the agency collecting the data and respondents' perceptions and behaviour. Apart from the reluctance of several Aboriginal communities to participate in data collection, different data gathering agencies use different criteria for defining Aboriginal people. Data collected by the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) is primarily restricted to those Aboriginals who have legal status as 'Registered Indians' and/or Inuit. However, ethnic origin data in the national Census are based on self-identification, making it difficult to compare Census data with DIAND data in order to draw accurate inferences.

The comparability of data from successive Censuses is also problematic due to the changes in the phrasing and definitions of ethnic origin questions. For instance, Wright (1993) reports that the forty-five percent increase between the 1981 and 1986 Census data (491,460 to 711,720) may primarily be attributable to the fact that only single Aboriginal origins were permitted in 1981, but multiple responses (and origins) were allowed in 1986. Interestingly, the 1991 Census data (Statistics Canada, 1993a) also reveal a large increase (41% - to 1,002,675) in the size of the Aboriginal population in the five year period following the 1986 Census. An increase of this magnitude can neither be attributed to demographic factors such as changes in fertility, nor to the phrasing of the question, as there were few differences between the 1991 and 1986 versions. Explanations of increases of this magnitude may have to unravel how significant social, political and economic events have affected the perceptions, attitudes and identities of respondents in the intervening years.

The perceptions and understanding of respondents, affected by their personal (and social) circumstances may also affect their actual responses on self-identification measures. For instance, Jarvis and Heaton (1989) reported

that some Aboriginal respondents, may have claimed official 'Indian' status even when they had legally lost such status, while others who were probably entitled to claim official status did not. Interestingly, some respondents originating from India also claimed 'Registered Indian' status (Jarvis & Heaton, 1989). Clearly the 'objectivity' of statistics based on self-identifications is somewhat questionable (see Wright, 1993).

Caution should also be exercised in interpreting language data obtained by the Canadian Census due to the variations in the method of obtaining data, definitions of languages (and dialects), mother-tongues and the particular questions asked concerning language use and proficiency (e.g. Edwards, 1994). For instance, Jarvis and Heaton (1989) argue that it was only after the 1981 Census used additional (and refined) questions that it became possible to statistically analyze patterns in Aboriginal language *shift* in Canada. Language shift was defined as the proportion of those respondents who spoke an Aboriginal language at birth and now used some other language as the main language in the home. However, analyses of recent Census data using appropriate questions (and definitions) have not eliminated discrepancies in assessment of language shift and retention rates. The recent Assembly of First Nations (1990) large-scale survey of Aboriginal across Canada suggested that the Census data had vastly underestimated language retention rates in ten out of twelve communities under comparison. Since an understanding of language shift and retention (as well as other sociolinguistic phenomena) needs to be contextualised in its appropriate sociostructural framework, an outline vitality analysis in terms of demographic, status and institutional support is presented next.

Demographic Vitality

According to Giles et al. (1977) demographic vitality factors relate to the sheer numbers of ethnolinguistic group members and their distribution throughout a particular urban, regional or national territory. Demographic variables also include group rates of immigration, emigration, endogamy and birthrate. Favourable demographic factors may be used by ethnolinguistic groups as a legitimising tool to empower them with institutional control and bolster their overall group vitality (e.g. the black majority in S. Africa under apartheid).

Aboriginal people constituted the majority of the population in Canada probably until the middle of the last century (e.g. Denevan, 1976). Since then, European expansion involving warfare, the spread of disease, land alienation, displacement, isolation in reservation systems, enforced assimilation and various other governmental measures including large-scale

non-Aboriginal immigration, has led to a situation where Aboriginal peoples comprise only between three and four percent of the population of Canada today (Statistics Canada, 1993a; Perley, 1993). Moreover, with the exception of the Inuit, Aboriginal language speakers in Canada have no major pool of potential speakers outside of Canada to draw upon to increase their numbers.

Analysis of the 1991 Census question on ethnic origins obtained information about those respondents reporting any "North American Indian, Metis or Inuit" origins (Single and multiple, Statistics Canada, 1993a). As shown in Table 1, by far the largest number of respondents reported "North American Indian" origins. Metis and Inuit origins were reported by a smaller proportion of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Following the Census, a large-scale survey - the Aboriginal Peoples Survey (APS, Statistics Canada, 1993b) - of a sample of persons who reported Aboriginal origins was conducted asking more detailed information about language, education, culture, employment, housing and other characteristics of Aboriginal peoples. As shown in Table 1, the post-Censal APS (1991, Statistics Canada, 1993b) which focused on those who "identified with an Aboriginal group" represented approximately 63% of those respondents who in the 1991 Census of the Canadian population reported having at least one Aboriginal origin. The Inuit reported the highest levels of identification, while the other Aboriginal groups reported roughly comparable levels of identification (Table 1). From a social psychological perspective, the collection of data amongst Aboriginals who actually reported identifying with an Aboriginal group was timely, given the primacy accorded to group identity in the discussion above.

Table 1
Ethnic Origins and Identifications according to 1991 Official Statistics

| Aboriginal group | Ethnic Origins - 1991 Census | Identifications - 1991 Aboriginal Peoples Survey |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| `North American Indian' | 783980 | 460680 (59% of Census) |
| `Metis' | 212650 | 135260 (64% of Census) |
| `Inuit' | 49255 | 36215 (74% of Census) |
| TOTAL | 1045885 ¹ | 625710 |

¹ The Census figures are somewhat inflated (from 1002675) due to the multiple counting of those

reporting multiple origins (Sources: Statistics Canada, 1993a, 1993b).

Barsh's (1994) analysis of available 1991 APS and Census data suggests that the current Aboriginal population is younger and has higher fertility rates than the national average. Aboriginal peoples also constitute the majority in the sparsely populated regions of northern Canada (except the Atlantic Coast) but not in southern Canada. Barsh also reports that a rapid increase in migration to urban areas in recent times (1960s and 1970s) has led a majority (64%) of Aboriginal peoples to be 'dispersed' (i.e. not living on government designated "Indian Reserves" and settlements). The largest concentrations of Aboriginal people in urban centres are to be found in Winnipeg, Edmonton and Vancouver, although it is noteworthy that they do not exceed five percent of these cities' populations (Statistics Canada, 1993a, 1993b).

Overall the demographic vitality of Aboriginal peoples may be considered to be low (though increasing) when taken as a whole across Canada but varies considerably depending on the region. Previous studies predicting the demise of Aboriginal languages (e.g. Foster, 1982; see Edwards, 1994) categorised the chances of survival of different Aboriginal languages in terms of sheer numbers without allowing for the impact of other relevant demographic variables identified in the vitality analysis of Giles et al (1977). The use of data available from the national Census and other sources may allow significantly more sophisticated analyses given that Census data show large regional (and other) differences in the number and size of Aboriginal communities in Canada. The 1991 Census and APS data suggest that Aboriginal demographic vitality may well be considered to be at moderate levels on the southern Prairies, and high levels in Northern Canada.

Institutional support/control and status vitality

Institutional support/control factors refer to the extent to which an ethnolinguistic group enjoys representation in, and control over, the various institutions of a community, region or nation. Giles et al. (1977) proposed that all forms of formal and informal representation in, and control over, religious, educational, political, media and cultural contexts contribute to groups' institutional support and overall vitality.

Status factors, less readily quantifiable than demographic and institutional support factors, are those pertaining to an ethnolinguistic group's social prestige, its economic and sociohistorical status as well as the status of its language and culture locally and internationally. Ethnolinguistic groups which have high institutional support/control and high demographic strength

are likely to enjoy considerable social status relative to less dominant and minority groups in society.

European colonisation of North America aimed to totally assimilate Aboriginal peoples and deny them any vitality either on institutional support and control or status dimensions. It was accompanied by a powerful racist ideology which characterised Aboriginal people as 'uncivilised', 'barbarian' and 'backward' (e.g. Kaegi, 1972; Perley, 1993). The last one hundred and fifty years have seen perhaps the most deliberate and cruel governmental policies, implemented by various educational agencies, and several religious and missionary groups, designed to eradicate Aboriginal languages and cultures in North America (e.g. see Perley, 1993; Gardner & Jimmie, 1989; also see Stevenson, 1995).

A system of segregated schooling (industrial, residential, boarding) for Aboriginal peoples was well in place before Canadian confederation in 1867 (e.g. Barman, Hebert & McCaskill, 1986; Ing, 1991). The early schools were run by various religious groups intent on assimilating and "civilising" Aboriginal peoples. In terms of language education this meant the teaching and use of English (or French) accompanied by a derogation of, and often severe punishment for even the minimal use of Aboriginal languages (e.g. Gardner & Jimmie, 1989). Following Confederation the situation changed little with the newly created federal "Department of Indian Affairs" (DIA) taking overall responsibility for Aboriginal education, but essentially continuing (and even expanding) previous assimilation efforts of the missionaries and governmental agencies. Perley (1993) argues that there was little change in the policy of devaluing Aboriginal languages and cultures either when the federal government took direct control of the residential schools (previously operated by missionaries) in the 1940s, or when it moved to the establishment of day schools on reserves. This policy of assimilation continued with the introduction of 'integrated' (i.e. with non-Aboriginals), 'English-only' schooling for Aboriginal children in the 1950s.

In 1969, without explicitly acknowledging previously assimilationistic policies, the Canadian Government published a white paper proposing the phasing out of government responsibility and authority for 'Indian affairs' to local Aboriginal groups and provincial governments, with all educational services to be provided by the provinces (Gardner & Jimmie, 1989). This paper also indicated a complete turn-around from a policy of 'linguistic imperialism' (Phillipson, 1992) that overtly suppressed Aboriginal languages to one where Aboriginal languages and cultures were to be 'valued, encouraged and assisted'. Gardner and Jimmie (1989) provide a powerful

analysis of the failure of this policy due to a severe lack in the provision of the means and resources to implement Aboriginal cultural and language programs in the curriculum. Aboriginal opposition to the white paper led the government to accept (in principle) a policy of "Indian Control of Indian Education" (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972). Although this policy made important strides in helping to revitalize Aboriginal languages and to valorise identification with Aboriginal communities, educational, financial and political constraints imposed by federal and provincial governments have severely impeded change and reinforced the low status ascribed to Aboriginal languages (e.g. Gardner & Jimmie, 1989; AFN, 1990).

In a recent survey across 593 First Nations communities covering a population of about half a million people, AFN (1990) reported that Aboriginal language instruction was available to less than half of all First Nations students. It was generally not available in the provincial school system (except in a few bilingual programmes in Ontario and immersion programmes in Quebec) even though approximately half of all First Nations students were enrolled in the provincial system. Aboriginal language instruction was found to be largely reserve based, available only as a subject for an average of two hours per week, and largely confined to the lower elementary grades. In financial terms, the AFN (1990) estimated that the federal government spent only 2 million Canadian dollars on 262 language retention programmes for over fifty Aboriginal languages between 1983-87, but a massive 626 million Canadian dollars promoting official bilingualism and official minority language rights in 1989-90.

The status and institutional support of languages in modern Canada was laid down in recommendations made by the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, and legislated on in the form of the Official Languages Act of 1969. This Act made no reference to Aboriginal languages and enshrined English and French as the official languages of Canada. The high (and equal) power and status of English and French were affirmed in the Canadian Constitution by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982). Minority language rights of those speaking the official languages were entrenched, but in spite of intense negotiations, Aboriginal linguistic rights were not articulated in the final version of the Canadian Charter (AFN, 1990). Speakers of non-official languages have received very little attention in the Canadian Charter and effectively have to rely on those sections of the charter which refer to equality rights and recognition of Canada's multicultural heritage (AFN, 1990; Blanc, 1985). Across Canada (excluding Nunavut), speakers of Aboriginal languages have received little official recognition except from the Quebec and NWT legislative assemblies. In the former, they are exempt from language regulations, and in the latter, six Aboriginal

languages have been declared official languages in addition to French and English. Recent efforts towards a national policy designed to boost the status and institutional representation of Aboriginal languages (e.g. Kirkness, 1989) remain to be effectively recognised and supported by the government.

Issues about the representation of Aboriginal languages and cultures in the media took centre stage with the increasing politicization of Aboriginal groups in Canada (Stiles, 1984) and coincided with the advent of satellite technologies. Minore and Hill (1990) argued that unlike most governmental policies concerning the institutional representation of (and control by) Aboriginal peoples, the Northern Native Broadcast Access Program initiated in 1983 has been fairly successful. It has provided federal government funds for the production and broadcast of culturally relevant materials in Aboriginal languages. Moreover Minore and Hill (1990) suggest that by being able to respond to local initiatives it has a good potential for the empowerment of Aboriginal peoples.

Overall, as a consequence of European colonisation, the institutional and status vitality of Aboriginal languages and cultures may be considered to be low but increasing today. It should be reemphasized that the resistance of Aboriginal peoples to colonisation has directly contributed to the ongoing socio-political changes (including negotiations for land claims) which are designed to boost their ethnolinguistic vitality. The media is likely to make an ever-increasing contribution to the vitality ('objective' and 'subjective') of Aboriginal languages and cultures following the current era of revolutionary developments in information technology and communication.

Vitality, language use and proficiency

A number of researchers have argued that the construct of ethnolinguistic vitality should not only serve to describe ethnolinguistic situations but should also have some predictive value for ethnolinguistic attitudes and behaviour (Giles et al., 1977; Husband & Khan, 1982; Johnson, Giles & Bourhis, 1983; Landry & Allard, 1994a). Laboratory studies conducted by Sachdev and Bourhis (1991) have shown that 'objective' changes in group numbers, status and power differentials have predictably independent and interactive effects on patterns of intergroup behaviour and perceptions.

In the field, Bourhis and Sachdev (1984) had reported that the 'objectively' high English-Canadian vitality in Hamilton was reflected in the findings that self-reported use of English was higher than self-reported use of Italian not only by majority English-Canadians, but also by minority Italian Canadian

subjects, across all public and private domains. Recently, Landry and Allard (1994b) who surveyed over 1500 anglophone and francophone students across Canada, obtained impressive empirical data showing that French and English usage across a wide array of social domains increased linearly in relation to the 'objective' vitality of the respective ethnolinguistic groups. In their study 'objective' vitality accounted for over 60% of the variance in patterns of language use (Landry & Allard, 1994b). Given this pattern of results, it would be expected that Aboriginal language use and proficiency would be related to their 'objective' vitality in Canada. Though systematic studies on language use and vitality remain to be conducted, some supportive evidence may be obtained from existing data. At the most simplistic level it might be expected that Aboriginal languages would be used infrequently in public settings given their low overall 'objective' ethnolinguistic vitality in Canada. Accordingly, data from the large scale AFN (1990) survey suggest that Aboriginal languages are used rarely in band offices, community meetings or public communication systems. Furthermore, as argued below, analyses of data from other national surveys may be also be used to explore how the regional and generational variation of vitality relates to patterns of language proficiency and use.

The rapid (last 50-100 years) but relatively recent drop in the ethnolinguistic vitality of Aboriginal peoples in Canada is generally reflected in the patterns of language proficiency across generations. For instance, Barsh (1994) reports that whereas in 1941 English or French was the mother tongue of less than 10 % of Aboriginal peoples, in 1991 the percentage of adults who had never spoken an Aboriginal language had increased rapidly to 55%. As shown in Table 2, relative to adults, children are less likely to be proficient in an Aboriginal language or speak it at home. The 1991 APS figures (Statistics Canada, 1993b) also reveal a generational difference in the manner of Aboriginal language acquisition which is likely to have an impact on language use. Relative to adults (Table 2), children are more likely to have learnt Aboriginal languages at school where their languages are taught mainly as a subject. There is some concern that the formal schooled knowledge about Aboriginal languages resulting from this is replacing the linguistic/communicative competence acquired by direct transmission and the everyday use of languages (Barsh,

Table 2: Aboriginal language proficiency (Statistics Canada, 1993b)

| IDENTIFIED as | Total Number | % Speak AL | % Never Spoke AL | % write AL | % AL home use | % Learnt AL at school |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|---------------|---------------------|---------------|------------------|--------------------------|
| Aboriginal Children (5-14) | 148,160 | 21 | 71 | 7 | 21 | 12 |
| "North American Indian" | 107,970 | 22 | 69 | 6 | 21 | 11 |
| On Reserve | 40,500 | 44 | 45 | 11 | 43 | 23 |
| Off Reserve | 67,465 | 9 | 84 | 2 | 8 | 4 |
| Metis | 31,985 | 5 | 89 | 2 | 5 | 2 |
| Inuit | 9,245 | 67 | 29 | 50 | 66 | 53 |
| Aboriginal Adults (15+) | 388,900 | 36 | 55 | 9 | 33 | 6 |
| "North American Indian" | 288,365 | 38 | 52 | 8 | 35 | 5 |
| On Reserve | 102,075 | 65 | 28 | 13 | 63 | 10 |
| Off Reserve | 186,295 | 23 | 65 | 4 | 19 | 2 |
| Metis | 84,155 | 18 | 74 | 2 | 15 | 1 |
| Inuit | 20,805 | 75 | 22 | 60 | 75 | 32 |

1994).

Jarvis and Heaton (1989) statistically assessed the impact of several demographic and geographical factors on patterns of language shift from mother tongue to principal language used in the home from the 1981 Census of Canada. They reported that approximately one in three Aboriginal peoples had an Aboriginal mother tongue and that over 70% of these still used it as the principal language in the home. This figure has increased according to the 1991 APS data (Statistics Canada, 1993b) which suggested that over 90% of those who report proficiency in an Aboriginal language speak it at home.

According to the analyses of Jarvis and Heaton (1989), the majority of the shift in the home from the Aboriginal language was to English. This accords with the high 'objective' vitality of English in Canada. Gender appeared to make little difference in language shift, but location, age and ethnic origin explained significantly larger amounts of variance. As might be expected from a vitality analysis, the greatest language shifts were reported amongst those who lived in the southern and urban parts of Canada, by young and middle-aged adults, and amongst those who reported either Metis origins or were not 'Registered Indians'. Children, older adults, the Inuit and those living in northern Canada displayed the lowest levels of language shift. Analyses of Provincial differences revealed levels of language shift that were the highest in British Columbia, Yukon, Newfoundland and New Brunswick; lowest in the Northwest Territories, Quebec and Nova Scotia; and moderate in the others (Jarvis & Heaton, 1989). Such demographic and regional differences in language shift map reasonably well on to the 'objective' vitality analyses reported above. At the very least, it is clear that vitality factors need to be considered to understand observed patterns of language shift and survival (Giles, Leets & Coupland, 1990).

The original formulations focused on an 'objective' analysis of ethnolinguistic vitality. Data were collected from a variety of sociological, economic, demographic and historical sources. Vitality analyses of this 'objective' type tend to be largely descriptive, allowing some analytic comparison and contrasting of ethnolinguistic groups (Giles, 1978, Bourhis, 1979). In an extension of the original formulations, Bourhis, Giles and Rosenthal (1981) argued that *perceptions* of vitality can play a mediating role in accounting for group members' intergroup strategies, language attitudes, behaviours and degrees of group identification. It was argued that group

members' subjective assessment of ingroup and outgroup vitality may be as important in determining sociolinguistic and interethnic behaviour as the group's 'objective' vitality.

Group members who perceive their own group vitality to be acceptably high on demography items but disproportionately low on institutional support factors may be motivated collectively to improve their own group representation and control of key institutional sectors such as the education system, the economy and the mass media (e.g. the Quebec case, Bourhis, 1984). The fruits of such efforts may have concrete beneficial effects for the 'objective' vitality of the group in institutional settings and may lead to further changes in vitality perceptions. A combination of both subjective and 'objective' vitality information was thus proposed as a more sensitive method of predicting the ethnolinguistic behaviour of group members than simply relying on 'objective' assessments of vitality (Johnson et al., 1983; Sachdev & Bourhis, 1993).

Vitality analyses presented thus far in this paper have focused on Aboriginal languages as a collective whole and ignored their diversity. The differential survival of different Aboriginal languages has been an important area of concern (AFN, 1990; Edwards, 1994). The AFN (1990) argued that pessimistic predictions of language survival which relied on sheer numbers of speakers (e.g. Foster, 1982) were not meaningful and did not serve language planning efforts well. Instead it was argued that the best guiding principles of language planning efforts were the equality of languages and the needs of local communities and groups. Whereas Foster's sheer demography based analysis had only identified 3 Aboriginal languages as having an excellent chance of survival, the AFN analyses predicted 49 language communities as having 'flourishing or enduring' languages. 'Flourishing' and 'enduring' languages were defined as being spoken fluently by more than 60% of all age groups in the local community and accounted for about 65% of speakers of all Aboriginal languages in the AFN (1990) survey. Interestingly, this community based definition appears heavily weighted by demographic (especially sheer numbers) considerations. The use of an ethnolinguistic vitality analyses with the local communities as units of focus may prove more predictive and useful for language planning as it broadens analysis of the

sociostructural context from demography to include issues of status and institutional support/control.

The priority given to language issues in this paper may seem high given the serious economic, social, political and environmental struggles faced by Aboriginal peoples (see Barsh, 1994; also other papers in this issue). However, this focus on language needs to be considered in the broader context of empowerment in Aboriginal education in Canada. Critical theorists (e.g. Cummins, 1986) evaluating research data gathered in a variety of non-Aboriginal settings have argued that the educational failure of minority students can be explained by the degree to which schools reflect or counteract the power relations that exist in the broader society. Specifically, empowering students by promoting and valorising their linguistic and cultural talents (e.g. Hamers & Blanc, 1989), actively encouraging community participation in student development and moving away from the dominant "transmission-oriented" teaching model, will lead to significantly better educational progress. Clearly, societal empowerment of Aboriginal Peoples is urgently necessary, and it is proposed that this should be accompanied by an explicit constitutional recognition of their **linguistic rights**. This would legally necessitate adequate government resourcing, and allow immense educational and social benefits to be reaped as well as revitalising Aboriginal languages and cultures.

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