

Fishman, Joshua, ed., 2001. *Can threatened languages be saved? Reversing language shift, revisited. A 21st century perspective*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters, pp xvi+503. ISBN 1-85359-493-8 (hbk), 1-85359-492-X (pbk).

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Fishman's career in the sociology of languages spans several decades. He has shaped and created several disciplines such as language and ethnicity or language and nationalism. *Reversing language shift, revisited* (RLS) is a sequel to his *Reversing language shift; theoretical and empirical foundations of assistance to threatened languages* (1991, Benjamins), in which he proposed a theoretical model that would predict the likely success or failure of language maintenance efforts. RLS theory "being more than merely a descriptive tool, attempts to locate the functional disruption of X [some language, GL] in social space and has suggested a widely (...) useful series of stages for doing so. Such *location helps establish both focus and priorities* for RLS efforts, rather than merely presenting a redundant restatement of Xish's functional, institutional or attitudinal deficiencies" (his emph.; 2001:466f). The so-called Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS)—a set of criteria that *measures* the degree of disruption of the maintenance of a language and the efforts that have been expended to maintain it—is restated on p 466 for those unfamiliar with the theory.

Fishman introduces into the theme of why it is so hard to save threatened languages (pp 1-22) and summarizes what is contained in the body of the book (pp 451-483). There are a list of contributors, a brief introduction and a detailed index. The 17 focal papers deal with (i) languages in the Americas, i.e. Navajo, Puerto Rican Spanish (in New York), Yiddish, Atom (in Mexico), French (in Quebec), and Quechua; (ii) in Europe, i.e. Irish, Frisian, Basque, and Catalan; (iii) in Oko in Africa, Andamanese in India, Ainu in Japan and Modern Hebrew; (iv) immigrant and indigenous languages in Australia (M. Clyne; Lo Bianco/Rhydwen), and Maori in New Zealand (R. Benton/N. Benton). With a few additions—e.g. Australia now has two articles—these languages had been discussed in 1991 so that their situation could now be compared with that in 2001. The relevance of this collection for Australianists lies in three aspects, for one, the coverage of Australia's Languages-Other-Than-English; secondly, the theoretical perspective provided by RSL and, thirdly, the fact that LOTEs can be compared with others elsewhere. I will focus on aspects relevant to Australianists.

GIDS is the guiding principle for all contributions and it is pertinent to mention some of its features. RLS, Fishman says "is the linguistic part of the pursuit of ethnocultural self-regulation which democracies and international bodies are increasingly recognising as a basic right for indigenous (and often also immigrant) populations." (2001:452). Human *linguistic* rights is the underlying theme and it is important to understand the mechanisms of support and danger, as well as their interrelations. The eight criteria divide into two sets, four of which have to do with what language communities do, four deal with steps in the wider community. Fishman emphasizes that there can be no progress if speakers or the remaining speakers do not take on an active part, even to the point of relearning the language so that they can act as interlocutors (not to mention the word *models*). There must be a self-contained cultural network in which children are exposed to and motivated to learn the language. If the "intergenerational and demographically concentrated home-family-neighbourhood" network is not functional, there can barely be progress that would lead the mainstream society to construct (or permit) pockets of language transmission for community uses. That sounds plausible, but the fact is that many RLS efforts start with those measures, hoping language communities would react positively. A top-down approach, however, does not work. On the other hand, many language communities are so widely dispersed that such a network is inconceivable in the first place and, if anything, top-down measures are seen to assist a little.

What is worth emphasizing is Fishman's humanistic approach—despite his style that is imbued with jargon (e.g. mainstream languages are called "X", speakers "Xians", other languages are "Y", speakers "Yians", there are "Xish" interests, etc.). He brings out clearly the culture-language-speaker nexus that is so often overlooked in general linguistics. Thus he says "[I]t is the specificity of the

linguistic bond of most cultural doings that makes the very notion of a 'translated culture' so inauthentic and even abhorrent to most ethnocultural aggregates." (2001:3). Aboriginal cultures are cases in point, since languages are considered a *repository of knowledge*. Immigrant cultures vary considerably, as Smolicz has repeatedly shown in his *memoir* studies where speakers of a language report extensively what role they assign to their native language.

Clyne's contribution is an up-to-date survey of the migrant LOTE situation in relation to the shift of first generations to English, the home-family-neighbourhood network regarding German and other LOTEs, library holdings in LOTEs, radio and TV broadcasting, newspapers and periodicals in LOTEs, etc. He adds that it would be useful to include in future studies the role of the internet, which provides access to a language's native land. Following step-by-step the GIDS model, he shows that Australia has missed a chance. Instead of progressing towards LOTE maintenance, at least, at the level of education for its international needs, it has demolished the necessary infrastructure in tertiary education for the sake of economic rationalism and privatization. Lo Bianco/Rhydwen's paper highlights the fact that "[T]he social structures of indigenous speech communities are dramatically unlike those of the wider society, nor are they similar to those of other minority speech communities that have entered westernised mainstream society." (2001:392). They argue for modifications to GIDS to account for them and for the absolute necessity to keep the domains in which indigenous languages might be used separate. They make the point that in some northern areas RLS may strengthen an indigenous language at the expense of others, as speakers turn to using it as a *lingua franca*. They also mention the negative impact of economy-driven considerations, even though some languages have experienced modest *ups* during the past ten years. But: "[D]espite occasional instances of revival that attain short-term, unexpected and spiritually uplifting gains for communities of speakers of traditional languages the pattern of attrition and extinction appears inexorable." (2001:419). Australia, thus, does not provide a show case for other countries. Both papers focus on the negative impact that the shift of language policies towards economic considerations has had. These policies have done away with what is necessary in secondary and tertiary education so that it is no longer possible to train the number of teachers and get quality in teacher training that would have been necessary for LOTE teaching to expand. What is worse is the cessation of funding of bilingual programs in indigenous languages in the Northern Territory is, as Lo Bianco/Rhydwen argue, a particular blow.

The book provides a stimulating theoretical perspective on RSL and a number of pertinent case studies. It offers input for political and social scientists who take an interest in the interaction and self-centred aspirations of ethnic groups. Language is but one small aspect of social politics but has repercussions in media and educational policies, public sector funding in out-of-school education (e.g. public libraries), etc. The Australianist will find important information on Australia.