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# 1

## Introduction

### Preliminaries

The impact of the city on language is varied; it is often far-reaching and is, occasionally, revolutionary. One example of the impact of urbanisation on language is the relationship between the appearance of the first cities in the world and the independent innovation of writing in a number of different parts of the globe – Mesoamerica, Ancient Egypt, Sumeria and China. Then, in the European context for the first time, the evolution of writing, literature, philosophy and the full range of language-centred activity associated with the rise of the city-state in Ancient and Classical Greece. In the contemporary world, the city is becoming increasingly important in economic, political, social and economic terms, in particular due to the specific nature of the current form of globalisation. Their significance may be measured simply in terms of population. For example, Castells noted in 1996 that there were 13 cities in the world with populations in excess of 10 million people and that before long there would be a number of cities with populations of over 20 million (Castells, 1996). Also, the United Nations (UN) recently estimated that the majority of the world population, for the first time in history, will be living in urban centres by the end of this decade (UN, 1999 & 2001). More recently, in 2004, it was calculated that there were 20 cities in the world with a population in excess of 10 million (15 of which were located in the so-called developing world) and that by the year 2015 there will be over 20 cities with a population in excess of 10 million, comprising around 5% of the total world population (UNPF, 2004). Awareness of the significance

of this for language is beginning to emerge. For example, Fischer noted some years ago that

One major cause (of linguistic change) of the past 200 years has been unprecedented urbanization. In 1790, only one in twenty Americans lived in a town; in 1900, only one in 40 lived on a farm. The Third World is now experiencing a similar urban revolution, eradicating not only languages but entire language families. The inversion of traditional human settlement patterns brings about innumerable linguistic upheavals, a *punctuation* causing innovation, dialect leveling and even language replacement.

(Fischer, 1999: 173)

Thus, the city is the birthplace of the most outstanding linguistic innovation but it is also a cemetery for languages. How might this contradiction be understood?

The intellectual concerns central to the work are set in relation to scholarly debates regarding language in city contexts, drawing from the areas of cultural and urban geography and the sociology of language in particular. In the text it is shown how the contemporary form of globalisation has certain effects on language in social context and the city is identified as the most important site for the realisation of these effects. Also, it is shown that from this arise a number of important questions to which the text responds: Is the discipline of sociolinguistics necessarily urban? Is cultural diversity inherent to the city? Is linguistic diversity sustainable in urban context? Is language change forged by the city, or is it the product of mobility? What are the implications for language planning and policy? The book challenges a set of assumptions that hold sustainable linguistic diversity to be inherently non-urban and regard the city as an unproblematic site understanding the social function of language. Also, the book argues that language is central to understanding how the city works and that the nature of the global connections and disconnections between cities and other places are crucial to understanding how language is changing in the contemporary world. While the globalisation of the English language and its translation into various local practices exemplifies some of the contradictory impacts of the relationship between language and the city, the study of other languages can be enormously illuminative. The case of global English is a striking phenomenon, one which has merited very considerable scrutiny (e.g. Crystal, 2003; Kachru, 1992; Mair, 2003; McArthur, 2003), but

here the focus is on linguistic diversity in the urban context. The normative statements challenged by this book are implied in fields of study beyond the sociology of language and so this work is a contribution to a number of disciplines.

By way of introduction the term 'globalisation' requires some clarification at this point. This term is often associated with the various and rapid changes the world is experiencing at present. Its meaning relates to a number of issues, including increasingly extensive global interconnections, the transformation of interactions across local and global processes, and the organisation and operation of power at levels above and below the nation-state. Globalisation can be described as a multi-dimensional process that encompasses all social relations – cultural, economic and political – and, as a result, its effects may be perceived in every aspect of society. According to Cochrane and Pain (2000), the principal features of globalisation are as follows:

- Stretched social relations – that is, the existence of cultural, economic and political networks of global connection. These transcend the borders of the nation-state and they are especially obvious in the phenomenon of regionalisation; that is, the increasing interconnection between states that share borders. Also, the individual is located within such networks so that local actions might have global implications.
- Intensification of flows and interactions – this stretching of social relations appears to relate to an increase in the intensity of global interactions, suggesting in turn that the effects of actions are greater than before. The intensity of contemporary communications connects distant actions, decisions, people and events within a shared immediate social space, a space that is virtual rather than physically or territorially real.
- Increasing interpenetration of global and local social processes – distant, as understood in conventional geographical terms, cultures and societies meet at the local level increasingly often and with greater intensity than before. This interpenetration of local and global geographies creates cultural variation and hybridity.
- Development of a transnational, global infrastructure – that is, the formal and informal institutional organisation that is necessary to the workings of the global networks. This includes transnational and global organisations of political and economic governance. These are expressed as interconnections that transcend nation-state borders and operate beyond its systems of management and regulation.

There is considerable difference of opinion on the significance of globalisation. Crudely speaking, three contrasting perspectives may be identified (Cochrane & Pain, 2000):

- The traditionalist perspective – that globalisation and its impact is greatly overstated. Proponents argue, for example, that the nation-state remains the key polity although its will to act has been diminished by the rhetoric of globalisation. Critics point out, however, that regionalisation, as within the European Union (EU), and proliferation of transnational corporations suggest some sort of basic qualitative, if not quantitative, change.
- The globalist perspective – that globalisation has transformed the world in a thoroughly revolutionary manner. Proponents argue, for example, that the nation-state has been overtaken by the transnational, business community, described by some as a global cosmocracy. Power is the property of global capital, isolating the nation-state as a polity that is simultaneously too small (to control global capital) and too big (to engage with individual citizens). Critics point out, however, that the technologies associated with the information and communications revolution that is central to globalisation are equally accessible in all societies and in all parts of the world. This suggests that there are limits to globalisation.
- The transformationalist perspective – this perspective draws upon the other two in adopting the position that globalisation is being driven by epistemic communities, NGOs and social movements. Power is conceived of as circulating between the state, business corporations and people and is a response to the fact that the power of the traditional nation-state has been eroded. If phenomena such as multilayered governance are accepted as evidence of globalisation, then it follows that this process and its impacts are clearest in Europe.

The city plays a critical role in the process of globalisation. Whether one concurs with Sassen – in that cities are key sites in a hierarchy of urban centres and that they possess and are empowered by important expert services located within institutions (1991) or with Castells – who argues that cities are critical nodes in a space of flows and that the city is a process where the extent of its power, derived from the global economic networks, is related to the levels of access to these networks that are possessed by the groups of experts that are resident in the city (1989; 1996 & 1997), it is the case that most of the important commentators

on the city in globalisation agree that the network as the strategic architecture and that the exact location of a city in the network is a matter of power, dependent upon the ability of the city to negotiate its position with other players.

How does one read all of this with regard to the question of language and, in particular, linguistic diversity and minority languages? A profound duality is held as a central assumption to this text – globalisation is a threat to local cultures and identities but it is the case that they can be transformed and renewed through globalisation. Calvet recently published (2002), in French, a paper with the title ‘Sociolinguistics and Cities: Hazard or Necessity?’ Given the contemporary form of globalisation and the centrality of cities to it, the response seems quite clear. The challenge of understanding the relationship between sociolinguistics and cities is a necessity, hazardous perhaps, but essential. Moreover, if Crystal (e.g. 1987 & 2001), Fischer (1999) and others are correct in regarding the current historical juncture as a language extinction horizon then it is a necessity of the most pressing kind.

Thus, the central purpose of the text is set out, which is to construct a fresh conceptual framework for understanding language–city relationships that brings together critical literatures in human geography, language planning and urban planning while also drawing from material in sociology, anthropology, sociolinguistics and cultural studies. The various aims of the text are as follows:

- To provide the first comprehensive treatment of language–city relationships, illuminating the workings of language within the urban context
- To illustrate and to explain how cities function as the sites of linguistic diversity and innovation
- To illustrate and to explain how cities function as the sites of language change, language shift and language death
- To indicate ways in which language planning and policy might address these functions of the city in the interests of sustainable linguistic diversity
- To propose a conceptual framework for understanding language–city relationships through critical reference to cutting-edge research on the geography and sociology of the city and on the sociology of language, drawing upon relational and radical perspectives on the city and upon an ecological view of language
- To consider the extent to which the discipline of sociolinguistics is necessarily urban

- To counter a simplistic biodiversity = linguistic diversity formulation in identifying cities as significant sites of linguistic diversity and innovation, as well as being the sites of language change, language shift and language death
- To situate sociolinguistics, in general, and language planning, in particular, in relation to the theorisation of the contemporary form of globalisation
- To present original research on the language in city contexts from a global perspective, drawing upon sites from around the world
- To relate conceptions of the city to ecological perspectives on language.

The main body of the text is divided into two parts. In Part One, entitled 'The Intellectual Inheritance' and comprising Chapters Two, Three and Four, three interrelated sets of literature are critically reviewed. These are, in Chapter Two, the geography, history and sociology of the city; in Chapter Three, the development and practice of sociolinguistics, or the sociology of language, in urban contexts; and in Chapter Four, modern and contemporary theory and practice in the field of language planning in relation to linguistic diversity in the city. Part Two of the text, entitled 'Towards a New Conceptual Terrain' and comprising Chapters Five, Six and Seven, develops a number of themes that are crucial to understanding the relationship between language and the city, namely place, identity and power. Much of the original research will be presented in this part of the book. The final chapter of the book, Chapter Eight, draws together the various main points of the text. Also, directions for future empirical research are indicated.

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