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Kutlay Yagmur^a; Martin Ehala^b

^a Department of Cultural Studies, Tilburg University, The Netherlands ^b Institute of Estonian and General Linguistics, University of Tartu, Estonia

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INTRODUCTION

Tradition and innovation in the Ethnolinguistic Vitality theory

Kutlay Yagmur^{a*} and Martin Ehala^b

^a*Department of Cultural Studies, Tilburg University, The Netherlands;* ^b*Institute of Estonian and General Linguistics, University of Tartu, Estonia*

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Introduction

According to Google Scholar, the annual number of new publications mentioning ‘Ethnolinguistic Vitality’ (EV theory henceforth) has been steadily growing during the last 15 years, from 20 in 1995 to 144 in 2009. While these numbers may be influenced by the recent increased electronic availability of research papers and easier access to such articles, there is still reason to believe that the concept of ‘EV’ is gaining prominence in the twenty-first century.

An obvious reason for the rise in interest seems to stem from the effect that globalisation has on the dynamics of ethnic and linguistic communities. On the one hand, the increased mobility has made a large number of traditional ethnolinguistic groups vulnerable through the invasion of dominant languages, cultures and infrastructures into their previously well-bounded territories. On the other hand, the increased mobility has also caused the emergence of large minority communities in the territories of previously quite homogeneous nation-states in Europe, as well as in North America and Australia, although the settings are, to some extent, different.

The increase in both types of contact has amplified the variety of ways in which EV is manifested. Traditionally, vitality research has been employed to document the low vitality of minorities and the decrease in vitality in connection with language shift. In the contemporary world, the rise of EV in some subordinate groups has also become quite evident through its effects on intergroup relations. In connection with this, the issues of heightening EV have gained more attention. Undoubtedly, this diversity has increased the awareness of scholars of the complexity of the notion of vitality.

However, it is not only in the framework of EV that the issues of ethnic group maintenance and collective identity, group distinctiveness and methods of social mobilisation are addressed. These topics are also increasingly being studied in social psychology, cross-cultural psychology, political science, culture studies and other fields of the social sciences and humanities. This indicates the great interdisciplinary nature of the phenomenon and also a need for a more integrative approach to its study.

*Corresponding author. Email: K.Yagmur@uvt.nl

Based on this fact, the current special issue of *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* aims to provide a critical analysis of the current research in the field of EV, as well as to introduce some new ventures to advance it, both theoretically and methodologically.

Ethnolinguistic Vitality (EV) theory: research evidence

In this section, the concept of EV and its relevance to language maintenance, shift and loss are discussed. In order to systematically investigate ethnic minority language contexts, various language-use typologies have been proposed. The typologies of Ferguson (1966), Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor (1977), Haarmann (1986), Haugen (1972) and Edwards (1992) are some of the well known and frequently cited works. In each typology, the authors consider some linguistic and social factors to be essential for an accurate description of language contact situations. Among those factors, 'ethnolinguistics' is taken up by Haugen, Haarmann, Giles et al., and Edwards. However, they differ in their interpretation of the concept of ethnolinguistics. According to Haugen, the attitudes towards a language by its speakers are the subject matter of ethnolinguistics. On the other hand, for Haarmann, the linguistic distance between the contact languages is the domain of ethnolinguistics.

Ethnolinguistics is only one of 10 factors in Haugen's model and one of seven in Haarmann's framework, while Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor's (1977) framework is solely based on the notion of EV. The EV theory is a social-psychological approach to the relationship between language and identity. Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor (1977) proposed the model of EV to develop a framework for investigating the role of sociostructural variables in intergroup relations, crosscultural communication, second language learning, mother tongue maintenance, and language shift and loss. The vitality of an ethnolinguistic group was defined as 'that which makes a group likely to behave as a distinctive and active collective entity in intergroup situations' (Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor 1977, 308).

Vitality variables

According to Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor (1977), status, demography, institutional support and control factors combine to make up the vitality of ethnolinguistic groups. A group's strengths and weaknesses in each of these domains can be assessed so as to provide a rough classification of ethnolinguistic groups as having *low*, *medium* or *high vitality*. Low vitality groups are most likely to go through linguistic assimilation and are not considered a distinctive collective group (Bourhis, Giles, and Rosenthal 1981). On the other hand, high vitality groups are likely to maintain their language and distinctive cultural traits in multilingual settings.

In Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor's (1977) framework, status variables include the economic, social, socio-historical and language status of a group within or outside the mainstream community. Demographic variables are those related to the number and distributional patterns of ethnolinguistic group members throughout a particular region or national territory. Demographic variables also include birth rate, the group's rate of in-group marriages, and immigration and emigration patterns. Institutional support factors refer to the extent to which a language group enjoys formal and informal representation in the various institutions of a society, the

extent of formal and informal support received in various institutions, in particular mass media, education, government services, industry, religion, culture and politics.

The above are the actual variables shaping vitality which provide an 'objective' picture of the group as a collective unit. However, Bourhis, Giles, and Rosenthal (1981) proposed that group members' subjective vitality perceptions of each of these variables may be as important as the group's 'objective' vitality. This resulted in the construction of the Subjective Ethnolinguistic Vitality Questionnaire (SEVQ). In order to take into account individuals' perceptions of the societal conditions influencing them, Bourhis, Giles, and Rosenthal (1981) constructed the SEVQ to measure how group members actually perceive their own group and out-groups on important vitality items. Johnson, Giles, and Bourhis (1983, 258) argue that objective and subjective vitality provide a starting point from which the difficult link between sociological (collective) and social-psychological (individual) accounts of language, ethnicity and intergroup relations can be explored. Johnson, Giles, and Bourhis have suggested that 'the vitality variables were identified as being important on the basis of the existing empirical literature relating to sociological factors promoting and impeding language maintenance and assimilation' (1983, 258). The following are some of the assumptions discussed in the literature on EV theory. Generally it is agreed that:

- (1) The EV theory can provide a valuable direction for furthering researchers' understanding of the variables and mechanisms involved in the maintenance, shift or attrition of a minority language in a language-contact setting. Accordingly, by means of EV theory and its accompanying instrument SEVQ, the investigation of language attitudes, intergroup relations, language-use choice, and language maintenance or shift might gain a new perspective.
- (2) Subjective vitality perceptions shape ethnic groups' strategies and manifestations of ethnic identity, which are conditioned by the degree of EV of the group. Accordingly, a combination of 'objective' and 'subjective' vitality analysis provides researchers with a sociologically sound profile of the ethnic group being considered.
- (3) EV perceptions of one generation will influence the language behaviour of succeeding generations, which might lead either to maintenance or to shift.
- (4) Integrative versus segregative attitudes of ethnic groups are determined by the relative ethnolinguistic vitalities of majority vs. minority language groups. By reflecting on both the minority and the majority groups' subjective EV perceptions, acculturative attitudes of respective groups can be explored.

In line with these conceptual assumptions, the concept of EV has received increasing attention as a conceptual tool for investigative issues related to language attitudes (Dube-Simard 1983; Giles and Johnson 1981; Johnson, Giles, and Bourhis 1983; McNamara 1987; Ryan, Giles, and Sebastian 1982; Sachdev et al. 1987), intergroup relations (Allard and Landry 1986; Bourhis 1984; Bourhis and Sachdev 1984; Dube-Simard 1983; Sachdev et al. 1987; Saint-Blancat 1985), language maintenance and shift (Clement 1987; Gibbons and Ashcroft 1995; Giles and Johnson 1987; Taft and Cahill 1989; Yagmur 2004; Yagmur 2009; Yagmur and Akinci 2003; Yagmur, de Bot, and Korzilius 1999), language choice (Lewin 1987; McNamara 1987) and language revitalisation (Yagmur and Kroon 2003, 2006). In addition, a number of studies have tested the usefulness of the concept of EV as a research tool (Abrams, Barker, and

Giles 2009; Bourhis and Sachdev 1984; Giles, Rosenthal, and Young 1985; Pittam, Gallois, and Willemyns 1991; Willemyns, Pittam, and Gallois 1993). The findings of these studies have shown strong empirical support for the social–psychological nature of the concepts of both objective and perceived EV.

The underlying assumption behind EV theory is that there is a two-way relationship between social identity and language behaviour. There are socio-structural variables in a given society and those variables interact in shaping groups' EVs. Saint-Blancat's (1985) study has shown how socio-structural variables directly influence the minority's vitality. Leets and Giles' (1995, 38) argument supports Saint-Blancat's that 'sociological factors not only directly affect a language's survival but also, and just as importantly, shape individuals' sociopsychological and interactional climates'.

In line with the EV theory, low vitality perceptions of group members can either lead to linguistic assimilation or language maintenance. Nevertheless, in some language contact contexts, in spite of low EV perception, a minority group may find an adequate strategy for the survival of the group only if the group members identify strongly with their community (Bourhis 1984; Johnson, Giles, and Bourhis 1983; Saint-Blancat 1985). However, the dominant group's strategies in relation to intergroup encounters are the deciding factor, as it is possible for dominant groups to manipulate the information reaching ethnic groups (through mass media and education) in such a way as to weaken the ethnic group's own vitality. Johnson, Giles, and Bourhis (1983), on the other hand, suggest that, despite dominant group control and manipulations, ethnic groups remind themselves of powerful periods in their own history, so that they can reinforce language maintenance efforts.

Ethnic group members develop more than one type of strategy in intergroup settings. They may systematically minimise or exaggerate the vitality of their own or other groups, depending on how much they identify with their own group, their degree of social interaction with in- and out-group members, their language choice in various settings, and whether they see intergroup settings as positive or negative (Bourhis, Giles, and Rosenthal 1981; Leets and Giles 1995; Sachdev et al. 1987). Furthermore, it is suggested that group survival and language maintenance are dependent on the perceptions and behaviour of succeeding generations of ethnolinguistic groups (Sachdev et al. 1987).

Critics of Ethnolinguistic Vitality (EV) theory

EV theory has been criticised by some scholars (e.g. Haarmann 1986; Husband and Saifullah Khan 1982; Tollefson 1991) with respect to its specification and application. Husband and Saifullah Khan (1982) have argued that the socio-structural variables identified as determining vitality are conceptually ambiguous. By simply depending on sociological and demographic information, these variables may produce a simplified analysis of ethnolinguistic groups. Husband and Saifullah Khan argue that it is risky to categorise groups as 'low' or 'high' vitality, as the variables proposed are not independent of each other but, rather, are interrelated. Husband and Saifullah Khan question the specification of 'ethnolinguistic' groups because such factors as social class, age, gender and sub-cultural divisions have been ignored. They also consider the operationalisation of the variables to be imprecise and ambiguous.

Husband and Saifullah Khan's (1982), and also Tollefson's (1991) criticisms centre on the claim that the concept of EV is defined in terms of dominant group criteria, and the recognition of the status of an ethnolinguistic community is based, again, on dominant criteria. In the same vein, Husband and Saifullah Khan criticise the specification of institutional support and control factors on the grounds that the institutions belong to the dominant group and the ethnic group's institutional support factors (ethnic schools, religious teaching and so on) are controlled by dominant groups.

Tollefson's (1991) criticisms, too, are structured around hegemony and power issues. He suggests that EV theory derives from Giles's speech accommodation theory, and that it is dominant-centric in nature. Tollefson argues that, according to accommodation theory, ethnic groups have greater vitality if their languages have higher status, favourable demographic variables, such as rising birth rates, and significant institutional support. Accordingly, he comments, the accommodation theory ignores key historical and structural variables that explain the range of choices available and the constraints operating on individuals that determine the meanings of their choices. Tollefson further claims that accommodation theory views language learning and language loss as two types of 'long-term accommodation', and that the accommodation theory attempts to explain language learning and language loss with reference to the EV of groups. He concludes by suggesting that the survival of minority languages is not simply a function of the 'internal vitality' of minority groups, but also of the strength of the dominant group and the historical consequences of hegemony (1991, 75).

Johnson, Giles, and Bourhis (1983) have reconsidered some of the controversial issues and provided responses to some of the criticisms. First of all, they partially recognise the validity of the criticisms regarding the interdependence of socio-structural variables; however, they believe that, on the basis of further empirical studies in various settings, specific links can be made between vitality items. In response to the criticisms regarding the hegemony issue, they suggest that despite dominant group control and manipulations, subordinate group members remind themselves of powerful moments in their own history. Also, in response to the criticism that vitality items were constructed without a theoretical framework, Johnson et al. claim that the vitality variables were developed by reflecting on the present literature on the sociology of language, with a firm theoretical background.

Current perspective

Over 30 years have passed since the introduction of the notion of 'EV' by Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor (1977). During this time, a substantial body of research has accumulated, including a number of collective volumes (Kindell and Lewis 2000; Landry and Allard 1994a, 1994b). The theory has seen a few advancements, such as the introduction of the notion of subjective vitality (Bourhis, Giles, and Rosenthal 1981), the conceptualisation of subjective vitality as a belief system (Allard and Landry 1986) and the proposal for a framework of vitality assessment (Harwood, Giles, and Bourhis 1994), to name a few significant ones. The theory has also evoked debates from time to time (Edwards 1994; Haarmann 1986; Hamers and Michel 1989; Husband and Saifullah Khan 1982; Johnson, Giles, and Bourhis 1983). Nevertheless, the interest in the EV theory has remained sparse (see Abrams, Barker, and Giles 2009) and the framework has not yet managed to establish itself as a

genuine field of study bridging sociolinguistics, cultural studies and social psychology, due to a number of methodological and conceptual factors. For example, the theory has changed very little over 30 years. The three main factors proposed initially as the determining factors for group vitality have remained essentially the same (Abrams, Barker, and Giles 2009; Bourhis 2001) and, although some alternative models have been proposed (Ehala 2009; Landry and Allard 1994a), this has not led to substantial development and refinement of the theory. Partly, this may be due to methodological difficulties, which have not made possible systematic falsification of hypotheses and the comparison of different models. Also, there seems to be a gap between the central notion and the work conducted in social psychology on related issues. Provided that EV is ‘that which makes a group likely to behave as a distinctive and active collective entity in intergroup situations’ (Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor 1977), it is essentially the feature of groupness of an ethnic community. In this way, the notion of vitality is close to the notion of entitativity, which is ‘the extent to which a group is perceived as being a coherent unit in which the members of the group are bonded together in some fashion’ (Lickel, Hamilton, and Sherman 2001). In social psychology, entitativity has attracted substantial attention over the last 15 years and several different aspects of group identification have been outlined (Roccas et al. 2008). It is likely that the theory of EV could benefit from the insights from these studies.

Despite the methodological and theoretical issues that need to be elaborated, the notion of EV has great heuristic value and it has been used as a reference point in several related fields. For example, it has been applied to issues of cross-cultural communication (Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey 1990), language maintenance (Giles, Leets, and Coupland 1990), second language learning (Clement, Baker, and MacIntyre 2003), acculturation (Bourhis et al. 1997) and media studies (Moring and Husband 2007). These applications indicate that the notion of EV has been found useful in explaining phenomena in these studies, but these phenomena can also offer feedback to the EV theory, providing crucial insights into the interrelations between vitality and other factors. As influences are rarely unidirectional in social domains, the applications of vitality theory bear direct relevance to the development of the theory itself.

Bearing in mind these circumstances, this special issue on theoretical aspects and applications of EV seeks to address a range of issues, including:

- What other factors besides demographic, status and institutional support play a role in affecting EV?
- Is it possible to generalise over a vast range of factors influencing EV to a limited set of crucial ones, or does EV depend too much on the case at hand?
- How can the problems of multiple and hybrid identities be approached within the vitality framework?
- Is a uniform methodology achievable for assessing EV, or should the method correspond to a particular social setting?
- How can a triangulated methodology be adopted in the investigation of EV and ethnocultural identity?
- How can various applications of the notion of vitality be used to elaborate and test the theory?

Most of the contributions to this special issue are based on papers presented at the colloquium ‘Scrutinizing Ethnolinguistic Vitality: Some new data and approaches’ at

the XII International Conference of Minority Languages, 28–29 May 2009 in Tartu, Estonia. Some participants in the colloquium at the Tartu conference revised their papers and contributed to this volume. Based on the findings on EV perceptions of Turkish immigrants in Australia, France, Germany and the Netherlands, in combination with language maintenance and shift results, Yagmur offers a critical evaluation of the EV theory and its research application. He basically claims that EV theory underestimates the ethnic institutions created by the ethnic groups themselves to take care of their own group interests. In contexts where the mainstream institutions do not give any formal support, ethnic groups set up their own institutions to provide all types of services promoting language maintenance.

Ehala and Zabrodskaia discuss the effect of inter-ethnic discordance on the subjective vitality perceptions of Russian speakers in Estonia. They mainly argue that a group's EV cannot be effectively measured on the basis of a single instrument such as a subjective EV questionnaire. They argue that high perceived inter-ethnic discordance may enhance group vitality by reducing the permeability of group boundaries and strengthening the emotional attachment to the group through identity threat. In this way, higher perceived discordance will contribute to higher subjective vitality perceptions. By examining EV in relation to intergroup discordance, group boundaries and ethnic identification, Ehala and Zabrodskaia show that SEV perceptions are significantly influenced by other social-psychological factors and therefore cannot be taken as a direct measure of SEV.

By using the Perceived Benefit Model of Language Shift (Karan 2001), and his own taxonomy of language shift motivations, Mark E. Karan claims that predicting the EV of ethnic groups is possible. According to Karan, the Perceived Benefit Model predicts that the discordance between populations representative of languages in the larger community's repertoire indeed has different impacts on language vitality and language shift situations.

By drawing on a study of language attitudes and shift, and the EV of the Greek-Orthodox community in Istanbul, Lisa J. McEntee-Atalianis argues that there is much to recommend the tripartite conceptualisation of the EV framework in assessing both subjective and objective vitality via quantitative and qualitative methods, such as ethnographic/observational approaches and discourse analytic frameworks. On the basis of her meta-analysis, McEntee-Atalianis introduces valuable new dimensions to the study of EV.

In their comparative study on media, media use and EV in bilingual communities, Tom Moring, Charles Husband, Catharina Lojander-Visapää, Laszlo Vincze, Joanna Fomina and Nadja Mänty explore the utility of EV as a conceptual tool in investigating the relationship between the media and language retention among German speakers in South Tyrol, Hungarian speakers in Romania, Swedish speakers in Finland, Finnish speakers in Sweden and Polish speakers in the UK. On the basis of their large-scale study, Moring et al. provide valuable evidence of the relationship between EV perceptions of different generations in different ethnic groups and their use in the media. In spite of differences between indigenous minorities and immigrant minorities, this study shows that media can be important vehicles in the maintenance of ethnic language and the supporting EV.

Finally, in his exploratory and summarising article, Martin Ehala introduces a new agenda for the study of EV in different communities. Ehala not only reviews and evaluates the papers presented in this Volume; he also presents an innovative approach for the investigation of language maintenance and shift, and EV in

different settings. Based on the strength of the emotional attachment of members to their group, Ehala categorises ethnic groups into two prototypes: as 'hot' or 'cold'. He suggests that the degree of emotional attachment (high or low) might predict the level of mobilisation (high or low) among group members in terms of their group interests. Ehala argues that EV is achieved by substantially different means in hot and cold groups: for hot groups, vitality is achieved by the strength of collective emotions, and for cold groups, vitality is the consequence of its members' rational decisions. By exploring the dynamics of EV in the dimensions of group strength, inter-ethnic discordance, utilitarianism versus traditionalism, and intergroup boundaries, Ehala presents an innovative approach to the study of EV in different communities.

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