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# Ethnolinguistic Vitality

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| Abstract: | Ethnolinguistic vitality is a group's ability to maintain and protect its existence in time as a collective entity with a distinctive identity and language. It involves continuing intergenerational transmission of group's language and cultural practices, sustainable demography and active social institutions, social cohesion and emotional attachment to its collective identity. This entry identifies the key stages of the development of the concept, and the main theoretical models with an outline of their core elements. |
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**Ethnolinguistic vitality**

**Martin Ehala**
**University of Tartu**
**Email address:** martin.ehala@ut.ee

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**Abstract**
Ethnolinguistic vitality is a group's ability to maintain and protect its existence in time as a collective entity with a distinctive identity and language. It involves continuing intergenerational transmission of group's language and cultural practices, sustainable demography and active social institutions, social cohesion and emotional attachment to its collective identity. This entry identifies the key stages of the development of the concept, and the main theoretical models with an outline of their core elements.

Ethnolinguistic vitality is a group's ability to maintain and protect its existence in time as a collective entity with a distinctive identity and language. It involves continuing intergenerational transmission of group's language and cultural practices, sustainable demography and active social institutions, social cohesion and emotional attachment to its collective identity. High vitality groups are capable of collective action to secure the group's interests in its intergroup setting while low vitality groups lack agency and are prone to assimilation.

The concept was introduced in 1977 (Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor, 1977) and has evolved through several stages of theoretical development. The theory of ethnolinguistic vitality is an interdisciplinary research framework involving language sociology, social psychology of language, sociolinguistics, media studies, political science, and anthropology. It has accumulated a large amount of empirical evidence, and at present, it is the most comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding the process of language maintenance and shift. Language shift is a process by which a language ceases to exist because its speakers do not pass it to their children.

**Standard model of ethnolinguistic vitality**
According to the standard model "the vitality of an ethno-linguistic group is that which makes a group likely to behave as a distinctive and active collective entity in inter-group situations" (Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor, 1977, p. 308). It was suggested that groups that have little vitality are likely to cease to exist as distinctive collectives, assimilating to stronger groups while those that have high vitality are likely to survive. Ethnolinguistic vitality has been divided into objective vitality (OV) and subjective vitality (SV). OV is the group's strength as determined by three groups of variables: demographic factors, institutional support factors and status factors.

Demographic factors are those that relate to the size of the group, birth rate, endogamy, exogamy patterns, immigration, emigration and geographical distribution of the group members, their proportion relative to members of various out-groups, and their historical ties to the territory which they populate. Institutional support factors consist of formal and informal support factors. Formal support factors indicate the extent to which the members of a group have gained positions of power in business, industry, administration, education, mass media, culture, sports and other fields. Informal support factors refer to the degree that a group has organized itself as a pressure group to safeguard its interests in social institutions such as education, culture and administration. Status factors are the social prestige

of a group, its socio-historic status, i.e. respect based on its historic achievements, and the prestige of its culture and language within a society, as well as internationally.

[Figure 1 here]

        In the standard model, SV was viewed as group members' subjective perceptions of their groups' vitality along the dimensions which were assumed to be the same as those that characterized objective vitality (see Figure 1). On this basis, a Subjective Vitality Questionnaire (SVQ) was constructed (Bourhis, Giles, and Rosenthal, 1981) containing items measuring the perception of OV factors. The results revealed that SV measured in this method was not in a consistent correlation with the three factor structure of the OV or reflected poorly the actual linguistic behaviour (language maintenance or shift) of the group. This led to the development of ethnolinguistic identity theory as a more elaborated account of social psychological side of vitality.

**Ethnolinguistic identity theory**
        Ethnolinguistic identity theory was elaborated by integrating the principles of social identity theory with the theory of ethnolinguistic vitality (Giles, and Johnson, 1987). Ethnolinguistic identity theory proposes that high level of SV increases members' identification with the group and their wish to maintain their language or ethnic speech style in intergroup communication. This tendency is strengthened if the group members perceive the intergroup boundaries to be rigid and impermeable and the intergroup situation as unstable, i.e. if they see cognitive alternatives to the existing group status relations. The lack of speech accommodation under these conditions was hypothesised to support language maintenance on the macro level. Conversely, if the speakers have low vitality perceptions, they see the intergroup situation as stable and legitimate and the intergroup boundaries as permeable, allowing for social mobility, they would choose to accommodate linguistically to the majority language speakers, and in the long run, this would lead to language shift (Giles, and Johnson, 1987).

**Extended model of ethnolinguistic vitality**
        Summarising cumulative work of 1980ties, the collective volume "Ethnolinguistic vitality" edited by Landry and Allard (1994a) presented the extended model of vitality. The concept of SV was elaborated by combining the affective side of identification with the perceptions of objective vitality resulting in a 24-item Beliefs on Ethnolinguistic Vitality Questionnaire (BEVQ). In BEVQ, the questions on exocentric vitality beliefs assess the perception of present and future vitality as well as its legitimacy; the items on egocentric beliefs assess the feeling of belongingness to the community and one's personal goals in relation to this affiliation.  Although BEQV has explained the language maintenance/shift patterns better then SVQ, it has not managed to become the standard instrument for measuring SV.
        Landry and Allard (1994b) proposed that minority group members' language behaviour is indicative of ethnolinguistic vitality. In extended model, language behaviour is modelled via the individual network of linguistic contact (INLC) which reflects the speaker's choice of the first (L1) and second (L2) languages in a wide range of communicative situations, including family, friends, acquaintances, school and work, public places, written and audiovisual media usage, and attendance of cultural events. The structure of INLC is influenced by OV, and it further influences the formation of SV.  The model includes a

temporal feedback loop where the SV affects speakers' language behaviour which may modify the structure of INCL in time. The changing structure of INLC may in turn influence OV (see Figure 2, upper left hand).

At the same time Harwood, Giles and Bourhis (1994) analysed and elaborated the theory further. They added the metacognitive/communicational level, called Vitality Assessment. Broadly, Vitality Assessment is the process of subjective vitality formation and it is believed to influence also a number of communicative behaviours such as L1 use and L2 learning, language choice and attitudes, linguistic accommodation etc. Vitality Assessment is derived from the cognition of ethnolinguistic situation (Figure 1, upper left hand) and it aims to explain "how representations of vitality within public and private discourse go about influencing the profiles that are observed" (Harwood, Giles, and Bourhis, 1994, p. 201). The structure of the extended model is presented in Figure 2 (the contributions of Landry and Allard (1994b) are presented in solid lines and Harwood, Giles, and Bourhis, 1994, in dashed lines):

[Figure 2 here]

The extended model broadened the scope of ethnolinguistic vitality research considerably by including new dimensions and emphasising the need to include qualitative and ethnographic data in the vitality research that until then had mainly been based on quantitative surveys. Subsequent theoretical developments in vitality research have been directed towards refining different aspects of the extended model.

### Further developments
**Interactive acculturation model**. The interactive formation of vitality perceptions of dominant and minority groups has been discussed in a number of studies of ethnolinguistic vitality with recurrent findings according to which vitality perceptions are related to intergroup processes, and that SV is constructed relationally in intergroup contact situations. Based on this rationale, the Interactive Acculturation Model (IAM) was proposed by Bourhis et al. (1997).

IAM states that the outcomes of intergroup relations are influenced by the acculturation orientations (assimilation, integration, segregation or marginalisation) that both the dominant majority group and a particular minority group have in the context of this particular intergroup setting. They propose that the combination of majority and minority acculturation orientations may lead either to consensual, problematic or conflictual relational outcomes. Consensual relational outcomes occur when both groups share either integration or assimilation attitudes, while conflictual relational outcomes are the likely outcome in the case of segregationist and marginalization orientations. The model predicts that the openness of the host society is the main factor that leads to integration and assimilation, while closedness leads to segregation and/or marginalization. The vitality of the minority group has a major influence on the relational outcome – low vitality groups tend to assimilate or marginalize, while medium vitality groups become integrated or segregated. High vitality groups may opt for acculturation orientations that satisfy the needs of their own cultural development rather than those preferred by the dominant majority.

**Cultural autonomy model** (CAM) proposed by Landry, Allard and Deveau (2010) elaborated the OV component of the standard model. CAM has four components: Social Proximity, Institutional Completeness, Ideological Legitimacy, and Group Identity. In CAM, the three groups of OV factors are rearranged revealing their dynamic interaction and connection to the group members' active participation within group's cultural and social institutions mediated by the strength of their collective identity.

Social Proximity is what Joshua Fishman calls home-family-neighbourhood-community nexus and what in the standard model is accounted for by the component of demographic factors. This is the setting where the primary socialisation and intergenerational transmission of language happens. The component of Institutional Completeness corresponds largely to institutional support factors in the standard model. The component of Ideological Legitimacy incorporates the status factors of the standard model, but includes also the language and minority policies of the state as well as the majority attitudes towards minority rights, much as outlined in the IAM.

Social Proximity, Institutional Completeness and Ideological Legitimacy are seen as interacting and reinforcing each other in the process of cultural autonomy. Strong social proximity facilitates elaboration of control over cultural institutions (education, media, church, health services) that the community needs for increasing its vitality; this in turn will positively feed back to social proximity patterns in the long run. Strong institutional control enables community leaders to engage in negotiations with the state to gain higher ideological legitimacy to their community and more linguistic rights which results in fuller institutional control over institutions and services. Ideological legitimacy influences language usage patterns in the social proximity component while active community is able to support group claims for greater ideological legitimacy.

All three components are equally important in this model forming a conceptual tripod. Collective identity is seen as standing in the centre of this tripod "connecting each of the legs, holding them together and solidifying the structure" (Bourhis, and Landry, 2008, p.199). This means that collective identity is the foundation of group action and the basis which makes it possible for the group to strengthen its institutional completeness and ideological legitimacy. Collective identity in turn is influenced by all three legs, so that low levels of social proximity, institutional completeness, and ideological legitimacy tend to weaken identification resulting in lower participation in community actions. High support from the tripod legs strengthens the identity and collective participation. The structure of the Cultural Autonomy Model is shown in Figure 3:

[Figure 3 here]

**Subjective vitality model**. Based on the ethnolinguistic identity theory and the previous advances in the structure of subjective vitality (SVQ and BSVQ), Ehala (2010) refined the concept of SV by outlining the relationships between the social psychological factors that contribute to the group's ability to act collectively. The refined SV model aims to specify the mechanisms of members' emotional attachment to the group and its Collective Identity as specified in the CAM model (Figure 3, centre).

The SV model includes four components: Perceived Strength Differential (PSD), perceived intergroup Discordance (D), perceived intercultural distance (R) and the level Utilitarianism (U). PSD expresses how strong the ingroup is perceived in comparison with the most relevant outgroup and it is measured by the standard SVQ, deducting the outgroup score from the score of ingroup (Negative PSD indicating low vitality and positive PSD high vitality in comparison with the relevant outgroup). D expresses the perceived illegitimacy of the intergroup power relations as well as distrust towards the outgroup. High D levels increase group's vitality while negative values of D, indicating outgroup favouritism, decrease vitality. Intergroup distance R expresses the nature of the individuals' network of linguistic contacts and the perception of cultural, racial and religious similarity with the out-group. The more the out-group language is used and the closer the respondent perceives him/herself to be to the out-group culturally, the lower is the vitality. Utilitarianism U characterises the commitment to the traditions and values of the in-group vs. the detachment from those traditions and

values and adherence to utilitarian values that stress personal needs and aspirations. Low U enhances vitality while high U decreases it. The relations of the components in the model are expressed in the formula SV = U (PSD + D) / R.

**See also**: Bilingualism & multilingualism; Communication accommodation theory; Cultural identity; Identity construction; Intercultural dialogue; Language ideologies; National language policies; Social psychology and language

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**Further reading**

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                              │ Ethnolinguistic │
                              │    vitality     │
                              └─────────────────┘
              ┌────────────────┐              ┌────────────────┐
              │ Objective vitality │          │ Subjective vitality │
              └────────────────┘              └────────────────┘
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Demographic factors
       Number
       Distribution
       Birth rate
Immigration
Institutional support factors
Industry
       Business
       Administration
       Education
       Mass media
       Religion
       Culture
Status factors
       Economic status
       Social status
       Socio-historical status
       Language status
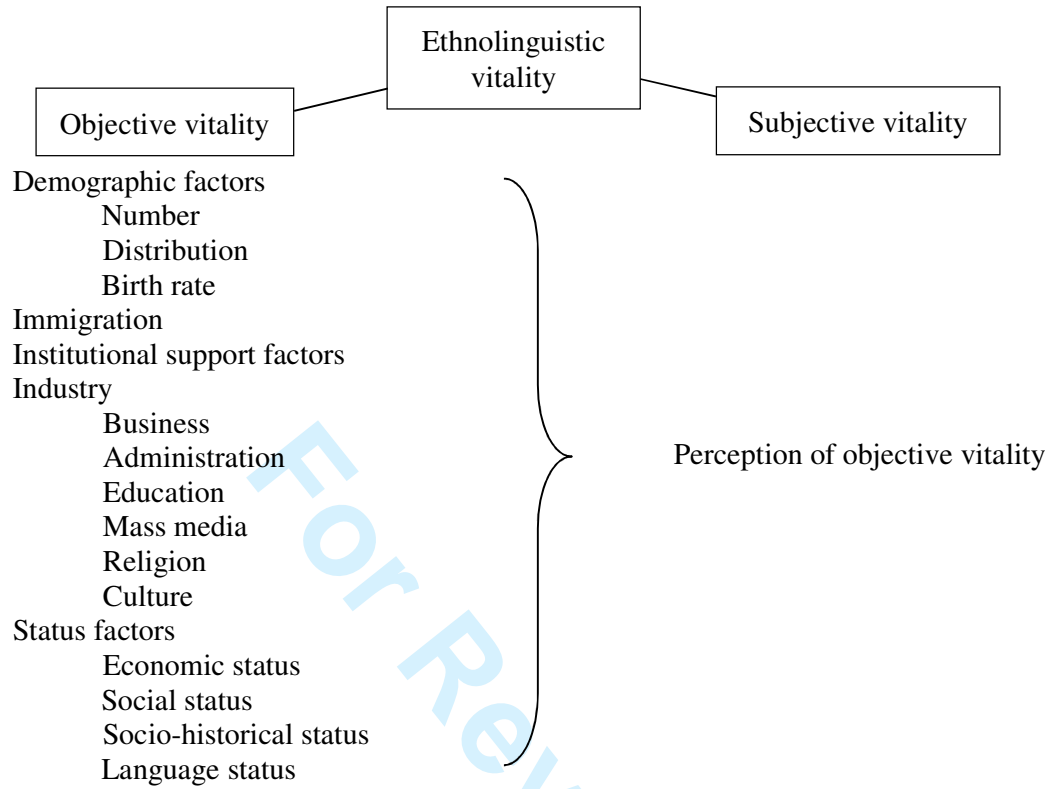
Perception of objective vitality

Figure 1. The standard model of ethnolinguistic vitality (based on Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor, 1977)
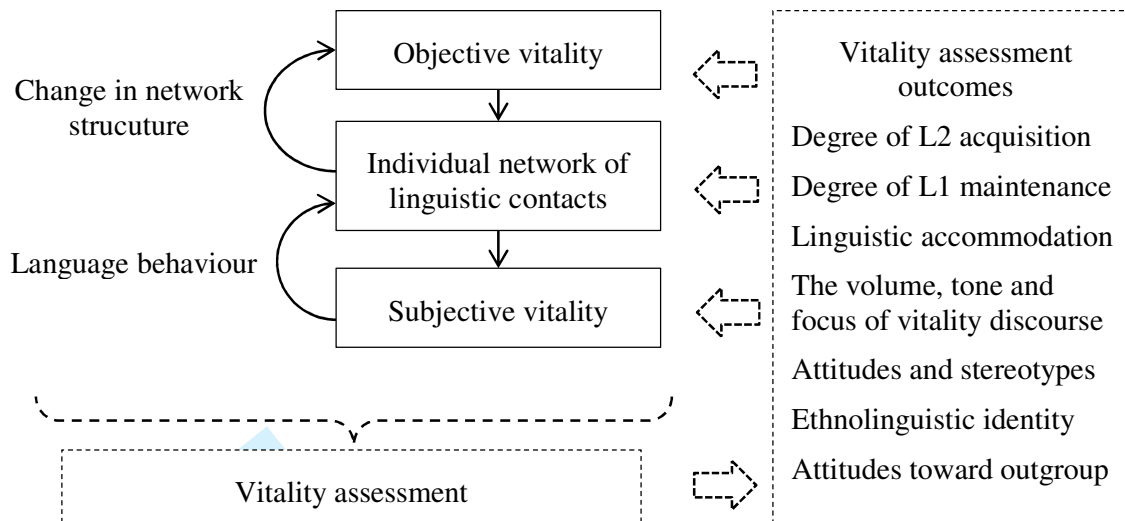
Figure 2. The extended model of ethnolinguistic vitality (based on Harwood, Giles, and Bourhis, 1994, and Landry and Allard, 1994b)

CIVIL SOCIETY Mobilization STATE AND CITIZENS

Institutional
Completeness

Governance

Ideological
Legitimacy

Collective Identity

Leadership

Community Participation

COMMUNITY

Social Proximity

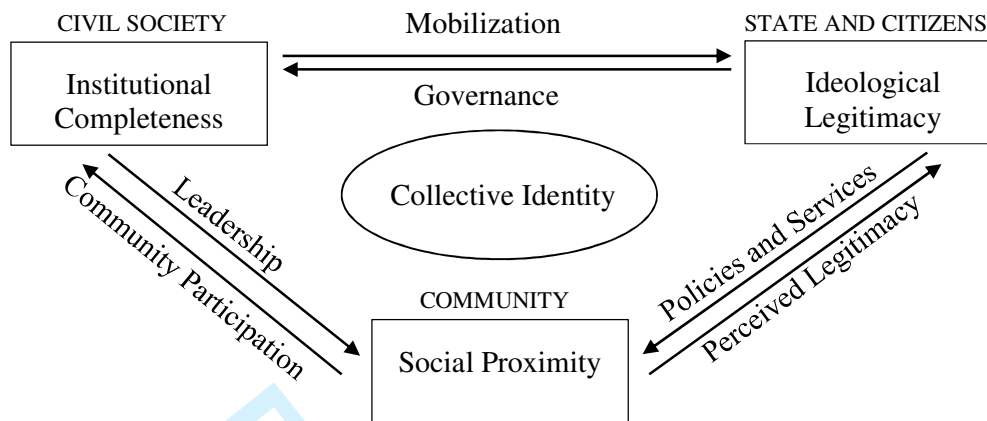Policies and Services

Perceived Legitimacy

Figure 3. Cultural autonomy model (adapted from Landry, Allard, & Deveau, 2010, p. 33)