

## INTRODUCTION

Fewer languages will exist in the third millennium than in the second. According to current estimates, some six thousand different vernaculars are now spoken in the world and, of these, about half will probably die out during the next hundred years (Krauss 1992). As Crystal (1999) points out, this means that, on average, the world loses one speech variety every fortnight.

Language death is neither a recent nor an uncommon phenomenon. Hittite and Etruscan are well-known examples of varieties which became extinct in prehistory and which have left precious little trace. Dorian (1981: 1–2) also describes how, during the twentieth century, dying languages were attested and documented all over the world. However, it is only since the early 1970s that the field of language death has become established as a separate sub-discipline of linguistic study, and much of the thanks for this must go to Dorian herself.

It would be wrong, however, to assume that the field of language death is concerned with dead languages. Languages only die with the disappearance of their last native speaker and, at this point, they are little more than curiosities – they cannot develop and, in most cases, have no function.<sup>1</sup> Within linguistics, language death is the study of varieties which are typically undergoing both reduction in terms of their speaker numbers and territorial contraction. In its strictest conceptual sense, it is the end point of the process of linguistic obsolescence, characterized by Bauman (1980) as a situation where:

- (i) an age gradient of speakers terminates in the adult population
- (ii) the language is not taught to children in the home
- (iii) the number of speakers declines very rapidly
- (iv) the entire (speaking) population is bilingual and English is preferred in essentially all situations
- (v) the language is inflexible, it no longer adapts to new situations
- (vi) there is no literacy.<sup>2</sup> (cited in Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer 1998: 59)

Obsolescent languages are not inherently different in nature from so-called 'healthy' ones – two varieties may undergo similar types of linguistic change but while such change is, in one case, associated with obsolescence, in the other there are no such connotations. Take, for example, the phenomenon of borrowing. In English, this is neither stigmatized nor an indication of obsolescence while, for varieties such as Scots Gaelic (Abalain 1989: 103) or Breton (Dressler 1991: 102–3), it is considered a sure sign of attrition. In

fact, the types of linguistic change recorded in dying and ‘healthy’ varieties differ very little and it is the sheer quantity of these changes, rather than their precise nature, together with the rate at which they occur and the sociopolitical situation of the variety in question, which make them indicative of language obsolescence. It should also be emphasized that the term ‘language death’ is not prescriptive – indeed, it is impossible to foretell the fate of any variety with great accuracy. Languages may survive with very few speakers,<sup>3</sup> and, as seen in Haiti, strong entrenchment can often compensate for a lack of prestige (Cobarrubias 1983: 55). It is also possible that, with a change in the sociopolitical context, revitalization may occur. Moreover, the existence of mixed languages such as Copper Island Aleut (Vakhtin 1998) and Ma’a (Thomason and Kaufman 1988: 223–8) indicates that to speak of ‘living’ versus ‘dying’ languages may often be to over-simplify the situation.

The complexity of issues involved in the decline of a variety within its native speech community has meant that, as Grenoble and Whaley point out, most comparative work on threatened languages tends to focus on the points they have in common rather than on the characteristics that separate them (1998: 22).<sup>4</sup> Indeed, several linguists, including Grenoble and Whaley themselves, have attempted to establish a typology or classification of language-death situations.

The most frequently cited of these classifications is that described by Campbell and Muntzel (1989: 182–6), who mention four possible scenarios:

- (i) *sudden death*, where there is language loss due to the sudden death, or massacre, of most of a variety’s speakers, such as in the case of Tasmanian.
- (ii) *radical death*, where loss is similarly rapid and is usually due to severe political repression, often with genocide, with the result that speakers stop using the language out of self-defence. This was seen, for example, in El Salvador in the early 1980s, when many people stopped speaking their native languages in order to avoid being identified as Indians, and thus killed.
- (iii) *gradual death*, where a language is lost in a contact situation, with the dominant language gradually ousting the subordinate – often minority – variety. The scenario typically involves intermediate stages of bilingualism, an age-governed proficiency continuum, where young speakers tend to be least proficient in the dying language and older speakers most proficient, and the existence of one or more generations of semi-speakers (Dorian 1981: 107).
- (iv) *bottom-to-top death*, where a language is lost in intimate contexts and remains exclusively in ceremonial usage. This category is rarer and is illustrated by Campbell’s own fieldwork in South America, where he found four men who were able to recite several prayers in South-

eastern Tzeltal, which speakers of other Tzeltal dialects were unable to translate as they no longer used this form of ritual language.<sup>5</sup>

The case of Jèrriais, the Norman dialect spoken on the Island of Jersey, is of interest to the field of language obsolescence since it does not ‘fit’ any of the four categories outlined above. Although the variety has been suffering a decline in speaker numbers since the nineteenth century, the progression towards obsolescence has taken less time than in most case studies found in the literature, which frequently describe varieties treading a slow, albeit steady, path towards extinction, as Campbell and Muntzel’s term ‘gradual death’ implies. Unlike most dying varieties, which may have a large number of older-generation speakers and fewer in each subsequent generation so that, to all intents and purposes, they gradually peter out, with Jèrriais no such marked age-continuum is present: native speakers are relatively easily locatable amongst Jersey-born inhabitants over the age of sixty but speakers under this age are thinner on the ground and very few native speakers are to be found under the age of forty. In other words, intergenerational transmission of Jèrriais has ceased completely and comparatively abruptly.

As seen above, Campbell and Muntzel give the names ‘sudden death’ and ‘radical death’ to more rapid types of linguistic extinction. These are both triggered by catastrophic events in a variety’s sociopolitical context and involve either the death or massacre of the native speech community, or at least fear of the latter. Although the linguistic situation of Jèrriais conforms to neither of the above scenarios, one easily identifiable catastrophic event did undeniably loom large in its history, namely the Second World War (Bunting 1996). In 1940, realizing that it would be impossible to defend the Channel Islands effectively against the German army, the British government decided to demilitarize. The Islands were subsequently invaded and were occupied by Germany until 1945. At the time of demilitarization, Islanders were given the opportunity of being evacuated to the mainland, an offer which, on Jersey, was taken up by some 10,000 people (out of a population of some 51,000), and included many women and children. The evacuees did not return to Jersey until the end of the war. The evacuations therefore meant that many of Jersey’s then children and teenagers spent five years in Great Britain and, as a corollary of this, were forced, during this time, to have almost exclusive recourse to the language with which their native tongue was in competition. Unlike Campbell and Muntzel’s ‘radical death’ (1989: 183), the severe political repression experienced by the Islanders who lived under German Occupation did not encourage them to stop speaking Jèrriais – if anything, it became a strong motivation for them to use it – but the result of these events brought about a marked change in circumstances after the German surrender in 1945. Although the Second World War did not literally result in the death of a significant number of the Jèrriais speech community, then, the German Occupation of the Island

during this period did lead to the elimination of many of its members from Jersey for the best part of five years, and meant that a considerable proportion of the Island's children were denied the opportunity to grow up in a Jèrriais-speaking environment, and hence the potential to speak Jèrriais as their first language. Those who had been evacuated as infants or young children had grown up with English as their native tongue and few of these ever became truly bilingual in Jèrriais. Moreover, despite the fact that speakers of Jèrriais were able to renew their acquaintance with their native tongue on returning to Jersey after the war, many older children and younger adults had either forgotten their Jèrriais or preferred not to use it, seeing English as a more fashionable, progressive variety, the language of social advancement and the key that unlocked the world outside the Island, whereas Jèrriais effectively locked its speakers into Jersey. Many parents considered proficiency in English to be far more beneficial to their offspring and thus made little attempt to teach them the native dialect. Dorian (1998: 3) mentions that it is common for a variety to become so exclusively related to a low-prestige people that its potential speakers prefer to distance themselves consciously from it and speak another language. This seems to have been true of Jèrriais-speaking parents at that time, who sought to provide their children with a different identity (or, at least, a means to escape their identity). Therefore, although the widespread Anglicization of the Island from the nineteenth century onwards meant that Jèrriais had certainly taken its first steps on the path to obsolescence before the outbreak of the Second World War, the unprecedented population movement which was brought about by the war in the space of half a decade had repercussions for both the Islanders' ability in, and their attitudes towards, Jèrriais, and this greatly precipitated the process of obsolescence.

On Jersey, therefore, there exists a situation whereby language obsolescence began gradually but seems to have been speeded up by a catastrophic event which greatly accelerated speaker reduction both physically, by taking many Islanders away from Jersey during the war, and also psychologically, by holding up English as the symbol of the outside world. As such, the circumstances seem to represent a mixture of both gradual and radical death, although, unlike in El Salvador, the language death following the catastrophic event was instigated indirectly rather than directly by the perpetrators of the political repression.<sup>6</sup>

Language death is found in all language families and on all continents. Indeed, Hill suggests that 'at least half the languages in the world have disappeared in the last 500 years' (1978: 69). Many of these varieties have vanished with little or no trace, taking with them valuable information about linguistic change. Although the work of Spence has provided detailed information on the phonology of Jèrriais (see, for example, Spence 1957a, 1957b, 1985, 1987, 1988) and that of Brasseur has attempted to situate the different varieties of Norman with respect to one another (Brasseur 1978a,

1978b), other than this, to date much of the academic writing on Jèrriais consists of occasional articles, such as Mason (1980), where Jèrriais is studied as a comparison with mainland Norman, rather than in its own right. A wealth of writing by dialect enthusiasts also exists but, as these individuals have generally received no linguistic training, such work tends to be largely comprised of general discussions on the state of the dialect (see, for example, Le Maistre 1947, 1981) or on a particularity of the lexis (see, for example, Le Feuvre 1979).

By undertaking a detailed examination of Jèrriais, this book presents a case study of an obsolescent variety whose sociolinguistic history differs from the more common 'gradual death' pattern but which, unless effective revitalization measures are implemented within the very near future, will nevertheless be to all intents and purposes dead in thirty so so years. As obsolescence is a sociolinguistic process rather than an exclusively linguistic one (Hoenigswald 1989: 353; Dressler 1981: 5), the study will attempt to give equal prominence to the external setting, speech behaviour and structural consequences of the process, described by Sasse (1992a: 19) as the interacting factors that come into play in a situation of this kind. As such, the work is of importance to the field of language obsolescence by offering a case study which differs from the more common 'gradual death' scenario and also helps answer Schmidt's appeal for more empirical evidence to be gained about terminal language stages (1985: 5).

The second and third chapters provide essential background information for readers unfamiliar with Jèrriais. Chapter 2 gives an account of the sociohistorical setting against which Jèrriais has developed. It also explains why the Channel Island varieties of Norman show the effect of prolonged contact with English, the language that is currently playing an instrumental role in their demise, rather than with mainland varieties of Norman, from which the Channel Island varieties differ significantly.

Chapter 3 gives a brief description of the phonology of Jèrriais, outlining its differences from standard French and illustrating the most salient ways in which it diverges from the other Channel Island varieties and from Mainland Norman. It also discusses the extensive regionally determined internal variation which is to be found within the dialect.

Chapters 4 and 5 examine the 'external' situation of Jèrriais. Chapter 4 draws a sociolinguistic profile of the speech community, based on data gathered by means of a survey undertaken in July 1996 of a sample of fifty native speakers of Jèrriais. Although, as will be seen in chapter 2, the 1989 Census of Jersey was able to establish the *number* of Jèrriais speakers for the first time, it did not provide any information on the *nature* of the speech community. Chapter 4, therefore, represents the first attempt of its kind to remedy this situation. The methodology and sampling technique used for the fieldwork are also presented in this chapter.

Chapter 5 documents the language planning that is currently being

undertaken as part of the campaign to revitalize Jèrriais. As well as examining the major driving forces and institutions behind the movement, it discusses recent examples of corpus planning and focuses on issues such as the embryonic standardization of Jèrriais and its implications for the future of the dialect.

Chapters 6 and 7 focus on the ‘internal’ situation of Jèrriais by examining linguistic developments attested in the contemporary dialect. They draw extensively on original data collected via tape-recorded interviews and lexical questionnaires. In both cases, the sample consists of the same informants as in chapter 4.

Chapter 6 examines linguistic developments at two levels. In the first instance, there is an analysis of the change taking place in the morphosyntax and lexis of Jèrriais, which has resulted in a situation whereby contemporary Jèrriais often differs significantly from traditional descriptions of the dialect. While it is demonstrated that some of these developments are undoubtedly due to contact with English, it becomes clear that others are more ambiguous in terms of their motivation. The second type of development discussed is phonological in nature and serves to illustrate the unpredictable nature of obsolescent varieties. Despite the fact that the Jèrriais setting seems to be ripe for the occurrence of a form of koinéization between the highly localized sub-dialects, analysis of the corpus revealed far more resistance to such levelling than had been anticipated.

Chapter 7 is intended to complement chapter 6 by extending the discussion of the lexis undertaken in that chapter to encompass the concept of lexical erosion. Terminology from ten common speech domains is examined in order to determine the relative vitality of different terms in everyday usage.

Chapter 8 is an attempt to complete the linguistic picture by considering the possible influence of Jèrriais on local varieties of French and English spoken on the Island, as well as possible recent influences of standard French on Jèrriais. Constraints of time and resources precluded as extensive or systematic a study of these varieties as that undertaken for Jèrriais in chapters 6 and 7. However, the analysis of Jersey English was undertaken on the basis of original data gathered from notes and observations made during field trips to Jersey between 1996 and 2000. The data used to examine the influence of standard French on Jèrriais are taken from the same recordings as those analysed in chapter 6 and represent ‘intrusive’ features that appeared so often in the speech of informants as to warrant further comment. The discussion of the influence of Jèrriais on the French of Jersey is based not on original data but, rather, on a reanalysis of data collected by Hublart (1979). All three types of influence examined in this chapter would make interesting subjects of study in their own right, and it is hoped to extend this analysis in the near future.