2 Language choice in multilingual communities

Choosing your variety or code

What is your linguistic repertoire?

Example 1

Kalala is 16 years old. He lives in Bukavu, an African city in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo-Zaire with a population of about 240,000. It is a multicultural, multilingual city with more people coming and going for work and business reasons than people who live there permanently. Over 40 groups speaking different languages can be found in the city. Kalala, like many of his friends, spends his days roaming the streets, stopping off periodically at regular meeting places in the market-place, in the park or at a friend's place. During a normal day he uses at least three different varieties or codes, and sometimes more.

Kalala speaks an informal style of Shi, his tribal language, at home with his family, and he is familiar with the formal Shi used for weddings and funerals. He uses informal Shi in the market place when he deals with vendors from his own ethnic group. When he wants to communicate with people from a different tribal group, he uses the lingua franca of the area, Swahili. He learned standard (Zairean) Swahili at school, but the local market place variety is a little different. It has its own distinct linguistic features and even its own name – Kingwana. He uses Kingwana to younger children and to adults he meets in the streets, as well as to people in the market place. He listens to pop music in Lingala, although he doesn't speak it or understand it.

Standard Swahili, one of the national languages, is the language used in Bukavu for most official transactions, despite the fact that French is the official language of the Democratic Republic of the Congo-Zaire. Kalala knows almost no French and, like most other people in Bukavu, he uses standard Swahili with officials in government offices when he has to fill in a form or pay a bill. He uses it when he tries for a job in a shop or an office, but in fact there are very few jobs around. He spends most of his time with his friends, and with them he uses another variety or code called Indoubil. This is a variety which is used among the young people in Bukavu, regardless of their ethnic backgrounds or tribal affiliations. It is used like in-group slang between young people in monolingual communities. Indoubil is based

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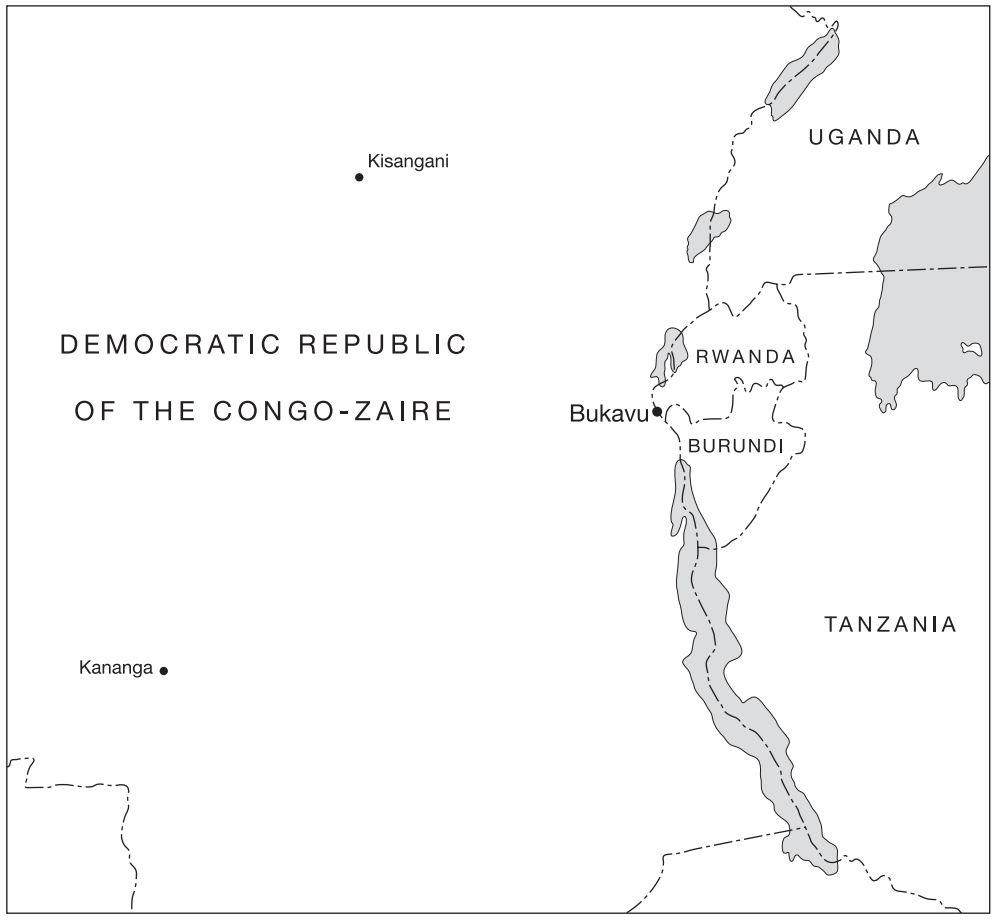

Map 2.1 Bukavu, Democratic Republic of the Congo-Zaire

on Swahili, but it has developed into a distinct variety or code by drawing on languages like French, English and Italian – all languages which can be read or heard in the multilingual city of Bukavu.

If we list the varieties or codes he uses regularly, we find that Kalala's linguistic repertoire includes three varieties of Swahili (standard Zairean, local Swahili or Kingwana, and Indoubil) and two varieties of his tribal language, Shi (a formal and an informal or casual style). The factors that lead Kalala to use one code rather than another are the kinds of social factors identified in the previous chapter as relevant to language choice in speech communities throughout the world. Characteristics of the users or participants are relevant. Kalala's own linguistic repertoire and the repertoire of the person he is talking to are basic limiting factors, for instance.

Table 2.1 illustrates the possibilities for communication when Kalala wanted to talk to a soldier who had recently arrived in Bukavu with his unit. Since he and his addressee share only one code or variety, standard Swahili, there is not much choice if he wants to communicate referential content (as opposed to, say, insult, abuse or admiration, where any variety could convey the affective message).

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Table 2.1 Two linguistic repertoires in the Democratic Republic of the Congo-Zaire

Kalala's linguistic repertoire	*Addressee's linguistic repertoire*
Shi: informal style formal style	Rega: informal style formal style
Indoubil	Lingala
Kingwana	
Standard Zairean Swahili	Standard Zairean Swahili

Source: Based on Goyvaerts *et al.* (1983), Goyvaerts (1988, 1996).

Exercise 1

(a) There are many degrees of 'knowing' a language. Table 2.1 is a simplification since it does not take account of how well Kalala and his addressee know any particular variety.
Consider how well you know a language other than your mother tongue.
How would you rate your knowledge? What factors are relevant to your assessment?
Do these include social factors?

(b) Using the information provided in the section above, which varieties do you think Kalala will use to
(i) talk to his younger brother at home?
(ii) plan the morning's activities with his best friend?
(iii) greet a stranger from a different tribe whom he met in the street?

Answers at end of chapter

Domains of language use

Example 2

'Anahina is a bilingual Tongan New Zealander living in Auckland. At home with her family she uses Tongan almost exclusively for a wide range of topics. She often talks to her grandmother about Tongan customs, for instance. With her mother she exchanges gossip about Tongan friends and relatives. Tongan is the language the family uses at meal-times. They discuss what they have been doing, plan family outings and share information about Tongan social events. It is only with her older sisters that she uses some English words when they are talking about school or doing their homework.

Certain social factors – who you are talking to, the social context of the talk, the function and topic of the discussion – turn out to be important in accounting for language choice in many different kinds of speech community. It has proved very useful, particularly when describing code choice in large speech communities, to look at 'typical' interactions which involve these factors. We can imagine, for instance, a 'typical' family interaction. It would be located in the setting of the home; the typical participants will obviously be family members; and typical topics would be family activities. 'Anahina's family's meal-time conversations, described

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in example 2, illustrate this pattern well. A number of such typical interactions have been identified as relevant in describing patterns of code choice in many speech communities. They are known as *domains* of language use, a term popularised by Joshua Fishman, an American sociolinguist. A domain involves typical interactions between typical participants in typical settings.

Table 2.2 describes five domains which can be identified in many communities.

Table 2.2 Domains of language use

Domain	*Addressee*	*Setting*	*Topic*	*Variety/Code*
Family	Parent	Home	Planning a family party	_____
Friendship	Friend	Beach	How to play beach tennis	_____
Religion	Priest	Church	Choosing the Sunday liturgy	_____
Education	Teacher	School	Solving a maths problem	_____
Employment	Employer	Workplace	Applying for a promotion	_____

Source: Based on Fishman (1972: 22).

Exercise 2

(a) Fill in the column labelled variety/code for your speech community. If your community is monolingual, remember that the term variety includes different dialects and styles of language.

(b) Ask a bilingual friend or neighbour which languages they would use in the different domains. It is useful to guess in advance how they will answer and then check your predictions against their responses. When you are wrong, see if you can identify the reason for your error.

If you do not know anyone who is bilingual, think of where you might meet people who are bilingual. In Wellington, New Zealand, students have found that bilingual people in local shops and takeaway bars are very interested in this topic, and are pleased to talk about their language use. You could consider asking a bilingual worker in a takeaway shop, a delicatessen or corner shop about their patterns of language use. But don't ask when they are busy!

Example 3

In Paraguay, a small South American country, two languages are used – Spanish, the language of the colonisers, and Guaraní, the American Indian indigenous language. People in Paraguay are proud that they have their own language which distinguishes them from the rest of South America. Many rural Paraguayans are monolingual in Guaraní, but those who live in the cities are usually bilingual. They read Spanish literature, but they gossip in both Spanish and Guaraní.

A study by Joan Rubin in the 1960s identified complementary patterns of language use in different domains. Urban bilingual Paraguayans selected different codes in different situations, and their use of Spanish and Guaraní fell into a pattern for different domains

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(see Table 2.3). This was useful, though it still leaves considerable areas of language use unspecified. Faced, for example, in the countryside by a woman in a long black skirt smoking a cigar what language should you use? (The answer will be based on your predictions about her linguistic repertoire.)

Table 2.3 Domains of language use in Paraguay

Domain	*Addressee*	*Setting*	*Topic*	*Language*
Family	Parent	Home	Planning a family party	*Guaraní*
Friendship	Friend	Café	Funny anecdote	*Guaraní*
Religion	Priest	Church	Choosing the Sunday liturgy	*Spanish*
Education	Teacher	Primary school	Telling a story	*Guaraní*
Education	Lecturer	University	Solving a maths problem	*Spanish*
Administration	Official	Office	Getting an import licence	*Spanish*

Source: This table was constructed from data provided in Rubin (1968).

This table describes the situation 40 years ago, but patterns of language use have steadily changed in Paraguay, especially in the urban areas. The complementary patterns of language use identified by Joan Rubin in the 1960s have given way to much greater bilingualism in most domains in twenty-first century Paraguay. City dwellers use both Spanish and Guaraní in the home as well as in school, and some fear that Guaraní may eventually be displaced in urban areas.

Exercise 3

In Brittany, Maryon McDonald noted that on a farm where she stayed the mother spoke Breton to the dog because it was farm dog, but she used (in her view) the more sophisticated language, French, to the cat because it was a pet. If you live in a multilingual speech community you might like to make notes on which language people use to their pets and why.

Modelling variety or code choice

Example 4

Maria is a teenager whose Portuguese parents came to London in the 1960s. She uses mainly Portuguese at home and to older people at the Portuguese Catholic church and community centre, but English is the appropriate variety or code for her to use at school. She uses mostly English in her after-school job serving in a local café, though occasionally older customers greet her in Portuguese.

Domain is clearly a very general concept which draws on three important social factors in code choice – participants, setting and topic. It is useful for capturing broad generalisations about any speech community. Using information about the domains of use in a community, it is possible to draw a very simple model summarising the norms of language use for the community. This is often particularly useful for bilingual and multilingual speech communities.

The information provided in example 4, for instance, identifies four domains and describes the variety or code appropriate to each.

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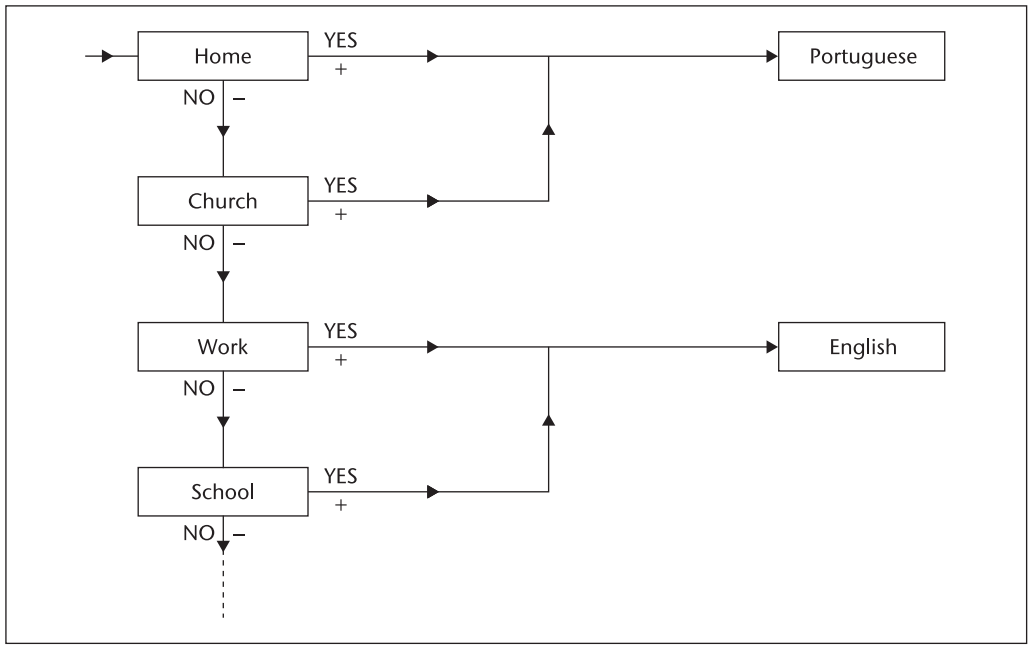

Figure 2.1 Appropriate code choice in different domains among the Portuguese community in London

Domain	**Variety/code**
Home/family	Portuguese
Church/religion	Portuguese
Work/employment	English
School/education	English

This information can also be summarised in a diagram or model, as figure 2.1 illustrates. While it obviously oversimplifies the complexity of bilingual interaction, nevertheless a model like this is useful in a number of ways. First, it forces us to be very clear about which domains and varieties are relevant to language choice. The model summarises what we know about the patterns of language use in the community. It is not an account of the choices a person *must* make or of the process they go through in selecting a code. It is simply a description of the community's norms which can be altered or added to if we discover more information. It would be possible, for instance, to add other domains after 'school', for instance, such as 'the pub' or 'the law court'.

A second reason why an explicit model is useful is that it provides a clear basis for comparing patterns of code choice in different speech communities. Models make it easy to compare the varieties appropriate in similar domains in different speech communities. And a model is also useful to a newcomer in a community as a summary of the appropriate patterns of code use in the community. A model describes which code or codes are usually selected for use in different situations. A model for Sauris, the Italian mountain community described in example 7 in chapter 1, would show that Friulian is normally used to order a beer in the local bar. And in Bukavu, if you want to be able to buy vegetables in the local market place at a reasonable price, a model would inform you that you need to know how to use Kingwana.

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Exercise 4(a)

Consider example 2 above. What does it suggest about the limitations of a domain-based approach to language choice?

Answer at end of chapter

Example 5

Oi Lin Tan, a 20-year-old Chinese Singaporean, uses three languages regularly. At home she uses Cantonese to her mother and to her grandfather who lives with them. With her friends she generally uses Singapore English. She learned to understand Hokkien, another Chinese language, in the smaller shops and market place, but in large department stores she again uses Singapore English. At primary school she was taught for just over half the time in Mandarin Chinese, and so she often watches Channel 8, the Mandarin television station, and she regularly reads a Chinese newspaper *Liánhé Zǎobào*, which is written in Mandarin Chinese. During the other part of the time at primary school she was taught in a formal variety of Singapore English. This is the code she uses when she has to deal with government officials, or when she applies for an office job during the university holidays. She went to an English-medium secondary school and she is now studying geography and economics at an English-medium university. Her textbooks are all in English.

Exercise 4(b)

Although Oi Lin Tan uses Cantonese to her mother, she uses Singapore English to her sisters. On the other hand, she uses Cantonese at the market to elderly Cantonese vegetable sellers. What factors might account for these code choices?

Answer at end of chapter

Other social factors affecting code choice

Though we have used domains as useful summaries of relevant social factors in the model provided above, it is often necessary to examine more specific social factors if a model is to be a useful description of code choices in a community. The components of a domain do not always fit with each other. They are not always 'congruent'. In other words, within any domain, individual interactions may not be 'typical' in the sense in which 'typical' is used in the domain concept. They may, nevertheless, be perfectly normal, and occur regularly. This is illustrated by Oi Lin Tan's use of Singapore English to her sisters as described in example 5. People may select a particular variety or code because it makes it easier to discuss a particular topic, regardless of where they are speaking. At home, people often discuss work or school, for instance, using the language associated with those domains, rather than the language of the family domain. Some describe this as 'leakage', suggesting it is in some way irregular – the code associated with one domain is 'leaking' into another. In fact, it is quite normal and very common. Particular topics may regularly be discussed in one code rather than another, regardless of the setting or addressee.

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The dimensions introduced in chapter 1 illustrate this point nicely. Any or all of them may be relevant in accounting for the choice of variety or code in a particular situation. When both participants share more than one variety, then other factors will contribute to the appropriate choice. The **social distance** dimension is relevant, for instance. How well do they know each other, i.e. what is the social distance between the participants? Are they strangers, friends, brothers? Kalala, for example, would use a different code to each.

The **status** relationship between people may be relevant in selecting the appropriate code. A high-status official in Bukavu will be addressed in standard Swahili in many contexts. In Singapore, English is the most frequently selected code for official transactions, regardless of the speaker's ethnicity. Social role may also be important and is often a factor contributing to status differences between people. Typical role relationships are teacher–pupil, doctor–patient, soldier–civilian, priest–parishioner, official–citizen. The first-named role is often the more statusful. You can no doubt think of many more examples of role pairs like these. The same person may be spoken to in a different code depending on whether they are acting as a teacher, as a parent or as a customer in the market place. In Bukavu, for instance, Mr Mukala, a teacher, insists on standard Swahili from his pupils, his wife uses Kongo, their tribal language, to talk to him, while in the market place he is addressed in Kingwana, the local variety of Swahili.

Features of the setting and the dimension of **formality** may also be important in selecting an appropriate variety or code. In church, at a formal ceremony, the appropriate variety will be different from that used afterwards in the church porch. The variety used for a formal radio lecture differs from that used for the adverts. In Paraguay, whether the interaction takes place in a rural as opposed to an urban setting is crucial to appropriate language choice. Other relevant factors relate to the social dimensions of formality and status: Spanish is the appropriate language for formal interactions.

Another important factor is the **function** or goal of the interaction. What is the language being used for? Is the speaker asking a favour or giving orders to someone? When Kalala applies for an office job he uses his 'best' standard written Swahili on the application form, and his most formal style of standard Swahili at the interview. When he verbally abuses his younger brother he uses Indoubil, the code in which his vocabulary of 'insult' is most extensive. The function is exclusively affective, and Kalala transmits his feelings effectively, despite the fact that his brother doesn't understand much Indoubil yet.

So in describing the patterns of code use of particular communities, the relevant social factors may not fit neatly into institutionalised domains. As we have seen, more specific social factors often need to be included, and a range of social dimensions may need to be considered too. The aim of any description is to represent the language patterns of the community accurately. If the model does not do that, it needs to be modified. The only limitation is one of usefulness. If a model gets too complicated and includes too many specific points, it loses its value as a method of capturing generalisations.

Exercise 5

Using the information provided in example 1, draw a diagram like that in figure 2.1 summarising the factors relevant to code choice for Kalala in Bukavu.

Answer at end of chapter

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Models can usefully go beyond the social factors summarised in the domain concept to take account of social dimensions such as social distance (stranger vs friend), relative status or role (doctor–patient), degrees of formality (formal wedding ceremony vs lunchtime chat) and the function or goal of the interaction (getting a bargain). Nevertheless, because they are concerned to capture broad generalisations, there are obvious limits to the usefulness of such models in describing the complexities of language choice. Interactions where people switch between codes within a domain cannot always be captured even by diagrams which consider the relevance of topic or social dimensions such as formality and social distance. This kind of linguistic behaviour is better described by a more detailed analysis of particular interactions. This point will be developed further in the section on code-switching and mixing below.

Before considering code-switching, however, it is useful to relate the patterns described so far to the important sociolinguistic concept of *diglossia*.

Diglossia

A linguistic division of labour

Example 6

In Eggenwil, a town in the Aargau canton of Switzerland, Silvia, a bank-teller, knows two very distinct varieties of German. One is the local Swiss German dialect of her canton which she uses in her everyday interactions. The other is standard German which she learnt at school, and though she understands it very well indeed, she rarely uses it in speech. Newspapers are written in standard German, and when she occasionally goes to hear a lecture at the university it may be in standard German. The national TV news is broadcast in standard German, but weather broadcasts now use dialect. The sermons her mother listens to in church are generally in standard German too, though more radical clerics use Swiss German dialect. The novels Silvia reads also use standard German.

The pattern of code or variety choice in Eggenwil is one which has been described with the term *diglossia*. This term has been used both in a narrow sense and in a much broader sense and we describe both. In the narrow and original sense of the term, diglossia has three crucial features:

1. Two distinct varieties of the same language are used in the community, with one regarded as a high (or H) variety and the other a low (or L) variety.
2. Each variety is used for quite distinct functions; H and L complement each other.
3. No one uses the H variety in everyday conversation.

The situation in Eggenwil fits these three criteria for narrow or 'classic' diglossia perfectly. There are a number of other communities which fit this narrow definition too. Arabic-speaking countries use classical Arabic as their H variety and regional colloquial varieties as L varieties. In Greece, until late last century there was an H variety Katharévousa, alongside an L variety, Dhimotiki, but Katharévousa has now disappeared (as described below). At one time, Latin was the H variety alongside daughter languages, such as Italian, French and Spanish, which had developed from its more colloquial form. These communities all satisfy the three criteria.

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In these communities, while the two varieties are (or were) linguistically related, the relationship is closer in some cases than others. The degree of difference in the pronunciation of H and L varies from place to place, for example. The sounds of Swiss German are quite different from those of standard German, while the pronunciation of Greek Katharévousa, when it was used, was much closer to Dhimotiki. The grammar of the two linguistically related varieties differs too. Often the grammar of H is morphologically more complicated. So standard German, for instance, uses more case markers on nouns and tense inflections on verbs than Swiss German; and standard French, the H variety in Haiti, uses more markers of number and gender on nouns than Haitian Creole, the L variety.

Most of the vocabulary of H and L is the same. But, not surprisingly since it is used in more formal domains, the H vocabulary includes many more formal and technical terms such as *conservation* and *psychometric*, while the L variety has words for everyday objects such as *saucepan* and *shoe*. There are also some interesting paired items for frequently referred to concepts. Where standard German uses *Kartoffel* for 'potato' and *Dachboden* for 'attic', Swiss German uses *Härdopfel* and *Estrich*. Where Katharévousa used *ikía* for 'house', Dhimotiki uses *spiti*.

We have some choices in English which give the flavour of these differences. Choosing between words like *perused* and *read*, or *affluent* and *rich*, for instance, or between expressions such as *having finally despatched the missive* and *when I had posted the letter at last* captures the kind of differences involved. But while either would be perfectly possible in written or spoken English, in most diglossia situations the H form would not occur in everyday conversation, and the L form would generally seem odd in writing.

Exercise 6

Fill in the following table on the basis of your predictions about when H will be used and when L will be used in diglossic communities.

	H(igh) Variety	L(ow) Variety
Religion (sermon, prayers)		
Literature (novels, non-fiction)		
Newspaper (editorial)		
Broadcasting: TV news		
Education (written material, lectures)		
Education (lesson discussion)		
Broadcasting: radio		
Shopping		
Gossiping		

Answer at end of chapter

No one uses H for everyday interaction. In Arabic-speaking countries, for instance, classical Arabic is revered as the language of the Koran. It is taught in school and used for very formal interactions and in writing. But for most everyday conversations in Arabic-speaking countries people use the colloquial variety. A friend of mine went to Morocco having learned classical Arabic at university in England. When he arrived and used his classical variety, some people were very impressed. People generally respect and admire those who have mastered classical

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Arabic. But most of them couldn't understand what he was saying. His colleagues warned him that he would be laughed at or regarded as sacrilegious if he went about trying to buy food in classical Arabic. It would be a bit like asking for steaks at the butcher's using Shakespearian English.

Attitudes to H vs L in a diglossia situation

Example 7

A century and a half ago a Swiss traveller in Haiti expressed his annoyance at the fond complacency with which the white creoles regarded their patois. He was sharply answered by a creole, who declared: 'There are a thousand things one dares not say in French, a thousand voluptuous images which one can hardly render successfully, which the Créole expresses or renders with infinite grace.'

Haiti has been described as another diglossic situation by some linguists, with French as the H variety and Haitian Creole as the L variety. As the quotation in example 7 suggests, attitudes towards the two codes in a diglossia situation are complicated. People generally admire the H variety even when they can't understand it. Attitudes to it are usually very respectful. It has prestige in the sense of high status. These attitudes are reinforced by the fact that the H variety is the one which is described and 'fixed', or standardised, in grammar books and dictionaries. People generally do not think of the L variety as worth describing. However, attitudes to the L variety are varied and often ambivalent. In many parts of Switzerland, people are quite comfortable with their L variety and use it all the time – even to strangers. In other countries, where the H variety is a language used in another country as a normal means of communication, and the L variety is used only locally, people may rate the L variety very low indeed. In Haiti, although both French and the Creole were declared national languages in the 1983 constitution, many people still regard French, the H variety, as the only real language of the country. They ignore the existence of Haitian Creole, which in fact everyone uses at home and with friends for all their everyday interactions. On the other hand, the quotation in example 7 suggests that even here the L variety is highly valued by some speakers. So while its very existence is denied by some, others may regard the L variety as the best way of expressing their real feelings.

Exercise 7

(a) Using the information provided above, summarise what you now know about the differences between H and L in diglossic communities.
- **(i)** How are they linguistically related? Are they distinct languages or varieties of the same language?
- **(ii)** How are they used in the community?
- **(iii)** Which is used for conversation with family and friends?
- **(iv)** How is each variety learned?
- **(v)** Which has most prestige?

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(vi) Which is codified in grammar books and dictionaries?
(vii) In which variety is literature usually written?

(b) Judged by these seven features would you say that Hemnesberget described in example 6 in chapter 1 qualified as a diglossic community? Why (not)?

Answers at end of chapter

Diglossia with and without bilingualism

Diglossia is a characteristic of speech communities rather than individuals. Individuals may be bilingual. Societies or communities are diglossic. In other words, the term diglossia describes societal or institutionalised bilingualism, where two varieties are required to cover all the community's domains. There are some diglossic communities where there is very limited individual bilingualism; e.g. in Haiti more than 90 per cent of the population is monolingual in Haitian Creole. Consequently, they cannot actively contribute in more formal domains.

Table 2.4 is one way of considering the range of potential relationships between diglossia and bilingualism. It is an idealised model, but it usefully identifies the extreme positions that are possible. If we restrict the terms diglossia and bilingualism to refer to different languages (rather than dialects or styles), then box 1 refers to a situation where the society is diglossic, two languages are required to cover the full range of domains and (most) individuals are bilingual. Those communities in Vanuatu where individuals speak the local village language (e.g. Erromangan, Aulua), as well as Bislama, the lingua franca of Vanuatu, would illustrate this box. Box 2 describes situations where individuals are bilingual, but there is no community-wide functional differentiation in the use of their languages. Many English-speaking countries fit this description. Individuals may be bilingual in Australia, the USA, England and New Zealand, but their two languages are not used by the whole community in different domains.

Table 2.4 Relationship between diglossia and bilingualism

		DIGLOSSIA	
		+	–
BILINGUALISM	+	1. Both diglossia and bilingualism	2. Bilingualism without diglossia
	–	3. Diglossia without bilingualism	4. Neither diglossia nor bilingualism

Source: Fishman (2003: 360).

Box 3 describes the situation of politically united groups where two languages are used for different functions, but by largely different speech communities. This is true for Haiti, since most people are monolingual in Haitian Creole. This situation tends to characterise colonised countries with clear-cut social class divisions: i.e. the elite speak one language and the lower classes use another: e.g. the French-speaking elite in nineteenth century Russia and in eleventh century Norman England. There will, of course, always be some bilingual individuals who act as go-betweens, but the overall pattern is one of diglossia without bilingualism. Box 4 describes

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the situation of monolingual groups, and Fishman suggests this is typical of isolated ethnic communities where there is little contact with other linguistic groups. Iceland, especially before the twentieth century, serves as an example of such a community, but there are also communities like this in places such as Papua New Guinea (PNG) and the Amazon basin.

The criteria which identify diglossic communities were initially interpreted very stringently, so that few communities qualified as diglossic. Soon, however, it became clear that some sociolinguists felt that the term could usefully be extended.

Extending the scope of 'diglossia'

As table 2.4 suggests, the way H and L varieties of German function in places like Eggenwil is very similar to the ways in which distinct languages operate in other communities, such as Sauris in the Italian Alps. Each code or language is used in different situations from the other. In earlier decades in Paraguay, the domains where Guaraní was used were quite distinct from those where Spanish was appropriate. Because of this similarity, it was suggested that bilingual communities like Sauris and Paraguay should also be considered as examples of diglossia. 'Diglossia' is here being used in a broader sense which gives most weight to feature or criterion (ii) – the complementary functions of two varieties or codes in a community. Features (i) and (iii) are dispensed with and the term diglossia is generalised to cover any situation where two languages are used for different functions in a speech community, especially where one language is used for H functions and the other for L functions. There is a division of labour between the languages.

Other features of the 'classic' diglossia situations are also often relevant, but they are not regarded as crucial to the definition. So the H variety is generally the prestige variety, but people may also be attached to and admire the L variety, as in Paraguay where people are typically proud of Guaraní. L is learned at home and the H variety in school, but some people may use H in the home too, as in Sauris where parents used Italian to children in order to prepare them for school. Literature is generally written in H rather than L, but there may be a rich oral literature in L. Though H has generally been standardised and codified in grammar books and dictionaries for centuries, L languages are also increasingly being codified and standardised.

Exercise 8

(a) Fill in the following table using the description of twentieth century Paraguayan patterns of language use outlined in example 3 and table 2.3 above as a basis for predicting which language is likely to be the main one associated with a particular domain.

	Spanish	**Guaraní**
Religion		
Literature		
Schooling		
Broadcasting		
Shopping		
Gossiping		

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(b) Does twentieth century Paraguay qualify as a diglossic society if criterion (ii) is regarded as the only important one?

Answers at end of chapter

Polyglossia

Diglossic situations involve two contrasting varieties, H and L. Sometimes, however, a more sophisticated concept is needed to describe the functional distribution of different varieties in a community. People like Kalala in Bukavu use a number of different codes for different purposes. The term polyglossia has been used for situations like this where a community regularly uses more than three languages. Kalala's linguistic repertoire described above in table 2.1 provides a nice example of polyglossic relationships.

Oi Lin Tan's Cantonese-speaking community in Singapore, described in example 5, can similarly be described as polyglossic, but the relationships between the various codes or varieties are not at all straightforward. Table 2.5 represents one way of describing them.

Table 2.5 Polyglossia in Singapore

H	Mandarin	Singapore English formal variety
L	Cantonese Hokkien	Singapore English informal variety

Both Mandarin and formal Singapore English can be considered H varieties alongside different L varieties. Mandarin functions as an H variety in relation to at least two L varieties, Hokkien and Cantonese. Informal Singapore English is an L variety alongside the more formal H variety. So for this speech community there are two H varieties and a number of L varieties in a complex relationship.

Polyglossia is thus a useful term for describing situations where a number of distinct codes or varieties are used for clearly distinct purposes or in clearly distinguishable situations.

Changes in a diglossia situation

Diglossia has been described as a stable situation. It is possible for two varieties to continue to exist side by side for centuries, as they have in Arabic-speaking countries and in Haiti for example. Alternatively, one variety may gradually displace the other. Latin was ousted from its position as the H language in Europe, for example, as the L varieties gradually expanded or leaked up into more formal domains. England was diglossic (in the broad sense) after 1066 when the Normans were in control. French was the language of the court, administration, the legal system and high society in general. English was the language of the peasants in the fields and the streets. The following words provide a nice illustration of this relationship:

English	**French**		**English**
ox	boeuf	→	beef
sheep	mouton	→	mutton
calf	veau	→	veal
pig	porc	→	pork

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The English *calf* becomes French *veau* as it moves from the farm to the dinner table. However, by the end of the fourteenth century, English had displaced French (while absorbing huge numbers of French words such as *beef*, *mutton*, *veal* and *pork*) so there were no longer domains in which French was the appropriate language to use.

In Greece, the relationship between Dhimotiki (L) and Katharévousa (H) changed in the late twentieth century. At the turn of the century, the relative roles of the two varieties were still quite distinct. Katharévousa was regarded very highly and was the appropriate variety for serious speeches or writing. Dhimotiki was used for informal conversation. There was

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a language riot in Athens in 1901 when the New Testament was published in Dhimotiki. Many people felt it was totally unsuited for such a serious purpose. Subsequently, however, the choice of Katharévousa or Dhimotiki took on political significance. Katharévousa was the only official language of Greece during the period from 1967 to 1974 when the right-wing military government was in power. In 1976, however, diglossia ended by law when the Athenian variety of Dhimotiki, labelled 'the people's language', and officially 'New/Modern Greek', was adopted as the official language by the democratic government. As mentioned above, attitudes to the H variety in a typical diglossia situation are usually respectful and admiring. The following quotation indicates how things in Greece changed. Katharévousa was denounced in the 1980s by a student leader as 'the old-fashioned medium of an educated elite . . . archaic and tediously demanding', with 'freakish diction . . . antiquated rhetorical devices and . . . insufferable verbosity'. By the 1990s, Katharévousa was no longer used in schools or even in school textbooks, and though traces of its influence may be found in very formal styles of Modern Greek, it has now largely disappeared.

Finally, it is worth considering whether the term diglossia or perhaps polyglossia should be used to describe complementary code use in *all* communities. In all speech communities, people use different varieties or codes in formal contexts, such as religious and legal ceremonies, as opposed to relaxed casual situations. In multilingual situations, the codes selected are generally distinct languages, e.g. French or Swahili for formal situations vs a vernacular tribal language such as Shi for casual interactions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo-Zaire. In predominantly monolingual speech communities, such as those of many English-speaking people in Britain or New Zealand, the contrasting codes are different styles of one language. As we shall see in later chapters, there are clearly identifiable linguistic differences between the more formal and the more colloquial styles of a language. But they are often a matter of degree. Nevertheless, there is a sense in which the variety at the formal end of the scale could be regarded as an H variety, while the most casual variety could be labelled L. Adopting this approach, the colloquial Māori used to talk to friends and family and in local shops in Māori townships in the early twentieth century could be described as the L variety. In addition, these communities made use of two H varieties. They used a formal variety of Māori for ceremonial purposes and for formal interaction on the marae (the formal meeting area). English was the other H variety. It was the language of the school, the government, the courts and for all official transactions with the Pakeha (non-Māori New Zealanders). So, if we expand the concept of diglossia to encompass different contextual varieties as well as distinct languages, the situation in these townships could be described as triglossic rather than diglossic.

Exercise 9

How can the following three dimensions be used to distinguish between H and L varieties in a diglossic speech community?

(i) Formality
(ii) Social distance
(iii) Social status

Answer at end of chapter

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