

Solutions to study questions

Chapter 1. Languages of the World.

(1) People such as Peter Mühlhäusler work in and on a linguistic environment which is quite different from the one we were brought up in. The Pacific is a region with naturally egalitarian language attitudes: unlike Europe, Papua New Guinea or Vanuatu are places where all languages and dialects have traditionally existed on a par with one another and it is awkward to treat e.g. the language variety spoken in another village as “ugly” or the language of a nearby large city as “better”. This also means that concepts such as ‘standard’ or ‘national language’ are unnatural in the Pacific because people there have not preoccupied themselves with questions such as “What is the correct language X?”. Europeans, in turn, have invented labels such as ‘German’ or ‘Dutch’ which are often associated with the official standard varieties of a given country. Judging by the way people speak in everyday casual settings, however, there is a Germanic dialect continuum between the Netherlands and Austria – a phenomenon similar to what is the linguistic reality in the Pacific region. With the advent of European settlers who brought their languages and language attitudes with them to the Pacific, some groups of local people started shifting to the languages of the economically more powerful newcomers and began to assign prestige to certain language varieties, e.g. to tok pisin which now is the national language of Papua New Guinea. Many vernaculars native to the Pacific region are oral languages whose past development has not been recorded. The disease is what happens to those local languages whose users shift to languages of wider communication – languages associated with the state or local authority, school and new social constructs.

(2) We might want languages to be counted for reasons connected with the protection of linguistic rights: knowing precisely how many languages are used on a given territory and how many speakers each of them has is of help when decisions are made as to how much and what kind of support should be ensured. Since language is part of one’s identity, knowing its name by name also makes it easier for a person to discover where one belongs and to represent oneself in front of others.

On the other hand, one’s identity may include several languages as most of the world is multilingual: it is common to use several languages on a daily basis depending where one is and whom one is speaking to, and a lot of switching between languages happens in many places every day. This means that instead of separate languages A and B, it is often more reasonable to speak of language practices of a community C. Moreover, languages which are related, e.g. Ukrainian, Polish and Sorbian, are sometimes very similar: while someone from Western Poland might not necessarily understand a person living in Lviv, the varieties spoken by the inhabitants of areas near the border between Poland and Ukraine enable smooth communication.

(3) The story might strike us as an example of an unnecessary use of force, but it shows how important the rules concerning language use are for the Kayardild people and other native Australian communities. Although we are sometimes unaware of it, we also have our own beliefs about how one should use language, e.g. that one should not address elders with “Hey, dude!” or that it would be weird to say “I’m afraid you might not be aware of the fact that you have just spilled your drink on my dress” at a party with good friends. The ties between language and place are perhaps more tight in northern parts of Australia than they

are in Europe, but language is always in one way or another part of the local environment. The regional languages of Europe such as Latgalian, Kashubian, Occitan or Frisian provide important examples. Also, some of us speak differently at school or at a university than with our grandparents who live in the country.