

Afrikaans-speaking churches in the UK and their impact on language maintenance

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The models of ethnolinguistic vitality by Giles et al. (1977) as well as Edwards (1992) identify the key factors contributing to a language being endangered. They examine the relationship between these different factors and the cumulative effects they have on language maintenance. However, since their aim is to establish a system with a more macro-level orientation, they don't close in on the internal structures within the individual factors and domains identified to explain how they then acquire their critical status for language maintenance.

This paper takes a closer look at one of these factors in a diaspora context: the domain of religion. Its specific focus are churches in London which are frequented by Afrikaans-speaking South Africans. Kotzé and Biberauer (2005) found that 74.9% of Afrikaans-speakers in the UK use this language for religious purposes, thereby making it the domain with the second highest reported use of Afrikaans after the household. Informal observations in an Afrikaans-speaking church congregation in the north of the UK (October-December 2008) also show that attending Sunday services and bible study groups conducted in Afrikaans is being regarded as highly important by the local speech community.

By investigating language choice and attitudes in these congregations, this paper sheds light on the subdomains of and social and linguistic dynamics within the religious domain that have an influence on its integral role in maintaining Afrikaans in a diaspora situation.