

Language Ecology and Sociolinguistics: Epistemological Cutting

Kavungi Mupachi Jean-Paul

Teaching Assistant at the Higher Institute of Applied Techniques of Lubumbashi (ISTA-Lubumbashi)

Abstract: *Language ecology is a relatively new linguistic discipline, according to which languages are living entities, indispensable to the life and survival of the universal socio-cultural ecosystem. It considers that languages are living organisms that are born, grow and, unfortunately, are likely to die. Their dynamics are therefore subject to different parameters of the environment, understood in a more global sense than that of the notion of context. From this point of view, we argue that the language ecology will be conceived as the study of languages taking into consideration the various environmental parameters in relation to linguistic communities.*

Keywords: language ecology

1. Introduction

Nowadays, the ecology of languages is becoming more and more successful, although at the same time we can deplore the lack of detailed studies in linguistics.

Even today, one wonders if the ecology of languages is a new discipline or whether it is a renewal stimulated by the current climate of the field of sociolinguistics. Here then arises the problem of the theoretical perspectives developed in this ecological current in linguistics. This would then lead us to establish the difference epistemological between the ecology of languages and sociolinguistics.

It is therefore in attempting to answer this question that this article presents the epistemological, theoretical and methodological framework of the ecology of languages. Indeed, this new approach aims to integrate a complex analysis of language by providing the means for sociolinguistics to bring together linguistic levels and to reveal the social, cognitive and environmental conditions of their production.

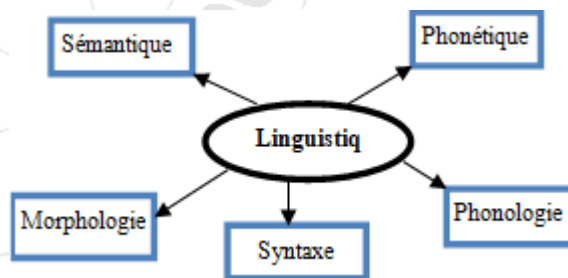
At the end, the ecology of languages gives as much importance to both extra linguistic and internal (or intra-individual) conditions in a perspective different from that of sociolinguistics. This is to say that the ecology of languages develops an approach that is both interactional and integrationist, a model of complexity to account at all levels for the interrelations between languages, people and their environment.

This statement is divided into three parts. We will initially present a panoramic view of linguistics; we will then talk about the sociolinguist and finally we will present the epistemological, theoretical and methodological framework of the ecology of languages in order to clearly highlight its object of study and to situate this new discipline in relation to sociolinguistics.

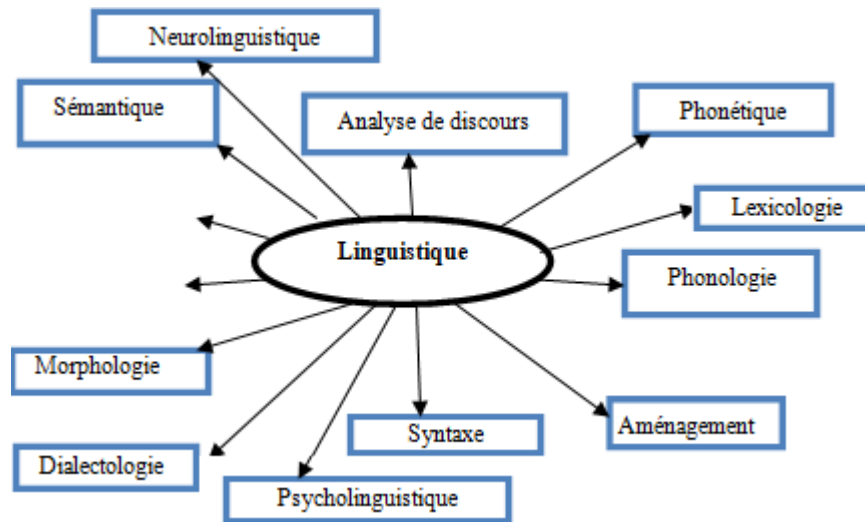
1.1. Panoramic view of Linguistics

The establishment of linguistics as a field of scientific study has had a great contribution from Ferdinand de Saussure, a Swiss linguist considered by many to be the "father" of linguistics. With his works of the early 20th century, he defined this field of study as "a science whose object is the language envisaged in itself and for itself."

The diagram below presents the traditional domains of linguistics, also called "internal" domains of linguistics:



The following diagram shows the non-traditional domains of linguistics (non-exhaustive list):



Linguistics is therefore a science of language, that is to say the objective, descriptive and explanatory study of structure, functioning (synchronic linguistics) and evolution over time (diachronic linguistics) of natural languages. human. The object of linguistics is the descriptive and explanatory study of the functioning of languages.

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This leads us to consider in the second part of this article the sociolinguistics to demarcate it epistemologically from linguistics.

1.2. Sociolinguistics

Sociolinguistics had a fledgling beginning in the middle of the 20th century. It is born of a rocking movement from the linguistics of language to the linguistics of speech.

Sociolinguistics was founded by WILLIAM LABOV in the early sixties. It is in reaction to the theories of F. de Saussure and his courses in general linguistics that LABOV has developed a new thesis on linguistics. Indeed, thanks to his research on the functioning of the language in several social spheres in New York in 1964. LABOV concluded that the social context of a language, which is not considered by SAUSSURE, plays an important role in the language structure¹.

This work revealed the absolute necessity of considering the reality of language productions². Thus, sociolinguistics proposes to start from the spoken word and the speaking subject, from the word to its social reality.

¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/sociolinguistics> (Page seen on July 10, 2019)

² Pierre Dumont and Bruno Maurer, Sociolinguistics of French in Francophone Africa, 1995 p4

Born in 1927, Labov is the founder of variationist linguistics. Variational linguistics is a theoretical and methodological framework for examining the scientific study of variation in languages. He noted that variations are dependent on a set of internal and external factors. These are:

- Social factors: age, education, occupation, geographical origin;
- Situational factors: each individual modifies his ways of speaking according to the circumstances and the stylistic variation;
- Internal factors: produces, by the internal heterogeneity of the linguistic system itself, the inherent variation.

He noticed that in New York he had different pronunciations of "R" caused by socio-economic factors.

What is the ecology of languages? What is its object of study? Is it really a different discipline of sociolinguistics? It is around these main questions and those that flow logically that we will discuss in the leagues that follow.

1.3. Ecology of languages

1.3.1. Epistemological framework

Initially described as one of the branches of the external sociolinguistics by the fact that it would be, a kind of meeting between a sociolinguistic theory and a socially environmental or even sociological theorization of the fact that it tends to become at least in the practices of research, an autonomous and distinct discipline of sociolinguistics because its object of research is no longer the same. Indeed, even if the term language is common to both disciplines, the conception we have in both disciplines is different.

For sociolinguistics, language refers to an object necessarily heterogeneous, necessarily produced, social uses, multi-formally, fundamentally engaging the construction of identities, socialization, the relationship to the world; in short, a complex object that it is of course important to describe, but in connection with the search for social intelligibility both of the description itself and of the relationship between language phenomena and social phenomena. For the ecology of languages, the language is

approached simultaneously in its triple relation with other languages, with their users and, finally, with their environment.

Despite the simultaneous apprehension of these three types of relationships, defining the ecology of languages is not a really easy task in that if what we call sociolinguistics is relatively consensual or at least socially identified, this what researchers call language ecology still refers today to research practices, theoretical positioning, relationships to ideologies, intervention, ethics that is different. Not only because each linguistic community has its own environmental questions, but also because language ecology now implies a plurality of problems and a plurality of approaches.

In fact, the language ecology is even more recent in that it constitutes a radical but at the same time constructive and active criticism of moments and limits of sociolinguistics. Indeed, it is since the 1990s that some researchers claim the ecological approach to sociolinguistics Traditional. However, the term "language ecology" still refers to several definitions sometimes concealing at the same time theoretical contradictions, which at the same time threaten the emergence of this new discipline. As far as we are concerned, these theoretical contradictions are precisely We hold that these theoretical contradictions are precisely constitutive of the emergence of new disciplines and participate in the production of knowledge in that they oblige us to a real argumentative and scientific debate.

The linguistic ecology remains a current whose oldest reference dates from 1970. Einar Haugen considered as the founding father of this concept had then undertaken to adapt the approach of ecologists (in the scientific sense of the term, not the political sense) to linguistics. If they study living beings in relation to their physical, chemical and biological environment, ecolinguists observe languages in their social environment: relationship between languages, relationship between languages and those speaking them, relationship also with geography of a place.

However, insists Louis-Jean Calvet, the idea of linguistic ecology is not so much to defend languages but to understand languages and their evolution: "If we understand why languages are threatened, we can decide if whether or not to protect them. He is particularly interested in the political and social approaches that we adopt.

Thus, the ecology of languages is a relatively new linguistic discipline, according to which languages are living entities, indispensable to the life and survival of the universal socio-cultural ecosystem. It considers that languages are living organisms that are born, grow and, unfortunately, are likely to die. Their dynamics are therefore subject to different parameters of the environment, understood in a more global sense than that of the notion of context.

From this point of view, we argue that the ecology of languages will be conceived as the study of languages taking into consideration the various environmental parameters in relation to linguistic communities.

And to schematize the epistemological cuts of these two disciplines (sociolinguistics and language ecology), we can say briefly and say that the first discipline deals with the covariance between the facts of language and the facts of society while the second studies simultaneously three clusters of relations: relations between languages, relations between languages and those who speak them, relations also with the geography of a place.

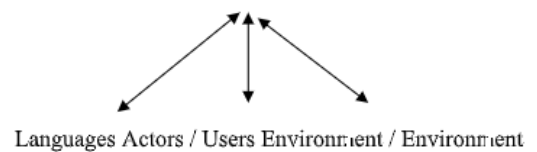
Schematically, we have:

- Sociolinguistics: Facts of language correlated to social facts (and not the other way around)

or

FL → FS

- Language Ecology: Languages



As we can see, ecology is another way of reorganizing relationships. We espouse here the idea of Salikoko Mufwene emitted in his work *Creoles, ecology, social, linguistic evolution*, idea according to which "the contact of the alloglottes populations is not the most important factor of the change of the equilibrium strengths between the variants "(193, see" the constitutive heterogeneity "of any living language), and that the importance of changes in the external ecology of a language, especially the composition of all its speakers, the order of their arrival, the population structure, and, among others, the factors relating to the growth of the population concerned. "

1.3.2. Terminological formation and convergence of terms in language ecology

To defend the idea of evolutionism and, consequently, of the defense of species (here "languages") in disappearance, several

French appellations have been used in linguistics with their equivalents in English:

- Linguistic ecology = linguistic ecology or language ecology
- Ecological linguistics = ecological linguistics
- Ecology of language = the ecology of languages
- Ecology of languages = the ecology of languages
- Ecolinguistics = Ecolinguistics.

Here the translation is problematic, because it is above all a question of knowing the country and the context of production in order to find the meaning of certain pillars constituting the theoretical base of the ecology. The very different evolution of certain terms like those of "environment" or "ecosystem". See for example the detailed studies of Pascaline Dury (1999) or Jacqueline Picoche (2003) which illustrate this passage from one field to another, from one country to another, without the production contexts necessarily being taken into account.

In the specific case of our research, we have chosen to speak about the ecology of languages, even if the use of this term is very often arbitrary among the actors of the field themselves. This is why we are talking about the proliferation of terminology when we consider the main names used to designate the ecological approach in linguistics. Even if the single definition is not guaranteed for language ecology, we have chosen this term because no translation of meaning is perceptible in the passage to translation (the ecology of languages, in English). As can be understood at first glance, language ecology is a kind of linguistics that actually focuses on safeguarding linguistic diversity. In other words, there would be a sort of "deal" between environmental science and language science or between ecology and linguistics.

1.3.3. Methodological issues

In the face of these complex networks of relationships, the proliferation of terminology and translation, there is first of all the need to take into account in methodological questions the diachronic and interdisciplinary dimension of the founding concepts of language ecology.

The fundamental principle of ecology is that any evolution must be considered as "coevolution" because all organisms evolve interdependently in their environment. This is true of languages and linguistic behaviors or practices that evolve at the same time as social, demographic, economic, political and technological changes in their environment.

It is clear that any methodological approach in language ecology must, in this case, make it possible to describe, analyze and understand the evolution of linguistic diversity. Compared to "traditional" sociolinguistic analyzes, this new methodological approach brought by the ecology of languages is thus based on a new linguistic that is more realistic and therefore more true since it is more concerned with languages and their environment (cognitive and social environment).

Thus, a methodological approach in language ecology analyzes these on different levels:

- The language level,
- The population level and
- The middle level.

In other words, the languages, equivalent to the species, are organized in constant relations with their environment, and evolve in reaction to the stimuli coming from this environment. And by medium of a language, is understood to mean the social organization, the size of groups of speakers, the functions of languages, the social role of their speakers, their degree of plurilingualism ..., factors which can have a direct influence on the form languages.

Thus, to redefine our discipline and, ipso facto its methodological framework, we consider that the ecology of languages is the study of languages and their differences in relation to ideologies and ways of life, in particular their ecological impacts. It is therefore a new and recent approach that broadens the simple sociolinguistic approach to take

into account not only the society in which a language is spoken, but the consequences of language and culture, via lifestyle, on local or global ecology.

The field of language ecology has developed considerably, primarily in the analysis of the ecological impact of certain discourses rather than the impact of languages in general. There are two main ecolinguistic approaches today called simply linguistic ecology and ecocritical discourse analysis. The main online forum for ecolinguistic research Language & Ecology Research Forum 1 defines this field as:

"The ecology of languages examines the influence of language on the language's ability to make possible the sustainable cohabitation of humans with each other, with other organisms and with their natural environment. The field of research extends from the impact of advertising discourse that encourages destructive consumption for the environment, to the power of poetry over nature that encourages respect for the natural world. "

- Analysis of Ecocritic Discourse

Ecocritical discourse analysis includes, but is not limited to, the analysis of critical discourses related to the environment and ecology, to reveal implicit assumptions and messages, and comments on the effectiveness of these in an ecological fulfillment lens. The analysis of ecocritical discourse not only reveals potentially destructive ideologies, but also attempts to find discursive representations that can contribute to a more eco-responsible society.

- Linguistic Ecology

The term "linguistic ecology" was used for the first time in an article on "the language situation" in Arizona (Voegelin, Voegelin and Schutz, 1967). It was brought by Einar Haugen, who invented a form of linguistics using the metaphor of an ecosystem to describe the relationships within different forms of languages present in the world, and groups of people who speak them. Whether linguistic ecology is a form of ecolinguistic or more appropriately characterized as sociolinguistic is controversial.

Linguistic ecology focuses on how languages interact with one another and where they are spoken, and frequently advocates for the preservation of endangered languages, analogous to the preservation of biological species.

2. Conclusion

To conclude, let us recall that language ecology is a relatively new linguistic discipline, according to which languages are living entities, indispensable to the life and survival of the universal socio-cultural ecosystem. It considers that languages are living organisms that are born, grow and, unfortunately, are likely to die. Their dynamics are therefore subject to different parameters of the environment, understood in a more global sense than that of the notion of context.

From this point of view, we argue that the language ecology will be conceived as the study of languages taking into consideration the various environmental parameters in relation to linguistic communities.

Thus, the ecological approach will want to give as much importance to so-called extra linguistics as to internal conditions (intra-individual) in a perspective different from traditional sociolinguistics or recent linguistic biological theories.

In relation to sociolinguistics, the ecology of languages is therefore interactional and integrative, in that it wants to develop a model of complexity to make all levels of interrelations between languages, people and their environment. It is this emerging discipline with its criterion of analysis that, ipso facto, establishes the complexity of our research.

In its emergence, this discipline is also based on the couple "practices / Representations" approach in close interrelation with the environment.

And as mentioned above, to schematize the epistemological break of these two disciplines (sociolinguistics and language ecology), we can say briefly and say that the first discipline deals with the covariance between the facts of language and the facts of society while the second simultaneously studies three clusters of relations: relations between languages, relations between languages and those who speak them, relations also, with the geography of a place.

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