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(editors)

Language Ecology for the 21st Century:
Linguistic Conflicts and
Social Environments



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The ecology of language in the twenty-first century

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While there is no shortage of standard reference works on language ecology (Fill & Mühlhäusler eds. 2006; Creese, Martin & Hornberger eds. 2010), few of these works actually challenge the actual notion of language ecology as an ongoing useful and productive paradigm in sociolinguistics at large. Garner, however, (2005: 98) is a strong exception to this rule: he writes that “Language ecology has not lived up to the promise of the original proposal by Haugen. It has remained a marginal and ill-defined approach, mainly in the study of multilingual societies.”

Being an American of Norwegian decent, Einar Haugen (1906–1994) was heavily inspired by the Norwegian language situation after 1814, the year when Norway was separated from Denmark after a union that had lasted for about 400 years. Haugen’s description and analysis of language development in modern Norway also represented the foundation for his famous language planning model (Haugen 1966). The Norwegian situation early on also deeply inspired his thinking in the direction of language ecology. It was therefore, in our view, quite appropriate that a new Norwegian university (the University of Agder) organized a conference in 2008 dedicated to language ecology, one of Einar Haugen’s major themes (cf. Haugen 1972), as a way of celebrating its newly (2007) obtained full accreditation as a university.

One does not have to concur totally with the view that Mark Garner (2005) expresses, quoted above, but the editors of the present volume nevertheless saw sufficient reason to pause, take stock, and try and put Einar Haugen’s heritage to the test. Forty years beyond its prime, Haugen’s theoretical framework may indeed, it is true, have



Einar Haugen

shed some of the refreshing and revolutionary take on language loss and standardization that was part of its original impact. One cannot help but notice, for example, that the ‘ecological turn’ in sociolinguistics is nowadays frequently eclipsed by musings on ‘language and globalization’ or on ‘linguistic injustice’ – a terminological shift which may signify rather more than a simple postmodern craving for new buzzwords. When an acclaimed ecolinguistics scholar straightforwardly states, without qualification, that “Standardisation is not a technical matter to be carried out by linguistically trained experts but an ecological one” (Mühlhäusler 2003), there may even be good reason to wake up to a reality in which the practice of language ecology has perhaps slipped out of linguists’ hands entirely, or almost so.

The contributors to this volume were therefore explicitly asked by the editors to assess the continued value and applicability of Haugen’s ecolinguistic theory (as well as its shortcomings) with respect to their specific fields of inquiry, and to refer to (at least some of) the ten central ecolinguistic questions which were posed in Haugen’s key publication on the topic in 1972, *The Ecology of Language* (cf. Eliasson in this volume).

The articles in the first section of our book address the issue of the legacy of Haugen’s work in the development of current sociolinguistic theory and practice generally, including treatments of aspects of language change, linguistic profiling, *Ausbau* linguistics, and minority language studies.

These theoretical contributions set the scene for seven subsequent case-studies, focusing on language ecological issues within (Section 2) and beyond (Section 3) Europe. At no point did we aspire to achieve an all-encompassing and exhaustive overview of all the ‘classic’ language ecological issues. With our selection of a limited series of geographically diverse (and perhaps unexpected) cases, we did hope, rather, to provide the most multi-faceted possible answer to the central question underlying this work: ‘What, if anything, is the value of Haugen’s theory, still, for achieving a better understanding of the language ecological debates of the beginning of the twenty-first century?’

Einar Haugen (1972: 325) anchored his eco-linguistic theory in the belief that “The true environment of a language is the society that

uses it as one of its codes”. As editors who have all worked in vibrant language-ecological environments – be they Norwegian, Swiss, British, or Belgian – we hope that the contributions in this volume will help to support our conviction that the true environment of a linguistic theory – ecological or otherwise – is the society in which it can be put to use for the general good.

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