

SOCIOECONOMIC CHANGE AND LANGUAGE ENDANGERMENT

BY

Ma, Wei

B.S., Qinghai Normal University, China, 1993

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Chairperson

Committee members

Date defended: _____

The Thesis Committee for Ma, Wei certifies
that this is the approved version of the following thesis:

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Chairperson

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Abstract

Language endangerment is acute in the world. In China Salar (ISO 639-3: SLR) is one of those language that is endangered. There are several different hypotheses for the causes of language endangerment; to better understand why so many languages are declining, I analyze the Salar case in this study. Based on a literature review and fieldwork in 1999-2005 and the summer of 2006, I conclude that the endangerment of Salar language appears to be caused less by prestige and literacy factors, and more by socioeconomic factors. Finally, I give recommendations for Salar revitalization.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Language Endangerment and the Salar Case

In the last century, there has been a widespread pattern of language decline or shift in the world among many indigenous peoples. It is estimated that “we stand to lose half of the world’s 6000 languages during the 21st century, and at the end of that century, most of the remaining languages will be endangered, to be lost in the subsequent century” (Krauss 1992, in Hinton and Hale 2001:19). Language endangerment is also acute in China. Salar (ISO 639-3: SLR) is one of those languages.

What causes indigenous languages to become endangered? In this study I am going to explore the Salar case to better understand the causes of language endangerment so we can find better ways to reverse language shift, or at least slow it down. I will conclude that socioeconomic changes among Salars are the primary cause of language decline. Prestige, literacy, and language policy all play important roles in this process, but they are not the fundamental reasons. Bilingualism is a necessary process in language shift, but bilingualism itself does not necessarily lead to language shift. When the dominant society practices unbalanced bilingual education that is in favor of the dominant language, bilingualism produces a disastrous consequence for indigenous languages. Finally I will give recommendations for Salar language revitalization.

1.2 The Salars

The Salars are Turkic-speaking Muslims. According to China's 2000 census, there were 104,503 Salars throughout China (Anon. 2003:791). The largest concentration of Salars is in Qinghai province, in Xunhua Salar Autonomous County, approximately 170 kilometers southeast of the provincial capital, Xining. Approximately 70 percent of the Salar people live in the villages of Xunhua on the south bank of the Yellow River. Jishi is the county seat of Xunhua; Mengda, Baizhuang, Qingshui, Jiezi, and Chahandousi¹ are other major villages. Most of the county's residents are Salar; other ethnic groups include Tibetan, Hui (Sinophone Muslim), and Han Chinese (the majority ethnic group in China). About 18,000 Salar people live in Hualong County in Qinghai province and also in Jishishan Bao'an-Dongxiang-Salar Autonomous County in Gansu province. Both are next to Xunhua County, respectively on the west and east of Xunhua. Other small concentrations of Salar people are scattered throughout Qinghai and Gansu provinces: Xining City; Golmud City; Gonghe, Guide, and Qilian counties of Qinghai; and Linxia City of Gansu. Around 5,000 Salar live in Yining County, Habahe County, and Urumqi City in Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region.

¹ All toponym names are rendered in Standard Chinese (Mandarin). Except for the county seat, known by its Chinese name of Jishi, villages also have Salar names, such as *Qizi* (Mengda), *Ahar* (Baizhuang), *Singer* (Qingshui), *Altiul* (Jiezi). See IPA symbols for this Salar transcription system in Appendix 3.

CHAPTER 2

LANGUAGE ENDANGERMENT LITERATURE AND HYPOTHESIS

2.1 Descriptions of Some Related Studies

I will focus on four aspects of former studies on language endangerment in this part. First, I will present the reason why we pay attention to the issue of language endangerment; then I will describe the ways of assessing language endangerment and evaluate the degree of the endangerment of Salar; in addition, I will review the research on language endangerment in China; last, I will describe the situation of bilingualism in China.

2.1.1 Why Care about Language Endangerment?

Language diversity is a very important part of human heritage because different languages may have unique and valuable knowledge about us and the world. If we lost most of these languages, we would lose the diversity of our languages, which makes our life more exciting. To enrich linguistic theory, researchers need to explore all different languages, including indigenous languages, not just those powerful ones, such as English, Chinese, French, and Spanish. To get success, the indigenous people are losing their valuable culture like language by adopting the dominant language

because they receive the economic and political pressure from the dominant societies. Losing their language is losing an important part of their culture for many groups. For example, if the Salars lost their language and just spoke Chinese, then there would be no difference between Salars and Huis (Chinese-speaking Muslim) culturally, both of them would be Chinese-speaking Muslims. Many Turkic cultural elements in Salar culture would disappear if the Salar language were gone because these Turkic cultures mainly exist in the Salar language. Indigenous peoples' effort to maintain their language is often related to their effort to keep their own identity or even to call for political rights. Anthropologists or linguists can help to protect the indigenous people's human rights by maintaining and revitalizing their languages. Of course, whether a language is maintained should be finally decided by the speech community itself. The most important reason to be concerned about the endangered language is that each language is a key to understanding the world from different vantage points. The extinction of these languages will be the irrecoverable loss of our potential knowledge to figure out many problems we are facing now (Hinton 2001:4-5; Hale 1998:192-193).

To stop or slow down the language loss, we must know why so many languages are endangered. Finding an answer to this question is important for the people whose languages are disappearing, and it is also important for the people who are working with these communities. This is the main task of this study, and I will discuss the cause of language endangerment in section 2.2 of this chapter and in Chapter 4. Since

my main case is Salar from the Tibetan plateau in Qinghai province, China, I will evaluate the degree of the endangerment of Salar below.

2.1.2. Assessing Language Endangerment

Since the 1990s, linguists have devised criteria to measure language endangerment. The most important of these criteria are Fishman's (1991) GIDS (Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale), Edwards' (1992) framework for the typology of minority languages, Krauss's (1996) four categories, and UNESCO's (2003) nine factors. The Edwards and Fishman criteria represented an excellent beginning, but they did not focus on indigenous languages per se.

Krauss (1996:17-18) categorized North American indigenous languages into four types : (A) the languages that are still being passed down to the next generation; (B) those still used by young adults; (C) the languages that are spoken only by older people; and (D) languages that only have a few speakers. His findings were significant in that they clearly showed for the first time the alarming rate of decline of North American languages. This also makes us wonder what kind of situation the other nondominant languages such as Salar have. For the Salar language I will use the UNESCO criteria to assess the endangerment of Salar because these criteria were produced by a collaborative consortium of international scholars, and thus have more authority.

The UNESCO guidelines present nine factors that can be used to evaluate the

degree of endangerment of a given language, and every factor has six grades (from “safe = 5” to “unsafe = 4” to “definitely endangered =3” to “severely endangered” = 2” to “critically endangered = 1” to “extinct = 0”). Below I will present each factor in turn, evaluating the specific Salar case, and assign each factor a rating.

Factor 1: Intergenerational Language Transmission (UNESCO 2003:8-9)

Salar is used by some children in all domains (before they go to school, Salar is their only language), and it is used by most children in limited domains (in school Chinese is the teaching language for all the children) (personal fieldwork 2006). We would assign Salar a grade of 4 for intergenerational language transmission.

According to the Expert Committee (UNESCO 2003:8-9), a grade of 4 is

“unsafe”(“The language is used by some children in all domains; it is used by all children in limited domains.”).

Factor 2: Absolute Number of Speakers (UNESCO 2003:9)

Based on He Junfang’s research (1999) and China’s 2000 census, there are about 95,000 native speakers of Salar.¹ UNESCO does not give a specific index for this factor, but considering the Han Chinese population, or even the neighboring Tibetan population, the number of 95,000 speakers is rather low. A language with a smaller population is more likely to be endangered than a language with a bigger population.

Factor 3: Proportion of Speakers within the Total Population (UNESCO 2003:9)

¹ He Junfang says 90.6 percent of Salars spoke their language in 1982. And there were 104,503 Salars in 2000 (Zhongguo 2003:791). Based on this, I calculated there were about 95,000 Salar speakers in 2000.

Since a majority of Salars (over 90 percent) are still speaking their own language (He JF 1999), we would assign Salar a grade of 4 on the third factor. This means that Salar is “unsafe” (“Nearly all speak the lagnaage.”).

Factor 4: Shifts in Domains of Language Use (UNESCO 2003:10-11)

Salar is used in the communities and for many functions, but it is greatly influenced by Chinese even in the home (see section 4.1) (personal fieldwork 2006). According to this index, we would assign Salar a grade of 3 on the fourth factor. This shows that Salar has “dwindling domains” (“The ancestral language is used in home domains and for many functions, but the dominant language begins to penetrate home domains.”).

Factor 5: Response to New Domains and Media (UNESCO 2003:11)

Since Salar is not used in any new domains, such as in school and science (personal estimate based on my fieldwork), we would give a grade of 0 to Salar on the fifth factor. This means that Salar is “inactive” (“The language is not used in any new domains.”).

Factor 6: Materials for Language Education and Literacy (UNESCO 2003:12)

The Salars no longer have their own orthography (only a few researchers use Latin-based scripts which are not unified yet), nor are there any Salar material used in Salar education (personal fieldwork 2006). Therefore, we would assign a grade of 0 to Salar on the sixth factor (“No orthography is available to the community.”).

Factor 7: Governmental Language Policy (UNESCO 2003:14)

Use of Salar is not encouraged by the government in social domains, and Chinese prevails in all public domains (The Constitution 1982; Zhonghua 2001; personal fieldwork 2006). Based on this, we would give a grade of 3 to Salar on the seventh factor. This means that Salar is at the edge of “passive assimilation” (“No explicit policy exists for minority languages; the dominant language prevails in the public domain.”).

Factor 8: The Community’s Attitude toward their Language (UNESCO 2003:14-15)

According to my interviews in 2004-2006, most, if not all, Salars support their language (see 4. 2) (Ma 2006, fieldwork); therefore, we would give a grade of 4 to Salar (“Most members support language maintenance.”).

Factor 9: Amount and Quality of Documentation (UNESCO 2003:16)

Written materials on Salar exist but there is no media in Salar; there are also some audio and video documentation in different quality¹. According to this, we would assign a grade of 3 to Salar on the last factor. This means that Salar has “fair” documentation (“There may be an adequate grammar, some dictionaries, and texts, but no everyday media; audio and video recordings may exist in varying quality or degree of annotation.”).

If we put all the above results of the nine aspects together, then we can get basic

¹ Documentation produced by Tenishev (1963, 1964, 1976a, 1976b, 1976c), Poppe (1953), Lin (1985, 1992), Hahn (1988), Ma QL et al. (1993), Yakup (1997), Dwyer (1998, 2007), Hebibulla (2000), Ma Wei et al. (2001), Han (2003, unpublished manuscript).

information about the endangerment of Salar (see the below table).

Estimated Degree of Endangerment of Salar Language (based on UNESCO 2003:20)

Factors	rating
1. Intergenerational Language Transmission	4
2. Absolute Number of Speakers	95,000
3. Proportion of Speakers within the Total Population	4
4. Shifts in Domains of Language Use	3
5. Response to New Domains and Media	0
6. Materials for Language Education and Literacy	0
7. Governmental & Institutional Language Attitudes and Policies including Official Status & Use	3
8. Community Members' Attitudes toward Their Own Language	4
9. Amount and Quality of Documentation	3

Although the most important index, “intergenerational language transmission”, has a grade of 4, it still means Salar language is threatened. Dwyer (2007:93) notices the decline of Salar language:

Given the necessity of multilingualism and the narrowing scope of Salar usage, it is likely that the language will remain valued in the private sphere, but its reach is likely to be further reduced elsewhere, particularly without native-language schooling and without an orthography. Continued contact-induced changes are to be expected at all levels of language.

All this clearly shows that Salar is a threatened language. To understand this issue in a broader background, in the next part, I will describe research on threatened languages in China.

2.1.3 Endangered Language Research in China

In the 1980s and 1990s, most applied linguistic research in China concerned so-called bilingual education. Research was primarily concerned with describing

minority languages to facilitate the learning of Chinese. (This is much like bilingual education in the United States, which serves primarily to assist students to learn English. These types of bilingual education contrast with actual education in two languages.) However, starting in 2000, the attention of some Chinese linguists began to turn to issues specifically of language endangerment in indigenous languages. This new interest has resulted in a number of promising studies.

Sun (2001), along with Dai and Deng (2001), was one of the first people to use the Chinese term *binwei yuyan* “endangered language” in a general article on language endangerment in China. Dai and Deng (2001) discuss the value of endangered language data for linguistics, as well as methods of and terminologies for evaluating the degree of endangerment. Xu (2002) attributes language endangerment or death at present to “voluntary language transfer,” i.e, that people themselves choose to give up their own languages in favor of other languages, which have a larger function of communication. It is true that many indigenous people today choose to give up their languages, but it seems Xu ignores the great pressure from the dominant societies on the subordinate ones. It is hard to imagine that people are willing to lose their own languages. She further analyzes the basic social elements that cause language transfer, such as population structure, cultural profundity and economic advantage. Languages with larger populations usually have more vitality than languages with smaller populations; people who have a strong economy can usually keep their languages better than those who have not.

Zhang (2001), Zhou (2003) and Li (2005) discuss how to reverse language shift,

through learning experiences in protecting endangered languages from other countries, making laws for language maintenance, calling for government and academics to work together to save endangered languages, establishing research foundations for endangered languages, and practicing bilingual education. In addition, He (2002), Wang (2004), and Deng (2004) conducted research in China on language loss among the Nanai, She, and Tujia, respectively. In addition to the above research, another very important issue related to language endangerment is bilingualism.

2.1.4 Bilingualism and Bilingualism Research in China

All Chinese citizens are guaranteed use of their language by the Constitution of People's Republic of China. Article 4 of the Constitution (1982) reads, "All nationalities have the freedom to use and develop their own spoken and written languages and to preserve or reform their own folkways and customs." But most citizens of China believe today that learning the nation's standard language, Mandarin, is essential for full participation in modern society. Balancing these concerns has resulted in bilingualism or multilingualism for the vast majority of the population in China.

The constitution further supports local government use of minority languages in their areas. Article 121 says, "In performing their functions, the organs of self-government of the national autonomous areas, in accordance with the provisions of the regulations on the exercise of autonomy in those areas, employ the spoken and

written language or languages in common use in the locality” (ibid.). The constitution also emphasizes the individual’s right to use his or her native language and asks local courts to use minority language to make the legal affairs easier for the local people (Article 134, 1982).

The above laws guarantee in theory that official minorities in China, such as the Salars, have the right to use their own languages in daily life or in school. In practice, however, it is not easy to carry out these laws. Since 1949 the central government has made great effort to spread the national language, Mandarin, throughout China, and this spread has accelerated recently. Most of the schools in minority areas teach Chinese alongside other minority languages. Therefore, bilingual education becomes a very important issue for minority groups in China.

Bilingual education in China is classified into six categories (Yan XJ, in Qumutiexi 1996:8). In the first category, from kindergarten to university, a minority language is taught alongside Standard Chinese. The second type of bilingual education includes teaching, in addition to Chinese, from primary school to university, parts of minority students’ classes are taught in their native language. In the third category, during the first three years, minority language is the only teaching language in school. From the fourth grade to sixth grade Chinese is introduced. These students spend one more year in middle school primarily studying Chinese. Then, all the classes are taught in Chinese except minority language class. In the fourth type of bilingual education, from primary school to high school, even partly in some universities, minority languages are the instrumental media in the school. In these

minority areas the Chinese language is also taught as a second language. In the fifth part, minority students used to learn only Chinese in school. Now in the first year of primary school, a minority language is the main teaching language. From the second year, all the textbooks are in Chinese. The last category is mainly for those speakers of languages without a writing system. A new writing system was created and used to reduce illiteracy among minorities. Salar fits into the last type because it has no writing system. A Latin-based orthography was developed in 1980s for Salar people and taught to adults in the Salar area, aiming to spread the writing system. But it lasted for only one month because it lacked continuous support from the government (Han JY, personal conversation 2006).

For minorities with small populations like the Salar, Sun DF (2006) suggests it is not necessary to teach students in their own language. Their native language could be used to help them learn Chinese. The minorities' language teaching could be taught as selective courses and should not affect Chinese learning. Of course, linguists can document these endangered languages if the communities permit. However, other scholars have different opinions. For example, Fan (2006) stresses that receiving education in native languages is the minority students' human right and the Chinese state should guarantee this right. Although China's constitution in theory guarantees the minorities' right to use their own language, in actual practice, official national minorities like the Salars have no education in their own language.

Children and adults alike from minority groups are increasingly under pressure to learn Mandarin, often at the expense of their native languages. Therefore, if

minority people like the Salar want to keep their language today, they must get support from the government and teach their languages in schools.

2.2 The Causes of Language Endangerment

2.2.1 Introduction

Below by discussing the hypotheses on the decline of the Native American languages, I will present the cause of the endangerment of Salar. Palmer (1997:264) offers hypotheses on why the North American languages are declining. He says that there are several possible hypotheses for explaining the decline of North American indigenous languages in the past century. First, indigenous people's own decisions and behaviors led to the decline of their languages. In other words, indigenous peoples were willing to give up their languages. However, it is difficult to imagine that people from different backgrounds and different values had the views and actions that led to their languages' decline in the last century. This pattern does not seem reasonable for language endangerment because most indigenous people want to keep their languages (Crawford 1996:60; Palmer 1997:264).

Second, Palmer (*ibid.*) says language decline could be the result of pressure from outside on all of these indigenous groups, and there is not a common pattern for this situation. This also cannot explain why so many native languages in North America were endangered at the same time. A third possibility is that there is one

factor that is responsible for the language endangerment in North America in the last century. “External factors, such as language policy, official repression or encouragement, and so forth have only had an indirect impact on language maintenance” (Palmer 1997:264). Here Palmer does not give too much attention to the dominant society’s language policy. Language policy actually plays an important role in language decline. However, it is true that whether a language is passed down to the next generation is ultimately determined by the indigenous people themselves. And the main factor that is responsible for the decline of the North American languages is the economic change both in the dominant society and the subordinate society (ibid.:265).

2.2.2 Prestige and Language Endangerment

Much of the literature has logically assumed that prestige is one of the main reasons for language endangerment. Dorian (1998:8) says people who have low-prestige usually tend to give up their own languages in favor of some high-prestige language. The standard language is believed to be an advanced and powerful tool, to have more capability to express complicated ideas; nonstandard languages, such as dialects and nondominant languages, are believed to be simple, and have less power to clearly express people’s ideas. As a result, people who speak a nonstandard dialect or nondominant language tend to believe that the features, which are different from the standard language, are the unrefined part of their own language.

What Dorian here talks about is that languages are usually related to the position of their speakers. The nondominant people attribute the difference between their languages and the dominant ones to the inferiority of their languages. In other words, low prestige is the cause of language endangerment. A similar observation is made by the UNESCO ad hoc expert group (UNESCO 2003:3):

Many indigenous peoples, associating their disadvantaged social position with their culture, have come to believe that their languages are not worth retaining. They abandon their languages and cultures in hopes of overcoming discrimination, to secure a livelihood, and enhance social mobility, or to assimilate to the global marketplace.

Maybe some people who speak indigenous languages or dialects have this kind of idea, and maybe prestige really does play a role in the process of language endangerment or a shift. But, I hypothesize, it is not the primary reason for language endangerment or a shift. Mufwene (2003:339) claims that many languages with high prestige in history have not been passed down to the present day. Some good examples are Ancient Greek and Classical Latin, which were lost when they competed with what Mufwene calls nonstandard languages. These languages (Ancient Greek and Classical Latin) are still spoken today, but they are in the new forms now, such as Modern Greek and the Romance languages. “All over the world, standard dialects have hardly become the prevailing vernaculars of their speakers.... Colloquial French, rather than the most prestigious variety endorsed by the Académie Française, is the most dynamic French variety spoken today” (ibid.).

From Mufwene’s statements, we can see that there is not necessarily a direct relation between language endangerment and prestige. Languages with high prestige like Ancient Greek did not survive. In contrast, many so-called low-prestige

languages are still spoken today. This shows that high prestige does not prevent language endangerment. In the case of Salar, according to my fieldwork, most Salar people love to speak their own language, and do not think that Chinese is more prestigious than Salar, but their language is still threatened by Chinese (see section 4.2). Therefore, prestige may not be the direct cause of the endangerment of Salar. Next, I will discuss the relationship between literacy and language endangerment.

2.2.3 Literacy and Language Endangerment

Hinton says (2001:239) “there is a strong feeling in the modern world that languages with writing systems are in some way superior to languages without them, and that people who do not have written languages are somehow cognitively impoverished compared to those growing up in a society with writing”. Many ethnolinguistic groups who have no writing system want to have their own. They believe that having a writing system, and later, literacy, will help them revitalize their language and will bring it prestige. Therefore, creating a new writing system is a very important aspect in their language’s maintenance or revitalization. But some scholars go to extremes and say, “lack of literacy is the most important factor in the deterioration and abandonment of indigenous language” (Salinas 1997:173, in Hinton 2001:239). Others like Sueyoshi et al. (2005:16) also say “the absence of writing systems and literature in the indigenous languages also contributes to decreasing use of indigenous languages while those languages that are written and have literature are

stable.”

Is lack of literacy what causes indigenous language endangerment or can having a writing system prevent the language endangerment? Not necessarily; Mufwene (2003:326) offers:

The increasing usage of English in the colonial economic system, aided by political factors, disfavored the other languages. It promised opportunities the others did not. It appears that the development of writing systems for, and literacy in, some endangered languages guarantees not their revitalization but their (lifeless) preservation like preserves in a jar.

This means that having a rich body of literature cannot guarantee a language survives. A lack of literacy is thus not necessarily the cause of language endangerment. A good example is Manchu. The Manchu ruled China between the 17th century and 20th century, and they had a rich oral and written language. Although there is still considerable Manchu literature in China, only about 500 people spoke Manchu in 1982 (He 1999:47). This number is only 0.01 percent of the whole Manchu population, and the other 99.99 percent of Manchu people have shifted to using Chinese (ibid.). Lague (2007:6) reports that modern Manchu exists only in remote and small areas, where Manchu people are concentrated and in the majority. And even in these places, Manchu is declining sharply due to road construction in the area and the increasing communications with Chinese-speaking people. This clearly shows again that a language with rich literature does not guarantee its vitality.

Literacy also cannot explain why Salar people started only recently (after late 1970s) to learn Chinese on a large scale. The same Chinese literature available now was also available 30 years ago. Why did Salar people not learn Chinese at that time? Chinese literacy is not the reason for the change of their attitude toward Chinese

because Salar had their own literacy in history, although many people do not know it, including many Salar people (Han JY 1989:3-6). This kind of literacy was based on a modified Arabic script, which was closely related to their religion.¹ Considering their great faith on Islam, it was not possible that they turned to learn Chinese just for Chinese literacy. So this may suggest that a lack of literacy may not be the main reason that Salar is declining.

2.2.4 Bilingual Education and Language Endangerment

Since language endangerment is usually related to a shift to another language, we need to understand the relationship between bilingual education and language endangerment. I will adopt Grosjean's (in Shin, 2005:17) definition of a bilingual:

The bilingual is a fully competent speaker/hearer; he or she has developed competencies (in the two languages and possibly a third system that is a combination of the two) to the extent required by his or her needs and those of the environment. The bilingual uses the two languages – separately or together – for different purposes in different domains of life and with different people.

If bilingual education in communities such as in the Salar area produces “fully competent speakers/hearers” (ibid.) in two languages, then we will have enough confidence that indigenous languages will not decline. However, many children from nondominant groups are receiving imbalanced education (not receiving equal education in their mother tongue and the dominant language). In Salar area, there is no real bilingual education—education in two languages, Salar and Chinese. Salar children only learn Chinese in school. This is not a bilingual education but

¹ Now a few language researchers and college students use Latin-based Salar writing systems which are not unified yet.

monolingual Chinese education.

And it is more encouraging that, according to recent research, bilingual children may have certain cognitive advantages over monolingual children, so bilingualism may be beneficial to a child's development. The educational linguist Brian Bielenberg (in Hinton and Hale 2001:17) says bilinguals are better at analyzing language in a theoretical way than monolinguals; bilinguals have more innovative ideas. He cites other researchers' findings that show:

Children's bilingualism is positively related to concept formation, classification, creativity, analogical reasoning, and visual-spatial skills... The positive effects of bilingualism on metalinguistic abilities include early word-referent distinction, sensitivity to language structure and detail, detection of ambiguities, syntactic orientation in sentence processing, and control of language processing (ibid.).

This means that balanced bilingual education is not a burden for children as many parents think; rather, it has lots of advantages over monolingual education.

In the areas occupied by ethnic groups such as Salar, there should be balanced bilingual education for the sake of children's mental development and maintenance of the nondominant languages. Unfortunately, in most situations where a language is endangered, due to government language policy which may want to only use the dominant language to unify the whole country, there is not balanced bilingual education. Hinton (2001:13) says in a minority community whose language is not spoken as the main language of the community anymore, if the endangered language is the home language, then the children will learn the dominant language in that society.

Hawaiian children present us with a good example here. Even though children learn Hawaiian at home and at school, English is spoken all around them, such as in

the marketplace, among peers, and so on. Therefore, they can learn English simultaneously. Even if the children spent the same amount of time studying both the endangered language and the dominant language, the two languages cannot get equal development since the children have less chance to practice the endangered language (ibid.). Considering the fact that in most cases many children in indigenous communities do not receive balanced bilingual education, and some only receive the dominant language education, their native language will gradually decline. Now Salar children only receive Chinese education in school and no education in Salar; this will definitely endanger Salar.

Pye (1992:75) points out: “language loss may be thought of as a case of defective bilingual acquisition.” If children have less or no chance to learn their own language compared to the mainstream language, then it will inevitably result in the endangerment of the indigenous language. This is especially true for Salar children who have no chance to learn Salar at school. After Salar children go to school, their Chinese is developing gradually, in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. And after high school or university graduation, there is not too much difference on the proficiency in Chinese between Salar and Han Chinese students. However, since there is no Salar orthography or Salar education in school, Salar children cannot read and write in Salar, and even their speaking is greatly influenced by Chinese. According to my interviews in 2006, Salar children’s counting ability is much better in Chinese than in Salar (see section 4.2).

I have a five-year-old daughter. She speaks Chinese mainly because she grew up

in her grandparent's home, where Chinese is the dominant language. But she still used to speak Salar a little since I only speak to her in Salar. However, after she went to nursery school where Chinese is the teaching language, she is reluctant to speak Salar. Except me, all the people around her speak Chinese with her. Now her Chinese is improving rapidly, but her Salar is improving little since I left her for two years. This is the result of "defective bilingual acquisition" (ibid.). Therefore, bilingualism itself is not the cause of language endangerment, only unbalanced bilingual education or monolingual education (education not in students' mother tongue) counts for the language decline, and this phenomenon is closely related to socioeconomic changes among the indigenous community. In the coming part, I will discuss the role of socioeconomic change in language endangerment.

2.2.5 Socioeconomic Change and Language Endangerment

Languages always exist in a socioeconomic milieu (Nettle and Romaine 2000:79). A language is always affected by other elements that surround it, and there must be a community to speak this language and teach it to the next generation. If we want to know why languages are endangered, we cannot just look at the languages themselves. We need to understand their ecology, that is, the environment of the people who speak them. People have their own activity sphere, whose boundaries are determined by "physical geography and natural resources, by their own knowledge and abilities, and by the behavior of others who are around them" (ibid.). Languages

are maintained in certain social and geographical settings like species of plants or animals that live in a certain ecosystem. Therefore, languages will inevitably change when the environment in which they live changes (ibid.).

The huge language endangerment or shift in the past century is a direct result of the socioeconomic environmental changes of the people who speak the languages. There have been amazing changes in the last centuries in the world, which have greatly influenced indigenous people. Industrialization and colonization are the remarkable productions of the western world. With industrialization, western countries accumulated huge amounts of wealth and developed new technologies, which enabled them to control other people (ibid.:132). To seek more raw materials for industrial production and expand their production market, western countries conquered many other countries with their strong military forces. And this colonization brought about significant consequences for the languages of indigenous people (Mufwene 2003:329). With modernization and industrialization, the economies of different ethnic groups of China are also integrated into the national level, some even in international level. For example, Qinghai Yijia Buhala Limited Company is run by Salars. The caps produced by this factory have 90 percent of the market for Muslim caps in China, and they are also very popular in Middle Eastern countries (Qinghai Yijia 2005). The Salar workers and administrators of this company cannot just speak Salar. They have to speak Chinese because not all the staff are Salars. Chinese is playing a more important role in the company than Salar. This kind of situation will finally have a negative impact on the maintenance of Salar language.

Mufwene (2003:334-336) posits a relation between colonization and language endangerment. He points out that colonization brings about huge changes in the socioeconomic environment of indigenous people. Furthermore, he claims that different styles of colonization have caused different forms of language endangerment. Indigenous languages were greatly affected by the languages of colonizers in places where the settlement colonies were practiced, such as many Native American languages in North America. In contrast, where a few colonizers permanently settled, indigenous languages have not endangered so much by the colonizers' languages. This explicitly shows how the behavior of the other societies influences the fate of the indigenous people's languages. No matter how far away they are geographically, the developed technology makes the distance shorter for them, and binds them closely.

In Salar areas, such as in Xunhua, although Salar people are the majority, the language of communication in different ethnic groups is not Salar but Chinese, because Xunhua is not isolated from other places of China any more, and the nationwide language is Chinese.

With the impact of the majority societies' change, the minority societies also experienced great socioeconomic changes, which are closely related to their language loss. Hinton (1999:74-75) points out:

The decline of linguistic diversity in the world is linked to the world political economy which invades and takes over the territories of indigenous peoples, threatens the ecosystems in which they live, wipes out their traditional means of livelihood. Because of these links, the right to maintain minority languages has become a human rights issue, supported by such international organizations as UNESCO.

Endangerment of indigenous people's languages is therefore connected to the

loss of their traditional lives. If we look at the situation of Navajo language, then we can have a better understanding on this issue.

About 30 years ago, nearly all Navajo people spoke their language, and Navajo was exclusively used in all aspects of Navajo oral communication, such as “at social gatherings, ceremonies, trading posts, chapter meetings, and work; in fields, canyons, and school hallways; on playgrounds and trips to town; and across the generations within nearly all family contexts” (Spolsky and Irvine 1982, in Lee and Mclaughlin 2001:25). The Navajo language today, however, is greatly endangered. Platero (2001:87) says up to 54.3 percent of the 682 Navajo preschoolers observed in the Navajo Head Start Language Study spoke English only; 17.7 percent of 682 were Navajo monolingual; and 27.9 percent of those children spoke both Navajo and English. According to this report, although the teachers were bilinguals, they usually just spoke English. English was also used more than Navajo between the children and their parents. All these factors show that Navajo is greatly endangered.

What is the root of the Navajo language shift? Why are the monolingual English-speakers of Navajos and bilingual speakers over 80 percent? “Prestige” cannot explain it, because most Navajo people want to keep their language alive (Crawford 1996:60). I believe that socioeconomic changes primarily contribute to the Navajo language’s shift. Beginning with World War II, many Navajos left their home to look for wage labor. Some of them became migrant workers in seasonal harvesting, some worked as employees in city factories, and others served as workers in railroad construction and operation (Minnesota State University 2006). When Navajos lived a

traditional life, they could communicate exclusively in their mother tongue. However, after their economic life changed they were forced to communicate with more and more people from outside of their reservation in other languages, primarily in English. This indicates a clear association between economic change and language shift because they both took place nearly at the same time, about one generation ago as we mentioned above.

Economic change brings about great change in the Navajos' social life. With modernization it is easier for the Navajo people to interact with English-speaking people than ever before (Lee and McLaughlin 2001:29). Spolsky (ibid.) notices that the more the Navajos had contact with English-speaking people, the more likely they were to speak English. Likewise, the more isolated the Navajos were from the mainstream society, the more likely they were to speak only Navajo.

All this clearly shows that by seeking modern living Navajo people are gradually losing their traditional culture, including their language. This is a cause for all indigenous languages, especially for smaller ones such as Salar.

Navajos and Salars have different cultures, histories, populations, and are subject to different language policies from their governments. It seems that they are not comparable. However, there are some similarities between them. Both of them are nondominant ethnic groups in their countries, and both are using the dominant languages, English and Chinese respectively, to communicate with others. Currently they both are in the process of modernization. If a language with a big population (298,197) (Ogunwole 2002:10) like the Navajo is threatened in the process of

socioeconomic change, then certainly a language with a small population (104,503) (Anon. 2003:791) like Salar will be threatened.

2.2.6 Summary

Language endangerment became a very serious issue beginning in the last century in North America, and other places in the world. By assessing the degree of the endangerment of Salar, we can see that Salar is threatened. What causes the endangerment of Salar? Based on literature research, I hypothesize that prestige and literacy play important roles in language endangerment, but they are not the primary cause. Bilingualism is necessary to language shift, but bilingualism itself does not necessarily lead to language shift. Only unbalanced bilingual education produces disastrous consequences for indigenous languages. In many cases the dominant societies use economic and political power to spread their languages and pay less or no attention to the indigenous languages. Today, the ultimate reason for language endangerment may be the socioeconomic changes both in the nondominant communities and in the dominant communities. We need to ask ourselves, if the Navajo, the largest tribe in North America, are losing their language, then what will happen to other smaller tribes in the United States and their counterparts in China like the Salars? It seems that language endangerment is really severe in this world, especially among small communities, and we have to find better ways to stop or slow down language endangerment, or at least document these languages before they

disappear forever (see section 4. 3).

CHAPTER 3

FIELD RESEARCH

3.1 Case Study: Shitoupo Village

Shitoupo¹ is a Salar village near Jishi town in Xunhua Salar Autonomous County in Qinghai province, China. Most of my data were collected there in the summer of 2006.

In 2005, Shitoupo had 144 families and a total population of 823 (Shitoupo 2005). Most of the villagers are Salar. Some of them claim they are Salar, but on their identity card they are shown as the Hui (Sinophone Muslim). Four residents are former government officials, the others are farmers. The village has 456.9 *mu*² of farmland, and the average person owns 0.39 *mu*. According to the report from the village committee in 2005, the average farmer's annual income is 1,444 *yuan*³. There is a primary school in Shitoupo, with 114 enrolled students and nine teachers in the 2006 spring semester. The school attendance rate is 100 percent (Shitoupo 2005).

I selected Shitoupo village for my fieldwork site because I was born there, received my primary education in the village school, and left at the age of 18. I return there at least twice a year to visit my parents or to do some fieldwork. For example, in

¹Shitoupo is the Standard Chinese (Mandarin) name of the village. In Salar it is *Daxinih*, meaning "rocky slope."

² 1 *mu* = 0.06 hectares = 1/6 acre.

³ 1 *yuan* Renminbi = 0.13 US\$ (April 13, 2007)

2003, I stayed 20 days in this village with five of my colleagues,¹ collecting data about the community's history, economy, religion, education, social structure, customs, and language. I have a deep, long-term relationship with the community. Also, my parents live there, and it was convenient for me to live with them and participate in their life. Finally, one of the principals of the community school is my friend. It made my work in the school easier.

3.2 Methods

3.2.1 Introduction

My methods for this study included participant observation in Shitoupo village; collecting data from 40 Salar children; follow-up interviews with selected survey respondents and their parents; tape recordings from 23 Salar children and four male adults, as well as previous fieldwork in Salar communities from 1999 to 2005².

3.2.2 Participating in Local Life

Between June and July in 2006, I lived with my parents and participated in Shitoupo community life. Although many young people did not know me, those over

¹ These colleagues include Xie Zuo, Ma Yufang, Zhu Heshuang, Sun Yi, and Tan Xiaoxia.

² Some of the work was joint research. For example, in 1999 I cooperated with Professor Arienne Dwyer; in 2000 and 2001 with my colleagues Liang Jingyu and Ma Rong; in 2003 with my colleagues Xie Zuo, Ma Yufang, Zhu Heshuang, Sun Yi, and Tan Xiaoxia.

age 30 still thought of me as a member of their community. To understand language use among male adults, I sometimes visited the local mosque and the mosque of the neighboring Salar village *Boylir*. In Salar areas, only males go to mosque to pray, and the mosque is also the place where they discuss community issues. When the topic was about religion, the Imam (religious leader) gave a speech to the audience in Salar; when it was about a nonreligious issue, the administrator of the community was in charge, using Salar as the language of communication. I also took part twice in their picnics, also male-only. Once was on the bank of the Yellow River, which flows by Shitoupo to the north; the other one was in a park near Jishi town, which is the seat of Xunhua County. In the first picnic, most of the men who were available spent a whole day there; the second time, only the Imam, his students, and four leaders on religious issues attended the meeting and picnic. I was invited by the Imam to join them, and it was the first time for me to join in religious people's entertainment. Obviously, they were curious about America and my work and wanted to chat with me about American and Salar culture.

I also participated in other activities, for example, attending funerals, helping a clerk in his store, and helping to harvest crops. However, it was not so easy for me to communicate with females. It is not polite to chat with Salar women unless they are relatives or one knew each other before. It especially was difficult to talk with young females since I was a young man. But I successfully talked to a few women by taking pictures for them. My digital camera was a big attraction for their young husbands and children. When I took a picture I was able to talk a little with these women, and I

promised to send them those pictures. Before I came back to America, I sent all the pictures to them. But the focus of my research was on children's language use and language attitudes toward Salar and the dominant regional language, a variety of Northwestern Chinese. To understand children's language use, I obtained each teacher's permission in the school to visit their classes and observe students' activities after class in school.

3.2.3 Data: Language Use and Attitudes among Salar Children

To maintain language the children must speak it. With the intention of understanding this situation in a Salar community, I surveyed 40 children ranging from age three to eleven. I interviewed each child with the help of a questionnaire and attempted to ask each question in the same way. Salar was the main interlanguage (the language of communication) between us. When these children could not understand me in Salar or I wanted to know the level of their Chinese, I occasionally used Standard Chinese (Mandarin) and the local dialect of Chinese (*Xunhua hua*). Salar is my mother tongue, and I received all my education in the local dialect of Chinese from primary school to high school, and Mandarin mainly in my university. I never had a problem understanding the local people, no matter whether they were Salar people or others, like teachers in the local school who spoke standard or local Chinese.

After their answers, I wrote down their ages, names, and their parents' names.

Using this information, I interviewed some of their parents about children's language use at home. Finding children to answer my questions was not easy because when I did this work, children attending school were busy preparing for their final exams, and many of the children who did not go to school were too shy to work with me. I got a lot of help from my five nephews (ages three to ten) and my mother to find children and convince them to work with me. Of course, before doing this work, I got oral permission from their teachers and parents (I told my work plan to their parents in a men's meeting of the community, and got support from them). I did not get women's consent, because as a man, it was difficult for me to talk to women, and there was no such women's meeting that I could attend. I also got research permission from Kansas University Human Subjects Committee on May 6, 2006.

3.2.4 Interviews with Selected Children and their Parents

To probe issues of prestige and language use, I selected some children to ask more questions about their background, especially those related to language use. I selected children from different backgrounds. For example, some were only three to five years old, and had not yet attended school. Some of them were over age six and were students. Among the students I interviewed some had travel experience outside Xunhua County or even outside Qinghai Province, and some had no such experience. I asked them to tell me stories or tell their travel experience in Salar or in

Northwestern Chinese.¹ All the children's interviews were conducted in my parent's home, where my nephews helped me to bring their peers. Sometimes my mother also brought some children who were her neighbors. After the interviews, I asked some of these children to take me to see their parents. In their homes, I got more information from adults about children's and adult's language use at home, parents' work experiences, and adult's expectation for their children's future. I also recorded parts of these interviews.

3.2.5 Previous Fieldwork

Before last summer's fieldwork in Salar communities, I had already done intensive work there many times, individually or cooperatively with my colleagues. For example, in 1999 I worked with Professor Arienne Dwyer from the United States in Xunhua, including Shitoupo village; between 2000 and 2001, I did both my individual fieldwork and cooperated with scholars from Beijing University and Central Nationalities University in Xunhua; in 2003, with my colleagues I spent 20 days at Shitoupo village for fieldwork; in 2004 and 2005 I did some fieldwork in Xunhua and Hualong County in Qinghai Province, Jishishan County in Gansu Province, Yining County in Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. All this fieldwork was done in Salar communities and most was related to Salar language, culture, and economy. Data from those fieldwork sessions will also be used in this study. In the

¹ I recorded most of these stories and personal experiences with a digital audio tape (DAT) recorder at 44.1 kHz, a Sony PCM-M1 with an AT822 stereo omni microphone.

coming chapter, I will analyze these data and discuss the causes of the endangerment of Salar.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSES OF THE DATA AND FINDINGS

4.1 The Situation of Salar at Shitoupo Village

In section 2.1.2 I assessed the degree of the endangerment of Salar in general, and concluded that Salar is endangered. Now I will discuss the situation of Salar at Shitoupo village in detail. Salar is the dominant language in Shitoupo village, and it is spoken by both the older and the younger generations. However, the language is greatly influenced by Chinese. When people speak Salar, there are many Chinese words in their speech: almost all the names for new things are from Chinese. For example, when I helped a clerk in his store, I asked for the names of his goods in Salar. He gave me about 150 names. Surprisingly, less than one-third were Salar names; the others were all Chinese names. For example, *gaizhui* (screwdriver), *shouqianzi* (clamp), *zenzi* (scissor), *gangchi* (steal ruler), *luosi* (screw <N>), *jiaobu* (masking tape), *suliao jiaobu* (plastic tape), *zhadao* (switch), *baoxiansi* (fuse), *huazhuan* (colored brick) were all Chinese words. There might be some words in Salar that could describe some of his goods. For example, *ah* (white), *ala* (colored), *goh* (blue), *boyih* (color) were Salar words about color. However, when these Salar words were not able to tell the exact differences among goods, such as different colors, he just gave up all the Salar words and shifted to Chinese. Loan words do not necessarily lead to language decline, but when a language borrows new words in great

number from other languages and does not respond to new domains in its own way, it is dangerous for this language (UNESCO 2003:11). Many other local people, who do not know Salar, often say they can understand part of Salar people's conversation. The only reason is that there are many Chinese words in Salar language.

This is especially true for Salar children. When I asked my 40 subjects to count both in Salar and Chinese, the result was surprising. Three of them were not able to count in Salar at all; most of the rest could not count up to ten; only six children were able to count to over ten, but at most to 29. Regarding Chinese counting, three children could not count at all; six children were able to count numbers under ten, and the others had no problem counting up to 100. And when I asked them how many people there were in their family, only a quarter of them answered my question with Salar numbers, the others in Chinese. Although adults in most cases use Chinese to count big numbers, they can count in Salar. When counting small numbers, such as fewer than 50, the adults usually use Salar words. This shows that Salar children's Chinese counting ability is much better than in Salar, although Salar is their first language. From my observation both in the local school and at home when playing games, many children sang Chinese songs and chanted Chinese words.

Code switching means "bilingual speakers alternate between codes within the same speech event, switch codes within a single turn, or mix elements from two codes within the same utterance"(Winford 2003:103). When the children told me stories in Salar, there was lots of code-switching between Salar and Chinese in the lexicon, sometimes even at the phrase level. For example, I observed when a 10-year-old boy

looked at ants running on the ground, he told himself in Chinese (Chinese transliteration in *pinyin*):

(1)

Mayi banjia she guodao, mingtian bi you da yu dao.
 Ant move snake cross tomorrow must have heavy rain come
 ‘If ants move home, and snakes cross the road, then there must be rain tomorrow.’

Then he switched to Salar:

(2)

Etisi yaǧmur yaǧ-gha¹.
 Tomorrow rain (N) rain (V)-future
 ‘Tomorrow it will rain.’

He first described the scene and made a judgment in Chinese, then used Salar just to make a judgment. It seems that he is more comfortable in Chinese than in Salar. This boy wrote a composition in Chinese describing the scene on the way to a market, and he retold it to me in Salar:

(3)

<i>Diu</i>	<i>yidabang,</i>	<i>yidabang</i>	<i>seji,</i>	<i>shu,</i>	<i>dal</i>	<i>baxinda</i>	<i>ge</i>
that	lots of	lots of	sparrow	tree	tree	on	song
S	Ch²	Ch	S	Ch	S	S	Ch

<i>Changna-jana,</i>	<i>inji</i>	<i>vu</i>	<i>tiaola-ba.</i>
Sing-after	then	dance	dance-progressive
Ch-S	S	Ch	Ch-S

‘On that tree, lots of sparrows were singing and dancing.’

(1) and (2) illustrate that this boy freely code-switched between Chinese and Salar at the phrase level. Unlike this, (3) exemplifies that Chinese and Salar are mixed

¹ See IPA symbols for this Salar transcription system in Appendix 3.

² Here **S** stands for Salar, and **Ch** stands for Northwestern Chinese.

together in his so-called Salar speech at the lexicon level. In this Salar sentence, there are 12 words or phrases. “*Diu*”, “*seji*”, “*dal*”, “*baxinda*”, and “*inji*” are Salar words or Phrase. “*yidabang*”, “*yidabang*”, “*shu*”, “*ge*”, and “*vu*” are Chinese phrase or words. “*changna-jana*” and “*tiaola-ba*” are mixed Chinese and Salar words. Exactly half of them are Salar and half are Chinese. However, when this boy told stories in Chinese, there were not any Salar words in his speech. This means that his Salar was greatly influenced by Chinese, but his Chinese was influenced hardly by Salar. If Chinese was influenced by Salar, then the influence was mainly from Salar pronunciations.

Except for a few elderly females, most of the adult residents of Shitoupo village could speak Chinese. And as long as a child goes to school and graduates from the local primary school, s/he will speak Chinese. Given the 100 percent school attendance, Salar children in this community will become bilingual in a very short time. Since local education is conducted only in Chinese, it seems that the endangerment of Salar will get worse in the future.

In 2003, I interviewed an older man who was the first one able to read Chinese in the community. He told me there was no one who could read in Chinese 80 years ago. At that time Salar people were unwilling to study Chinese. Even when they were forced by the government, they hired Chinese children to go to school on their behalf. But when the local school was established in 1975, Salar children gradually started to learn Chinese, and now all the school-aged children are learning Chinese. Salar people’s positive attitude toward learning Chinese is directly related to the endangerment of their language. But why is there such a change that results in the

language decline? In the next part, I will discuss the reason.

4.2 The Causes of the Decline of Salar

Cross-linguistically, language endangerment is often attributed to low prestige and a lack of pedagogical materials in the target language (Dorian 1998:8; UNESCO 2003:3; Salinas 1997:173; Sueyoshi et al. 2005:16). Yet based on my current research, the endangerment of Salar language appears to be caused less by prestige and literacy factors, and more by socioeconomic factors.

Salars historically rejected Chinese. They were even willing to pay the punishment fee for not going to Chinese school in the early 20th century (Wushijiu, who was the first Salar able to read Chinese in Shitoupo village, 2003, personal communication). Before the 1980s many Salars believed that learning Chinese would cause them to lose their Islamic religion, since they believe that the Han Chinese have no God. Salar people are well-known for their devotion to their religion. For them, religion is the most important thing, not language. Salars pay much more attention to their religion identity than to their group identity. When they intermarry, the precondition for the marriage is not the other side's ethnic identity but religion. Even marrying with Salar people, they usually consider religion. If both sides of the marriage do not belong to the same sect of Islam, sometimes they prefer to marry with people from other Muslim groups, such as the Hui (Chinese-speaking Muslim) if they share the same belief (Ma CJ 2005:51; Ma fieldwork 2006). By rejecting the Chinese

language, the Salars in history found an effective way to keep their religious faith. This is the reason why Salar people refused to learn Chinese historically. For them, Chinese had no prestige. Beginning with the modern Chinese economic reform around 1978, more and more Salar children began to learn Chinese. Is this related to the prestige of Chinese? It seems not. Three-fourths of the 40 Salar children research subjects in Shitoupo village said they preferred to be taught in Salar in school rather than in Chinese. The others said they preferred Chinese because their textbooks are all in Chinese. It is clear that for Salar children, there is no other choice but to learn Chinese if they go to school.

What about adults' attitudes toward their mother tongue? In my interviews with 20 Salar adults in 2004 and 2005, all said they like to speak Salar and they speak Salar, and 90 percent said Salar should be kept alive. Therefore, Salar people changed their attitude toward Chinese and started to learn it, not because they just think poorly of Salar but highly of Chinese.

As we discussed in section 2.2.3, a lack of literacy in Salar is not the reason for the decline of Salar. The reason Salar people changed their minds and started to learn Chinese widely is, I hypothesize, due to the socioeconomic change within the community. Around 30 years ago Shitoupo Salar began to send their children to the local Chinese school; since that time the school attendance has been growing steadily. When these children graduate from this primary school, they can communicate in the local Chinese dialect. The question is why Salar people from that time gradually changed their mind in favor of Chinese. If we look at the history of the Shitoupo

village, we see that since the late 1970s there has been a dramatic socioeconomic change in this community.

In the late 1970s, China began to carry out the so-called Reform and Open Policy (*Gaige Kaifang Zhengce*), which aimed to change its economic structure and open its door to foreign countries (Gu and Zheng 1989:5). Before that time, the land was owned and run by the government, the farmers worked together on collective farms, and at the end of a year the farmers got some grain and money for their work. Except for only a few people who worked in government offices, most of the Shitoupo Salar worked together in their village as farmers and spoke Salar. Most people with whom they interacted were also Salars from other Salar villages. When they needed some products which they could not produce by themselves, they went to Tibetan villages to exchange Salar products for Tibetan products. Since this kind of trade lasted until 1980s, most of Shitoupo Salar men had a good command of the local Amdo variety of Tibetan. Salars had a very good relationship with Tibetans; almost every family in a community had Tibetan friends. When they went to neighboring Tibetan villages to do business, Salars stayed at Tibetan friends' home, and Tibetans often visited their Salar friends when they went to the Xunhua county seat, Jishi, or when Tibetans made pilgrimages to other places. I clearly remember that when I was young, many Tibetans visited the Shitoupo village. In 2003, I interviewed one of the oldest Salar men in the Shitoupo community. The older man was not able to speak Chinese, but he spoke fluent Tibetan. He told me how he went to neighboring Tibetan villages and exchanged products with Tibetans.

However, since China's Reform and Open Policy in the Salar region, the farmers got their own land and they do not need to work together. Many of the Salar young men go out from their home to make money. They also go to neighboring Tibetan areas to do business, but most of these areas are far away from Xunhua, and Amdo Tibetan is not the only language they use to communicate. Both Salar and Tibetan traders can speak Northwestern Chinese, since they have already received some Chinese education and had close ties with Chinese-speaking people. Now in Shitoupo village, men 40 years and older can speak Amdo Tibetan, the younger generation shifts to Northwestern Chinese or Standard Chinese to communicate with non-Salar people. There are lots of Tibetan words in Salar due to the close relations between Salar and Tibetan. However, the influence from Amdo Tibetan has been replaced by Northwestern Chinese since the economic interaction between Salars and Tibetans in Xunhua area has almost stopped, because the Salars now can buy farm products in market and no longer need to go to neighboring Tibetan areas to exchange products. During my one month's stay at Shitoupo last summer, I did not see any Tibetans visiting this community. The interaction between Salars and Han Chinese is greater now than ever before, because a great number of Salars go to cities to work, where usually the most people are Han Chinese. When the Salar people got their own land in 1981, they earned more income than before and they gradually accumulated some wealth. And with the growth of population since late 1980s, the average amount of land per person is becoming less and less. Many Salars now cannot make a decent living from farming. Many Salar people are forced to leave their hometown. Some

buy their own truck or bus to transport goods or passengers from northern Tibet (Qinghai province) to central Tibet; some run restaurants in big cities, such as Beijing, Guangzhou, Zhengzhou, and Shenzhen. Others run factories inside or outside Xunhua; some are employees. Salar people do not just work with their own people any more, with whom they can speak Salar. In contrast, Northwestern and Standard Chinese are the languages of work outside Xunhua. In Shitoupo village an older man told me:

There are seven people in my family, and we have 3.2 *mu* land. The total income from the land is about 900 *yuan* in one year. It cannot support my family. As a farmer, I even need to buy grain, not alone it is difficult for me to pay my facilities bills. We have to go out to make some money. Now my son, daughter-in-law and two grandchildren live in Xining (the capital city of Qinghai province) to do some business. Sometimes, they can earn 20,000 *yuan* a year. We cannot afford just to be farmers at home.

His two grandchildren happened to be with him at that time. I asked the children some questions and found they spoke both Salar and Mandarin (and not the local Xunhua variety of Northwestern Chinese).

When Salar people first go to cities, they often suffer a lot for not knowing Chinese. Many things, such as shopping, buying tickets, eating at restaurants, taking buses and so on, are all very difficult for them. They realize that they must learn Chinese if they want to survive in China. I met a young man in Shitoupo, and he told me he had never been to school. When he went to cities to work, he found that it was very difficult for him to live there. After many years, he learned how to speak Northwestern Chinese, but he could not read much. He told me that he was still learning Chinese characters by himself in his free time. This kind of situation is very common among Salar people. To prevent their children from following in their footsteps, most Salars send their children to Chinese school, hoping they do not suffer

a problem with the dominant language any more.

Schooling is also the only way to find a regular job in government offices, schools, hospitals, and other institutions. Seeing some young people who received school education find a job in government institutions, many Salar parents also hope their children can do it. Students who receive a university offer or who find a regular job are always the main topic of villagers' conversation. Last summer, when six young people who had received higher education got their jobs after severe competition among many candidates in Xunhua County, some older men in Shitoupo village celebrated it. This could better explain why the school attendance in the local primary school is 100 percent now.

As I suggested in section 2.2.4, bilingualism does not necessarily lead to language endangerment; Salar children's Chinese learning will not necessarily result in the endangerment of Salar. However, the school where Salar children are studying is not offering bilingual education, but rather monolingual Chinese education. Although Salar students are allowed to speak their mother tongue at school, all language teaching and teaching materials are in Chinese. Salar children have no chance to improve their language. This may better explain some issues discussed in section 4.1, such as why Salar children's Chinese counting ability is much better than their Salar counting ability; why most of them can only sing Chinese songs; why when they speak Salar there are lots of Chinese words in their speech, but there are no Salar words when they speak Chinese. All of these examples are closely related to monolingual Chinese education. And the motivation to learn Chinese is the result of

the economic change among their community since the 1970s.

With the development of economy in the Salar area, the living standard of Salar people is greatly improved and it is directly related to the endangerment of Salar language. First, the communication with the outside society is easier than before. One of my informants told me that when he was young, he walked to Xining and it took three days. Now it just takes two or three hours by car. To go from the village to Xunhua downtown only takes five minutes by car. Just in the last 15 years, about 20 people made their pilgrimages to Mecca. At least half of the families have their own telephone and many young people own cell phones. Half of these people have a TV, some have a DVD and a VCD, and even a few people have computers and Internet access. All these new things make Salar people more interactive with the outside world and the language of communication is mainly Chinese.

Second, the change of their traditional life to modern life leads to great losses in their customs. For example, since they have electronic appliances such as TV, they do not need to tell traditional stories to kill time. Because of this, many myths, songs, legends, and humors are facing extinction, and the great chance to learn Salar is disappearing. Contrary to this, with more and more access to Chinese, many children are more willing to learn Chinese, because they find Chinese is useful in their life.

Third, almost all the new products are from outside of their community, they do not have their own names for these products, and they just use Chinese names. On the one hand, there are more and more new Chinese words in their language; on the other hand, many Salar words are disappearing due to the loss of their traditions, to which

Salar language is closely related. Thus the endangerment of Salar language is increasingly accelerated. This suggests that with the development of the living standard among indigenous peoples, language endangerment will happen everywhere.

We can see that socioeconomic change among Salar society plays the most important role in the endangerment of Salar language. Closely related to this change, monolingual Chinese education also contributes to the loss of Salar language. Prestige and literacy have no direct impact on the decline of Salar.

4.3 Suggestions for Salar Revitalization

Realizing education is the only way to get success in their life now, Salar people send their children to school to study Standard Chinese, and since there is no education in Salar, they seem to be moving into the Chinese mainstream. Many Salars I interviewed do not realize that they are losing their first language. To stop the Salar language decline, I give some basic suggestions here.

- (1) It is necessary to help Salar people understand the importance of their mother tongue and build up their positive attitudes toward their language. Many Salar people, especially some who are less educated, do not realize that their language is declining now. There is not much attention paid even by highly educated people. Language revitalization cannot be done by others, if the community members do not want to do it.

Therefore, the first step is to make them understand the severe situation of their language, and the consequence of losing their language—losing their heritage. Although prestige is not the cause of language endangerment, it is necessary to raise the prestige of Salar language among Salar people.

- (2) Since language endangerment is closely related to economy, it is very important to build Salar's own economy and create as many jobs as possible that are related to using Salar language. Most Salar people live in Xunhua, and it is the only Salar Autonomous County in all of China. Xunhua now is on the top one hundred county tour sites in China, and it attracts more and more people to visit it for its natural and cultural resources. This will accelerate the loss of Salar language on the one hand, but it will be possible to link the local tourism and the promoting of Salar in Xunhua area on the other hand. For example, if the tour guides are required to speak both Chinese and Salar, then it will be an incentive for young people to learn Salar because they will know that the Salar language is not useless. During the last 30 years, Salar people have made great economic progress. There are several famous companies owned by Salar people, and some of them are located in Xunhua Salar Autonomous County and Xining City where most Salar people live. Up to now, there are not any efforts made to link the Salar's economy and the revitalization of their language. If the Salar companies offer some

positions only for bilinguals, then it will be helpful for the maintenance of Salar.

- (3) Salar people should make good use of the current national language policy, which guarantees that all languages in China are equal and each ethnic group has the right to use or not use its oral and written language. Especially in Xunhua, the local government has the authority to teach Salar in local schools. But since language revitalization is complicated work, some Salar officials do not want to make trouble for themselves.¹ Therefore, lobbying these Salar officials will be also very important in the language revival work.
- (4) It is important to develop a suitable orthography for Salar. Although Salar people once had an Arabic-based writing system, it is not well-known by many people now. And most importantly, the central government recommends Latin script for the newly created writing system, which is also the favor of young Salars. Therefore, a new practical writing system needs to be created to write down the Salar language and raise the prestige of this language.
- (5) Modern technology should be used to expand the domains of Salar. There is a Chinese Web site (run by some young Salars, and I am involved in this work) trying to spread the use of written Salar. But it

¹ In 2004, some people, including me, asked Salar officials from Xunhua County to promote Salar language. We were told that they would discuss this issue, but until now there is no any progress.

reaches only a few young people who have access to the Internet. More should be made, especially by using radio and TV if it is possible.

- (6) It is crucial to foster leadership for language revitalization. Since language revitalization is unprofitable and time consuming, the establishment of a responsible team will be a prerequisite to perform the language revival work.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

Language endangerment in the past century has concerned many people, including linguists and community members. Factors, such as prestige, literacy, and language policy play some role in language endangerment, but they are not the fundamental cause. In the past, languages like Latin disappeared although they had prestige and were accompanied with literacy. In other words, prestige and literacy cannot prevent the endangerment of languages. Language policy exerts great influence on the decline of indigenous languages, but what kind of language people want to pass down to their next generation is ultimately determined by their own will, not by outside forces. Bilingualism is necessary to language endangerment or shift, but it does not inevitably result in the decline of indigenous languages. The problem is not bilingual education itself, but unbalanced bilingual education, which is closely related to socioeconomic factors. Socioeconomic change is the primary factor that leads to language endangerment. Languages exist in and reflect a certain environment. The change of this environment will necessarily change the status of languages. The Navajo case from America and the Salar case from China both clearly show how socioeconomic change affects languages. Indigenous people want to interact with other people so they can live a better life, but since they have less power in the whole society, they are paying the price of native language loss to live life as the dominant people do. Therefore, socioeconomic change is the main factor that is responsible for

the endangerment of the indigenous languages, such as Navajo and Salar. How we balance the development of the indigenous people's lives and maintain their languages needs to be further studied in the future.

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APPENDICES

1. Survey Questions for Salar Children

(Asked in Salar)

1. Do you like speaking Chinese?
2. When do you speak Chinese?
3. Do you speak Xunhua Hua or Mandarin? Which one do you prefer?
4. Between Salar and Chinese, which one do you prefer to be taught in your class?
5. What classes are you taking now?
6. Can you tell a story in Salar or in Chinese?
7. Can you sing a song in Salar or in Chinese?
8. How many people are there in your family? What do they do?
9. Is there anyone in your home who can speak Chinese?
10. Do you speak Chinese at your home?
11. Do you watch TV at home? How long?
12. Are your parents able to help you in your studies? If so, to what degree?
13. What games can you play? When you play games, what language do you speak?
14. Where have you traveled?
15. When you grow up, what do you want to be?
 - A. a public officer
 - B. a businessman
 - C. a teacher
 - D. a farmer
 - E. an Imam
 - F. others
16. Can you count in Salar and Chinese?

2. Photo: Salar Children Learning Chinese at Shitoupo Primary School



Photo by the author, June 21, 2006.

3. IPA for Salar Transcription
(Modified by Arienne Dwyer, 18 July 2006)

Orthography	Phonemic	Phonetic	Example	Gloss
a	/a/	a, ɑ	bala	child
o	/o/	o, ɔ	ghol	arm
e	/e/	ɛ, e, æ, ɤ	emeh	bread
i	/i/	i, ɪ, ɨ	bihi	high, tall
u	/u/	u, ʊ, ʉ	ullī	big
ü	/y/	y, ʏ, u	yür	walk, go
ö	/ø/	ø, œ, o	öt	gallbladder
ï	/ɨ/	ɨ, ə	altī	six
b	/p/(/b/)	p	bal	honey
p	/p ^h /(/p/)	p ^h	purnī	nose
m	/m/	m	mal	livestock, betrothal gift
f	/f/	f	fur	blow, weave
d	/t/(/d/)	t	dal	tree
t	/t ^h /(/t/)	t ^h	tam	tasteless
n	/n/	n, ɲ	on	ten
l	/l/	l	ghal	leave, stay
g	/k/(/g/)	k	gir	enter
k	/k ^h /(/k/)	k ^h	kem	who
j	/dʒ/ (/dʒ/)	tʂ	jatuh	rope
q	/tʃ ^h / (/tʂ/)	tʂ ^h	qala	call
x	/ʃ/ (/ʃ/)	ʃ	exeh	donkey
zh	/tʂ/(/dʒ/)	tʂ	zhuxi	chairman
ch	/tʂ ^h /(/tʂ/)	tʂ ^h	chizi	vehicle
sh	/ʂ/	ʂ	shizi	lion

r	/r/	ɹ, r, ʒ	bar	rich
z	/z/	z, ts	zanzi	bowl
s	/s/	s	sal	boat
y	/j/	j, ɟ	yel	wind
ǰ	/ʒ/	ʒ, ʒ	miniǰi baǰ	my, mine garden, bundle, strip
gh	/q/(/ɟ/)	q	ghǰz	girl, daughter
kh	/q ^h /(/q/)	q ^h	khut	bug, worm
h	/x/	x, ɣ, ɕ	handu kuh	laneway bran
ħ	/h/	h	ħeli	money
ng	/ŋ/	ŋ	nang	what
v	/v/	v, w	var	go