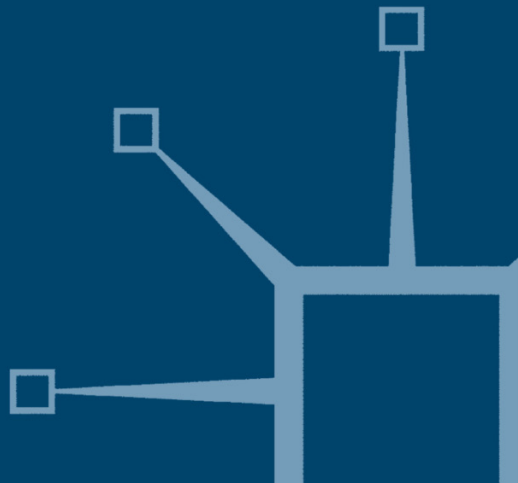


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The Sociology of Language and Religion

Change, Conflict and Accommodation

Edited by
Tope Omoniyi



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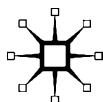
The Sociology of Language and Religion

Change, Conflict and Accommodation

Edited by

Tope Omoniyi
Roehampton University, UK

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Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2010 978-0-230-51699-1

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First published 2010 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

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Palgrave Macmillan in the US is a division of St Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

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ISBN 978-1-349-35476-4

ISBN 978-0-230-30471-0 (eBook)

DOI 10.1057/9780230304710

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources. Logging, pulping and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10

For Shikl, Joshua A. Fishman

Only the staff and the strategy of a tested generalissimo will prevail on linguistic pharaohs and instil confidence that drives the troops to heed the battle cry to re-soul heritage languages and reverse their shift towards imminent demise. There'll always be conflict, but a fair measure of change and accommodation neutralizes its potential to destroy. Language and religion both require faith and faith is a function of institutions as well as of people. In the sociology of language and religion they have an opportunity to join forces for their mutual benefit. Eighty cheers and counting for our General!

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Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	ix
<i>List of Tables</i>	x
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xi
<i>Notes on the Contributors</i>	xii
1 Introduction: Change, Accommodation and Conflict <i>Tope Omoniyi</i>	1
2 Jewish Religious Multilingualism <i>Bernard Spolsky</i>	14
3 Mauritian Muslims: Negotiating Changing Identities through Language <i>Aaliya Rajah-Carrim</i>	29
4 Arabic and Sociocultural Change among the Yoruba <i>Oladipo Salami</i>	45
5 Authenticating a Tradition in Transition: Language of Hinduism in the US <i>Rajeshwari V. Pandharipande</i>	58
6 <i>Blorít</i> – Pagans' Mohawk or Sabras' Forelock? Ideological Secularization of Hebrew Terms in Socialist Zionist Israeli <i>Azzan Yadin and Ghil'ad Zuckermann</i>	84
7 Society, Language, History and Religion: a Perspective on Bangla from Linguistic Anthropology <i>James M. Wilce</i>	126
8 Metaphors of Change: Adolescent Singaporeans Switching Religion <i>Phyllis Ghim-Lian Chew</i>	156
9 African American Vernacular English, Religion and Ethnicity <i>Nkonko M. Kamwangamalu</i>	190

10	Holy Hip-Hop, Language and Social Change <i>Tope Omoniyi</i>	205
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	<i>Index</i>	235
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List of Figures

5.1	Diglossia: priests' languages	68
5.2	Diglossia: languages of Hindu devotees/Indian Hindus	69
5.3	Expanding use of English in religious domains	69
5.4	The functional distribution of the languages (independent of the users)	70
5.5	Semantic diglossia	70
6.1	Sources of lexical enrichment	88
6.2	Israeli Parliament, the Knesset	97
8.1	Push and pull factors	161
8.2	The descriptive essay	162

List of Tables

4.1	Concepts new to the Yoruba world	50
4.2	New names for pre-existing concepts	50
4.3	Material loans from Arabic	53
4.4	Arabic loanwords for days of the week	53
4.5	Examples of personal (Islamic) names	54
4.6	Arabic titles in Yoruba	55
8.1	Source and target domains in Taoism	169
8.2	Source and target domains in Christianity	175
8.3	Source and target domains in Buddhism	179

Acknowledgements

The Sociology of Language and Religion continues to grow as a field of scholarship through the joint efforts of all those who not only identify the issues engaged with as worthy of exploration and thorough examination but also recognize the interventionist potential of this new field. The organizers of the Limerick Sociolinguistics Symposium 2006 are to be thanked for providing the platform on which some of the ideas in this volume were first opened up for public debate. I thank Jill Lake formerly at Palgrave Macmillan for her support, encouragement and belief in this field of scholarship and for commissioning this volume in particular. My thanks too to Melanie Blair for midwifing the volume to delivery after Jill retired. I am extremely grateful to colleagues in the Academy who kindly agreed to read portions of the volume and offer very insightful comments which have ensured that this is a work of the utmost quality. I thank John Joseph our independent reader for his professionalism. And to Philip Tye our copy editor I offer a special thank you for rising to the demands and queries by my contributors and for persevering when we came up against his deadlines. Finally, I want to especially thank Gella Fishman for various forms of support for the field including two trips to Europe within a five-year span (2002–6).

TOPE OMONIYI

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1

Introduction: Change, Accommodation and Conflict

Tope Omoniyi

The concepts of change, accommodation and conflict that are our focus in this volume are not new to the older traditional disciplines of sociology, social psychology and religion where they are experiential social phenomena that both characterize and define the relationships between two states of being, contexts or persons/groups. While change frames discussions of the transition between and into states, contexts and selves, conflict and accommodation are probable responses to such changes, one resisting and diverging the other embracing and converging. As a hybrid discipline, sociolinguistics had inherited these concepts but confined the experiential to language behaviour as we find when accounting for variation in different fields of linguistic analysis – phonology, lexis, morphology, syntax, pragmatics and discourse. Giles and Powesland refer to the ‘individual speaker’s diversity of speech possibilities’ which warrant choice-making and modification aimed at ‘controlling the way in which he is perceived by the listener’ (1975: vi). They say that we accommodate in speech through speed of delivery, pitch range, phonological variables and vocabulary. These are all micro-level linguistic measures. The underlying thought then is the pursuit and preservation of harmony in society by managing the potential impact of social demarcations and difference based on speech performance.

In the sociolinguistic literature, conflict has been theorized traditionally along social class lines, anchored as it were to Marxist thinking and especially the works of Marx, Lenin and Weber. Class and capitalism, technology, and division of labour-derived hierarchies have been central to articulations of conflict in the social sciences (Giddens and Held 1982). These demarcations and differences mostly served to identify

subgroups and the dynamics of coexistence within the same ethno-linguistic or racial groups. Once we move outside these groups and are confronted with mixed ethnicity, race and religious groups, demarcations and differences require a redefinition of change, accommodation and conflict. Let us take a closer look at each of our three concepts separately.

Change

Change is conceptualized in Labovian sociolinguistics as a property of the linguistic system. In other words, modification to forms is to be found at the various levels of analysis, i.e. phonological, lexical, syntactic, semantic and the pragmatic. This field of scholarship accounts for change by citing internal as well as external factors. Anderson ((2008: 13) opts for a description of change in terms of 'internal constraints' and 'external motivations'. This approach to discussing change is a micro-analytical one in which conditions were proffered for specific vowel changes in Detroit. This model does not serve the purpose of the new disciplinary field that the essays in this volume have made their focus. Anderson and Milroy note that 'variationist research seldom attempts to integrate socially motivated and intrasystemic factors in accounts of language change' (unpublished manuscript cited in Anderson 2008: 13). We may interpret this criticism in two ways based on our interpretation of 'intrasystemic': either as factors internal to systemic units of analysis such as phonology, morphology, syntax, for example, or a group as a social system. Such conceptualization of change is simply narrow and too discipline specific. I shall take their critique one step further by noting one further shortfall. The approach overlooks ideologically motivated extrasystemic factors which account for nuanced language behaviour that may persist and become part of the sociolinguistic repertoire of a community. By extrasystemic factors I refer to variable structural leverages or events in secondary or external social systems outside of the primary system which through processes such as globalization, transnationalism and cosmopolitanism wield observable influences. These include influences from media information flows, political conflicts and economic crashes with wider ramifications beyond nation-state boundaries such as 9/11 and 7/7. Kerswill (2006) describes these as contact-driven and includes extralinguistic factors. Let us take an example each from both of these.

The Anglican reform in Britain led to debates about the admission of women to the priesthood during the 1990s, a move that the religious right opposed vehemently. In that conflict we find a whole body of

discourse texts in which gender, culture and religion mediate the linguistic form. The fact that there are now women priests in churches across England represents social change which impacts on language use in the Christian community. At a micro-level, the safe assumption one generation earlier that pronominal choice was predetermined with reference to the priesthood has had to be reviewed.

The second example is more dramatic. In an ironic twist, the tragic events of September 11, 2001 and the subsequent Bush Administration-led global 'war on terror' fed the arsenal of humour around the world. For instance, the repertoire of Nigerian humour was expanded to include the ascription of 'Osama' as an *aka* (also known as) to anyone who sported a luxuriant beard. Similarly, President George Bush's infamous geo-political construction of Iran, Iraq and North Korea as the 'Axis of Evil' is narrowly construed in some quarters as a geo-religious representation of the Middle East which pitched two religious civilizations (Christianity and Islam) against each other and was then appropriated by the humour trade. These are obvious reflections of sociolinguistic change in language behaviour that may be directly linked to sociopolitical events in other parts of the world and therefore extrasystemic in relation to Nigeria. Eventually, the solidarity evoked by Al-Qaeda among Islamic faithfuls caused skirmishes in predominantly Muslim northern Nigeria but it did not degenerate into another Iraq. Thus the narrow conceptualization of change in variation research falls even more woefully short of the mark where contemporary developments such as I have alluded to here are concerned. The new discipline of sociology of language and religion needs a broader, more encompassing framework in order to effectively cope with such new notions of change.

Popular religion or what arguably may be seen as the consequence of a process of secularization that I shall refer to as the popculturization of religion displays similar attitudes and practices to those that we associate with popular culture. For instance, the serenity and conservatism that traditionally define religion have been traded for the 'cool' factor which in functional terms makes religion attractive to youth as a demographic that was observably increasingly uninterested or at least apathetic (see Omoniyi, Ch. 10 this volume). Talking the talk and walking the walk in a manner of speaking is vernacularization – social processing; this is evidence of socioreligious change which from the standpoint of Christianity or the Church as institutions signals a certain degree of accommodation of secular culture.

What my illustrations above also do is not only show that the sociology of language and religion by default takes a macroanalytical perspective on change but also that it does not completely rule out the

consideration of modifications to certain micro-level linguistic elements or their usage as it were. The new discipline's interest and focus are on languages as systems and the purposes and rationale advanced for choices made in language behaviour and I shall expand on that a bit. It is an established fact in the sociolinguistic research on diglossia that the High and Low varieties of Arabic are used for religious and everyday communicative purposes respectively (see Ferguson 1959, Rosenhouse and Goral 2006: 842). With this in mind then sociology of language and religion (SLR) research is interested in departures from native practice such as the use of the L-variety of English in religious texts as a strategy of evangelization among non-educated groups who have limited literacy skills in second-language contexts. The use of pidgin in Bible translations in Cameroon is an instance of this. This argument is not foolproof nevertheless, as pidgin has developed and risen in status in some regions. Zuckermann's most controversial support of the Tanakh Ram translation of the Hebrew Bible into Israeli makes the same point (see *Jerusalem Post*, 18 May 2009). Now let us take a closer look at accommodation.

Accommodation

Accommodating in the sociology of language and religion has several dimensions to it. First, in multi-faith societies, on several levels of social organization and contexts, institutions and groups as well as individuals negotiate their coexistence in different ways. Such negotiations entail varying degrees of convergence and/or divergence as society attempts to develop suitable models of integration or assimilation. Borrowing from Ferguson's idea of diglossia, Omoniyi espoused the concepts of *bifaithism* and *difaithia* to define the structural asymmetry between different religious groups in a multi-faith society (see Omoniyi 2006). Second, accommodation may also be articulated within the framework of Rampton's notion of 'language crossing' (1995) and apply it here to how we perceive people or groups and how we desire to be perceived in return by such people or groups. I shall argue that the appropriation of language practices associated with a faith group other than one's own as a strategy of signalling friendship or solidarity is an instance of accommodation. For example, using religious tropes like 'In Sha Allah', 'be'ezrat hashem', 'Praise God' and 'Holy Mary', as interjections (God willing) and exclamations in interaction with Muslims, Jews, Pentecostals and Catholics respectively marks convergence ordinarily, but if these groups constituted a cultural minority within a larger

group then such forms may exemplify acts of accommodation by the majority.

Furthermore, change in the era of globalization includes the possibility of adoption of language forms from new cultural repertoires resulting from the contact situation. For example, in a predominantly Christian community the arrival of Muslim immigrants may expose both the latter and their hosts to each other's sociocultural practices including of course language behaviour. The direction of flow is dependent upon whether multiculturalism is conceptualized institutionally within integrative or assimilative ideological frameworks. Purists or conservative types will experience culture conflict while liberals will embrace accommodationism in both groups. Accommodation may support diversity and syncretism while conflict courts exclusion, both of which generate different discourses.

Another perspective of accommodation is that which we observe in the social and cultural fabric as a consequence of change in the ethnolinguistic composition of communities through migration. In the post-war period, for instance, British cities such as Liverpool, Manchester, Bristol, London, Leicester and a number of others experienced an influx of immigrants which altered their ethnocultural configuration. A town such as Southall (a London suburb) is said to have experienced attrition of its white population with the inflow of Asian immigrants from different parts of the subcontinent. The outcome of that process today is that Southall is recognized as a major British Asian community in south-east England. Its material culture reflects a mix of traditional British culture (weather, architecture and language) and the different cultures of the Asian subcontinent from which the immigrants derived: Pakistan, Punjab, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and so on. Talk about the weather as a topic in Southall is shared by other English towns in a way that is not shared by the homelands from which the immigrants derived. So that Southall cannot be a replica of any one Asian town or city in the subcontinent. The multi-faithism (Omoniyi 2006) that abounds there is a peculiar post-Empire social reality. The linguistic landscape depicts this in the multilingual and multireligious practices evident in the names of places beginning with Southall Station which is also written in Urdu. Public services also acknowledge that composition and produce leaflets in English, Urdu and Arabic.

Sharia was a knotty issue in Nigeria at the beginning of the Third Republic with some northern states seeking to introduce an alternative judicial system – based on the Islamic religion but one challenged by those who seek to uphold secularism. On *Inside Africa*, CNN August 23,

Aisha Sesay ran the story of hip-hop artists in Kano who are censored. The artist Nazir Hausawa told CNN correspondent Christian Parefoy that the music industry was an alternative source of livelihood in a period of growing unemployment. But the authorities saw hip-hop as an element of the West's corrupting influence. One major complaint was about the scanty nature of hip-hop's fashion. Other illustrations of this form of change in the perception and practice of religion may be drawn from emerging evidence of basement rock bands, couture and fashion runways in the Islamic Republic of Iran carried by CNN in August 2008 in the programme *Inside the Middle East*.

Conflict

Conflict may be conceptualized as the counterpositioning of social groups (identities) or their beliefs both of which are discernible from language behaviour (see essays in Part 2 of Pütz 1994). These oppositions are observable in a number of contexts and I shall provide brief but apt illustrations from research on identity and translation. The construction and protection of ethnoreligious identities have been at the core of conflict perhaps more noticeably since events of 9/11 (September 11, 2001). However, the troubles in Chechnya, Kosovo and Northern Ireland to mention a few provide proof that religion-fuelled ethnic conflict goes much farther back than 2001. Clayton (1998: 41) claims that the conflict in Northern Ireland had more to do with settler colonial history and ethnic difference which were not mutually exclusive. He cautions that 'the idea that the conflict is religious deserves careful consideration. It is, however, very much a minority view among sociologists, and indeed participants, that the religious divide is both the cause of the conflict and the fount from which Protestant fears spring.' I may therefore be playing safe here by not making the conflict per se the chosen focus of my illustration. Instead, I shall look briefly at the deployment of the Truth Commission as a mechanism in the healing process to spotlight a language interest that is evidently linked to ethnolinguistic and religious identities at a macroanalytical level.

In post-conflict Northern Ireland, the Truth Commission was set up as a strategy of healing the nation which was divided by religion. The Commission which was chaired by Bishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa led the two communities through a narrative-based process to purge them of endemic hatred that had built up over the better part of the twentieth century.

At a microanalytical level, the production of contemporary versions of religious literature is fraught with evidence of linguistic change, both intralanguage as well as between languages (cf. Zuckermann's discussion of *maxima in minimis* in relation to 'Othering' in Omoniyi and Fishman 2006). Hephzibah Israel remarks in a conference abstract proposed to the 2009 International Association for Translation and Intercultural Studies conference in Melbourne, Australia, on the theme 'Mediation and Conflict: Translation and Culture in a Global Context' that:

In order to represent the religion as a culturally recognizable faith system, yet unique in character and structure, all levels of religious translation either modify or control target language use. As a result, a new religious vocabulary is often created. Since the language of the convert derives largely from this newly created religious vocabulary, the politics and aesthetics of translation practices and language use influence the way the self is articulated to construct new religious identities. For this very reason, religious translations have often been the site of conflict where the authority to control language use has meant the authority to define identity.

Israel (email communication) reports that in her doctoral research on Bible translations in South India and its impact on the formation of religious identity among the Protestant community she 'found that, interestingly, each time there was a split in the community the arguments over what it meant to be a Protestant and what best represented the Protestant faith was expressed in terms of the right translation of the Bible and the correct register of religious terminology to be used in the translation'. This view which she articulates in a number of articles (see Israel 2005, 2006, 2009) underlines the observed variations in the understandings of Christianity that derive from which version of the Bible people have access to. In other words, faith is neatly anchored to the language of the text in which it is accessed. Naturally, such differences of opinion are directly relevant to discussions of change, conflict and accommodation in the sociology of language and religion.

Four Kornerz, a UK gospel rap group, appeared on MTV Base UK on the *Download Chart* programme (8 December 2007) and remarked that their music 'is not just for the Church, it's for the culture'. They appeared alongside secular artists Alicia Keys, and Mark Ronsson FT (featuring) Amy Winehouse. This is a very strong indication of the group's sense of their secular global appeal, rather than restricted sacred themes and audience which is a departure from the traditional perception of

religion. This is quintessential change acknowledged. This is an exploration of media globalization to move gospel music beyond the sacred space of a church and Christian congregation that it was traditionally associated with. This cannot be described as a one-off incident considering that in October 2007, G-Force, another UK gospel group, received the MOBO Award for the Best Gospel Album at the undoubtedly secular annual Music of Black Origin (MOBO) Award ceremony in London. Thus we must acknowledge this as an element of culture change (see Omoniyi, Ch. 10 this volume). And directly related to this is the issue of globalization, particularly of culture. Tomlinson (1999) presents cultural globalization as 'deterritorialisation' – decoupling of culture and space but which does not produce a 'homogeneous global culture'. Tomlinson did not have a discourse focus. Fairclough suggests that the hybridity that results from deterritorialization includes 'interdiscursive hybridity', that is 'the mixing of different discourses, different genres and different styles' (2006: 124).

Summary of chapters

In Chapter 2, Bernard Spolsky opens by posing three fundamental and probing questions based on a decision to engage with changes in both of the contributory fields to our new hybrid discipline. He queries if there is a cause and effect relationship between religion and the sociology of language, or that both are intertwined and mutually affecting each other. He also asks whether change results from conflict or from accommodation. One other dimension left out in these initial questions is the possibility of a reversal in which both conflict and accommodation result from change as I suggest in the earlier part of this introduction. In search of answers to these questions, Spolsky elects in his chapter to look at the development of language policy in Jewish religious life with specific focus on language choice for prayer. He attempts to explain changes in Jewish religious language practice by weighing up changing external circumstances, changes in belief and the results of identifiable management decisions. He draws on social change rather than linguistics for a model while acknowledging that at the micro-level, changes in pronunciation of Hebrew presumably changed like other linguistic changes, but at the macro-level, decisions about language and variety choice were more likely to be made abruptly even if diffusion was gradual.

In Chapter 3, Aaliya Rajah-Carrim analyses the changing linguistic practices of a minority religious group in a plurireligious secular

society: Muslims in Mauritius. Although most Mauritian Muslims (MMs) are of Indian origin, they adhere to different theological groups. There are also ethnic differences within the community. These religious and ethnic identities are reflected in, and expressed by, linguistic practices.

In Chapter 4, Oladipo Salami argues that the Islamic religion, via its language of liturgy – Arabic – has impacted the Yoruba language. In doing this, he demonstrates that a number of lexical items covering aspects of material and intellectual cultures which were foreign to Yoruba before the contact with Arabic–Islamic culture have been borrowed. Invoking the Whorfian principle of linguistic determinism, he shows that Islam, via Arabic, has not only impacted Yoruba lexicon but also has caused changes in Yoruba world view, providing illustration from Yoruba naming practices where the influence of the Islamic religion on Yoruba personal identity is immense. A Yoruba person who converts to Islam drops their Yoruba indigenous names for Arabic–Islamic names. Although the history and narratives surrounding names are still very important to the Yoruba, with Islam some attempts at accommodation are evident in attempts to relate such histories to the lives of past prophets or important personalities in early Islam. He notes though that this element of change today makes it more difficult to preserve family histories and narratives in names. He also argues that the process of religious and language accommodation between Arabic and Yoruba has been largely unidirectional to the advantage of Arabic–Islamic culture. He conjectures that this pervasive presence of Arabic–Islamic culture in Yorubaland motivated Yoruba Muslims to demand the introduction of Islamic law (Sharia) to the south-west of Nigeria in the wake of the expansion of the Sharia legal system in Northern Nigeria at the dawn of the Fourth Republic.

In Chapter 5, Rajeshwari Pandharipande identifies a set of core research questions that the sociology of language and religion as a field of inquiry must engage with, and notes that those questions can only be answered by taking into account perspectives from both linguistics and religious studies. She notes that the extent and the nature of the impact of sociocultural change on languages and religions and the accommodation of the change crucially depend on the extent of the variability in the correlation between a particular language and the religion expressed by it. For example, the relationship between Islam (religious meaning) and the Arabic language (the linguistic code) is relatively invariable compared to Hinduism where there is a high degree of variability of languages (Sanskrit, Hindi, Bangla, Marathi, etc.) of the religion. Therefore, the impact of the change in the sociocultural

setting on the languages of Islam and Hinduism will not be the same. She argues that for an adequate understanding of the concept of change in the language of religion, it is necessary for the framework of sociology of language and religion to take into account the perspectives of linguists as well as theologians. She addresses another important but hitherto ignored dimension of change and accommodation, that is, the issue of authentication of change in the language of religion within the new sociocultural context. In other words, we may ask, what is the authority which sanctions change, and what is the mechanism of this process of authentication?

In Chapter 6, Azzan Yadin and Ghil'ad Zuckermann claim that the main problem facing those attempting to revive Hebrew as the national language of Israel has been that of Hebrew lexical voids, which were not semantic voids but cases in which purists tried to supplant unwelcome guest words, foreignisms and loanwords. The 'revivalists' attempted to use mainly internal sources of lexical enrichment but were faced with a paucity of roots. They changed the meanings of obsolete Hebrew terms to fit the modern world. This infusion often entailed the secularization of religious terms. Thus their chapter explores the widespread phenomenon of semantic secularization, as in the ideologically neutral process visible in English *cell* 'monk's living place' > 'autonomous self-replicating unit from which tissues of the body are formed'. The main focus, however, is on secularizations involving *ideologically manipulative* 'lexical engineering', as exemplified by deliberate, subversive processes of extreme semantic shifting, pejoration, amelioration, trivialization and allusion.

In Chapter 7, James M. Wilce suggests that the sociology of language and religion explores the same terrain as linguistic anthropology, identifying for example the analysis of history (change), a major concern of SLR articulated in Principle 2 of Fishman's Decalogue (2006). Anthropology has for at least two decades discarded reifying approaches to 'culture' in favour of those approaches that focus on contestation as well as the situational production and 'dialogic emergence' of culture (Tedlock and Mannheim 1995), and the complex relationship of culture to discourse. Linguistic anthropologists have rejected simplistic equations of culture with text arising out of the humanities and cultural anthropology, preferring instead to explore *natural histories of discourse*. These explorations reveal processes by which discourse comes to appear, momentarily, as text-like (Silverstein and Urban 1996). This linguistic anthropological perspective on conflict, history, and everyday and macrosocial process, complements some of Joshua Fishman's principles (Decalogue).

In Chapter 8, Phyllis Ghim-Lian Chew takes the position that religion or more generally religiosity is increasingly playing a role in how adults potentially view the world, yet there is a paucity of literature on religious development in adolescence, a phase of contending with important questions of identity and meaning, characterized by many cognitive and social changes in the transition into adult life. She further argues that a study of change in adolescents' religious practice is important because their behaviour, attitudes and beliefs affect the political, economic and social future of the nation. To fill this gap, she examines oral and written texts produced by Singaporean adolescents for the use of English metaphors to describe switch of religion. The majority of adolescents in her study have switched from Taoism to Christianity and Buddhism. She notes that more specifically, the chapter focuses on adolescents' experience and articulation of change, conflict and accommodation in switching religion.

Nkonko Kamwangamalu suggests in Chapter 9 that a gap exists in African American Vernacular English (AAVE) scholarship around how African Americans use AAVE to construct or project their ethnic identity in both the secular and the sacred arenas such as the church (Smitherman 1994, 2002 [1973]). He explores this issue from the perspective of accommodation theory (Giles 1977, Giles and Smith 1979) and of ethnicity in the sociology of language and religion (Fishman 2002, 2006). Drawing on qualitative data from published literature, he argues that despite the diglossic relationship in which AAVE coexists with Standard American English and attempts to 'erase' it in a bid to enforce the myth of one true, invariant, uniform standard English, AAVE remains the key marker of ethnic identity for most African Americans. Depending on a speaker's linguistic repertoire, this identity is at times deliberately 'attenuated' especially in inter-group linguistic interactions to accommodate out-group members. In intra-group interactions and in not-made-for-TV African American church services, however, speakers tend to 'accentuate' the features of AAVE to project their ethnic identity. In these settings AAVE is unmarked and so it figures prominently in what Smitherman (2002 [1973]) calls sacred style characterized by call and response, rhythmic patterns, spontaneity, concreteness and signifying.

In Chapter 10, the last of the volume, Tope Omoniyi focuses on the appropriation of hip-hop for religious purposes, thus identifying sacralization and secularization as social processes of change and accommodation. He engages with the re-evaluation of both the source and direction of change in relation to the culture flow that globalization fuels. In other

words, is the globalization of religious practice through transnational communities and institutions associated with Pentecostalism, televangelism, television and music ministries as cultural vehicles influenced by the spread of a variety of language or vice versa? The employment of hip-hop for the popularization of religious faiths becomes the site of the exploration of how sociolinguistic change may apply within the framework of the sociology of language and religion.

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