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Afrikaans in Patagonia: Language shift and cultural integration in a rural immigrant community

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Abstract: Chubut Province, in Patagonia, Argentina, is home to a group of Afrikaans-speaking Boers, descendants of those who—starting in 1902—came to Argentina from the region of present-day South Africa. Although little Afrikaans is spoken among fourth- and fifth-generation community members, many in the third generation (60 years and older) still maintain the language. According to Joshua Fishman’s model of generational language shift, the Boers’ Afrikaans should have been largely diluted by the third generation; older community members today should have little functional knowledge of the language, and their children and grandchildren none. The goal of this paper is to explore the persistence of bilingualism in the Argentine Boer community and explain why the changes normally associated with the third generation of immigrants are only now being seen in the fourth and fifth generations. On the basis of bilingual interviews with living community members, we argue that the community’s attitude toward Afrikaans as a language of group identity, as well as the relative isolation of the

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community in rural Patagonia in the first half of the 20th century, were both decisive factors in delaying the process of linguistic assimilation. Only in the middle of the 20th century, when the community came into greater contact with Argentine society as a result of modernization and schooling in the region, did the process of linguistic integration begin in a measurable way.

Keywords: Afrikaans-Spanish bilingualism, Boers in Patagonia, Joshua Fishman, immigration in Argentina, language shift in immigrant populations

1 Introduction

Following the Second Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902), the various independent republics organized by Boer settlers in Southern Africa were subjugated to British rule.¹ Between 1902 and 1907, approximately 600 Afrikaans-speaking Boers emigrated to the Chubut region of Patagonia, Argentina. Lured by the Argentine government’s propaganda, which promised cheap, fertile land and freedom from British rule, they established themselves principally as sheep farmers in the modern-day Patagonian province of Chubut. The regions where the Boers settled were far removed from any major urban centers, letting the community remain functionally monolingual in Afrikaans throughout the first several decades of its existence.

Today, there are still descendants of the original Afrikaans-speaking settlers concentrated around the cities of Comodoro Rivadavia and Sarmiento, who maintain a strong cultural Afrikaans identity (Henriksen et al. 2018). Most Boers who were born around the middle of the century—primarily belonging to the third generation—acquired Afrikaans as their first language and only began to learn Spanish years later in school. For economic reasons, many migrated into towns upon reaching adulthood, marrying Spanish speakers and raising their children in Spanish. Today, the number of Afrikaans speakers in the community is dwindling as the youngest generations (fourth and fifth) evince a decisive shift toward monolingual Spanish use.

The rate at which this community has shifted from Afrikaans to Spanish is, at first evaluation, not consistent with the paradigm of generational language shift

¹ The political entity “South Africa” did not come into existence until 1910 (as the Union of South Africa, which became the Republic of South Africa in 1961). Since the immigrants who established the Afrikaans community in Argentina left before this, it is anachronistic to refer to them as “South African.” The community self-identifies as “Boer” (Afrikaans ‘farmer’, pronounced [bur]), so we use this term throughout.

established by sociolinguist Joshua Fishman. Fishman proposed the concept of a three-generation shift as the standard predictive model for language evolution among immigrant populations (Fishman 1972, 1980; Fishman et al. 1966; see also Wei 1994). Following this model, the majority language that immigrants use as a matter of necessity in their new home culture is recognized as having increased prestige and opportunity in the bilingual second generation. By the third generation, members typically only have receptive knowledge of their heritage language and are fully dominant in the majority language. In Fishman's words, "What begins as the language of social and economic mobility ends, within three generations or so, as the language of the crib as well" (1989: 206). This three-generation chronology has been tested and affirmed in a variety of contexts, including French-American communities (Varro 1998), Hispano-American communities (Veltman 1983), and ethnic and linguistic intermarriages (Stevens 1985).

What, then, explains the apparently slower, four-to-five generational shift from minority to majority language among the Boers of Patagonia? Based on our analysis of the testimony of living members of the community, three hypotheses can be proposed: First, the relative isolation of Patagonia from the mainstream of economic life in Argentina in the early 20th century delayed the shift away from the minority language. Second, the Boer community's robust pride in their heritage formed an identity which was intertwined with language use, contributing to the slow adoption of Spanish as a language of group identity. Lastly, before the development of the oil industry in Patagonia and the establishment of government schools in the region, most immigrant groups did not view Spanish as a *de facto* language of prestige, and thus most immigrant groups were slow to adopt Spanish. This general cultural view of Spanish in Patagonia affected the view of the Boers as well. The goal of this paper is to evaluate these three hypotheses by exploring the historical and sociological factors that led to this delayed chronology of language shift.

This paper is organized as follows. Section 2 offers an overview of our research method and data-collection process. Section 3 examines the Boers' linguistic isolation, from the arrival of the first generation to the beginning of the third (1902–1940s). Section 4 then probes the shift to Spanish as the majority language among third-generation community members (1940–1960s), which took place largely in response to the growth of educational opportunities in the area and the expansion of industry. The concluding general discussion (Sections 5 and 6) considers the decline of Afrikaans among fourth- and fifth-generation Boers (1960s–present), arguing that integration through education and economic development—not mere contact upon immigration—was the decisive force in "starting the clock" on the process of L1 to L2 language shift.

2 Methodological and historical background

Our analysis of the linguistic evolution of the Boer community in Patagonia is based on testimonies by living bilingual speakers. We define bilingualism as proficiency in two languages while acknowledging that individual bilingual speakers themselves have varying degrees of skill in each.² Testimonies were gathered over the course of 81 interviews conducted during two research trips to Patagonia, in 2014 and 2018. In 2014, we contacted 28 community members who claimed to be able to speak both Spanish and Afrikaans. After identifying nine of these who proved unable to sustain conversation in the latter, we interviewed the remaining 19 speakers once in each language.³ We also conducted interviews with non-Boer monolingual Spanish speakers who married community members, and a few fourth-generation children (who have little to no knowledge in Afrikaans). We returned to the community in 2018, when we interviewed (in Afrikaans and again in Spanish) 13 of the original 19 community members as well as 10 new ones, two monolingual spouses, and one of the children. Most of the 29 bilingual interviewees (born between 1932 and 1959) belong to the third generation of Boer immigrants in Patagonia, which we define as the children of at least one Boer parent who was born in Argentina or arrived in Patagonia before early adolescence.⁴ While all acquired Afrikaans as a first language and can still converse in it, most are now dominant in Spanish, and thus this paper is based principally on the Spanish interviews.⁵

While the 2014 interviews were structured as sociolinguistic interviews aimed at eliciting casual speech in both languages through a variety of open-ended questions (Coetzee et al. 2019; Henriksen et al. 2019), it quickly became apparent that the Boers' personal histories could offer important insight into their community's linguistic history as well. In order to explain the trajectory of the Patagonian Boers' language shift, it was necessary to employ a multifaceted and interdisciplinary methodology that could address linguistic questions as well as interpret sociological and anthropological data relating to identity and social practice. Above all, it was imperative to take into account how the Boers themselves remember and represent their own experience of language use. Thus, for the

² For a comprehensive list of subtypes of bilingualism, see Wei 2000:6–7.

³ For our purposes, we did not interview community members who could be considered, according to Wei's categorization, as "passive" or "receptive" bilinguals (Wei 2000:7).

⁴ The oldest living community members, born in the early 1930s, were children of parents who might be categorized as "G1.5" because they arrived to Argentina in early adolescence. For further discussion, see Potowski 2016: 48.

⁵ We plan to pursue an additional study based on the Afrikaans-language interviews.

2018 trip, we tailored each interview to elicit testimonies that, beyond reflecting linguistic traits, also expressed personal experiences and memories relating to language identity, race, class, and culture.

After the trips, we transcribed orthographically all speech in the interviews using the ELAN software. We classified interview segments based on topics addressed, creating a list of standard categories (e. g. memories of parents' language use, accounts of first exposure to Spanish, experiences at school, language attitudes, nostalgia, references to other languages in Patagonia, etc.). After organizing all the transcriptions according to these categories, we identified recurring patterns and common experiences, which formed the basis of our analysis. Following this procedure, our research team could understand how the sociological context and history of the Patagonian Boer community affected their Spanish and Afrikaans use over time, which is the primary focus of this paper. The discussion that follows includes a selection of representative quotes derived from a subset of our interviewees (For a full index of all speakers interviewed, listed by pseudonyms, see Appendix, Table 1). Our focus on what Janicki (2004: 67) terms "macro-linguistic phenomena of sociological interest," as opposed to merely "micro-sociological phenomena of linguistic interest," has been necessary for understanding the role of extra-linguistic forces that have affected the rate of language shift among the Patagonian Boer community.

3 Before the oil: Language, education, and social life among Boer settlers in Chubut

Though the Boers emigrated to Argentina starting in 1902, they maintained the use of their first language, Afrikaans, for at least four decades. This delayed the expected transition toward Spanish and, in so doing, defied the expectations of a three-generation shift defined in Fishman's model. Decisive in this timeline was the marginal standing of Spanish itself among immigrant communities of the region in the early 20th century, as well as the high value of Afrikaans as a marker of identity among the Boers themselves. Based on the family memories and community traditions as described in the interviews (discussed below), it has been possible to conclude that Afrikaans was considered the most prestigious language by many among the first two generations of Boer immigrants in Chubut.

In order to understand this cultural value, it is necessary to consider in more detail the historical roots of Afrikaans in the colonial enterprise in South Africa, which began with the establishment of the Dutch East India Company on the southern tip of Africa in 1652. Although contact with the Netherlands continued

throughout the following century and a half, the spoken language quickly began diverging from Dutch due to contact with indigenous languages (e. g. Khoisan languages), other immigrant languages such as German and French, and languages spoken by slaves brought from eastern Africa and Southeast Asia (Roberge 2002: 81). Various non-standard dialects were spoken among different settler populations, and what later came to be known as “Afrikaans” (called by many names such as *hotnotstaal* ‘Hottentot language’, *kombuistaal* ‘kitchen language’, *Boerehollands* ‘Boer Dutch’, and others) developed in this context (Hofmeyr 1987: 97; Roberge 2002: 83). Due to the imposition of English following the arrival of British settlers in 1820 (subsequent to the British takeover of the Cape in 1806), there was an increase in the motivation to preserve and promote Dutch (and its dialects) beginning in the mid-19th century. This was intensified after the so-called Groot Trek (“Great Migration”) that saw large numbers of descendants of Dutch settlers move eastward and northward into territory not under British control. These migrations resulted in the formation of various Boer republics. Two of these, known as the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (South African Republic) and the Oranje-Vrijstaat (Orange Free State), founded in 1852 and 1854 respectively, which used Dutch as their official language in a diglossic sociocultural context, became involved in wars with the British Empire. Following the second Anglo-Boer war of 1899–1902, and especially during the second decade of the 20th century, more intellectual and political leaders from the Boer communities were willing to advocate publicly for Afrikaans as a written language (Hofmeyr 1987: 96–98, 105–108; Kapp 2013: 22–45; Kriel 2013: 236–39), resulting in an increased pride in the Afrikaans language by its speakers (Mesthrie 2008: 319–30; Zietsman 1992: 7–20; Steyn 1987: 69–75). The ancestors of the Patagonian Boer community thus brought to Argentina an established pride in their cultural heritage and a sense that “their language” (albeit vaguely defined) was intrinsically tied to their unique cultural and religious identities. A robust pride persists among the living community members as well as a sense of having received that pride from their forebears. As Mattys⁶ (b. 1939) notes, “El bóer es una raza ... muy orgulloso ... no sé si es culpa de la guerra ... pero tal vez muchos heredamos ese orgullo.” [The Boer is a ... very proud race. I don’t know if that is because of the war ... maybe many of us inherited that pride.] Ruben (b. 1947) agrees: “Uno un poquito siente orgullo de ser Boer porque ... uno siente que sus raíces algo de orgullo tiene.” [One feels a bit of pride in being Boer because ... one feels that there is pride in one’s roots.] Dawie (b. 1942) affirms: “Con orgullo digo que soy Boer.” [With pride I say I am Boer.]

This self-regard contributed to the resistance to learning Spanish among the first generation of settlers in Argentina, a resistance that was bolstered by a decided Boer

⁶ Pseudonyms are used here and throughout this paper (see Table 1).

prejudice against Spanish in particular. Numerous testimonies by interviewees support the notion that some families actively discouraged their children from using the language. In the words of Renthia (b. 1938), in her childhood home, “Usaba mucho el afrikaans, y los chicos se criaron, no podían hablar en castellano porque los padres se enojaban, decía: idioma de indios.” [Afrikaans was used a lot, and the children were raised [so] they could not speak in Spanish because their parents would get angry, they would say: (it’s a) language of Indians.] Aneke (b. 1953) mentioned that her family spoke Afrikaans even in the presence of non-speakers. Similarly, Hantie (b. 1947) tells how women from the Boer community were told not to interact with Argentine men in Spanish. “Mi papá tenía la costumbre, y creo que muchos, nosotros no podíamos tener contacto con los castellanos, a pesar que vivíamos acá.” [My father had the custom—and I think many did—that we were not to have contact with the Spanish speakers.] These testimonies are representative of a broader consensus suggesting the Boer immigrants of the first two generations looked down on Spanish because of negative racial stereotypes (du Toit 1995: 315).

This initial resistance to integration cannot be explained without also taking traditional Boer attitudes toward race and ethnicity into account. Du Toit explains that “The Boers came from South Africa with heavy cultural baggage—and none heavier than racial prejudice ... There was strong prejudice against those who were not of the elect, i. e., Afrikaans speaking, Protestant, or white” (1995: 229). Such attitudes motivated the first generation of settlers to avoid interactions, and especially marriage, with their largely Spanish-speaking, Catholic, Argentine countrymen. Some of these prejudices carried on to the second generation as well, but by the third generation—the subjects of our interviews—they were largely “the exception and dying out. They are not held by the younger generation ...” (1995: 230).

The legacy of such persistent negative views could still be seen in the stories narrated by some of our interviewees. Kerina (b. 1938) recounts a telling misunderstanding with her relatives in South Africa after she married a local Argentine man.

Tenían gente peones que trabajaba con ellos ... Y en vez de decirles “indios” les decían “Spaniard” ... Entonces una vez un primo que vivía en Sudáfrica le manda un CD a mi mamá y le dice, “muchos saludos a toda la familia y a aquella que se casó con el ‘Spaniard,’” como que yo era menos ... como si yo me hubiera casado con el peón ... algo que la familia no aceptaba.

[There were farmhands who worked with (the Boers) ... but instead of calling them “Indians” they called them “Spaniards” ... Once a cousin who lived in South Africa sent a CD [with a recorded message] to my mother, saying “Greetings to the whole family, and to the one who married the ‘Spaniard,’” as if I were lesser ... It was as if I had married a farmhand ... which the family did not accept.]

Another speaker, Bennie (b. 1950), learned Spanish after the age of five from laborers on the farm. He chafed at being associated with indigenous people by South Africans:

En un momento vienen unos periodistas de Sudáfrica y se van de vuelta, y escriben unas barbaridades que nosotros vivíamos como, como, los, los, los, los, los nativos de acá, que era una vergüenza pero unas barbaridades ... que hablo en Mapuche, esas cosas. No, la mentira.

[Once, some South African journalists came and after going back, they go writing ridiculous things, like that we lived like, like natives from here. It was shameful. Truly ridiculous things, like that I speak Mapuche, things like ... that. No, lies.]

This “heavy cultural baggage,” as du Toit calls it, had a determinative effect on the rate of language shift among the first generations and, as Kerina’s and Bennie’s stories both show, that baggage was still a presence for second- and even third-generation Afrikaans speakers.

Negative attitudes toward the Spanish language were, however, only partly the natural result of Boer prejudices and pride. Among the settler population, Spanish also had to compete for recognition and prestige with other local immigrant languages such as English. For example, Irma (b. 1950) tells how her mother-in-law was slow to learn any Spanish and communicated mostly in Afrikaans and English. “El español le costaba más porque ... en la casa hablaba toda la familia en afrikaans o en inglés ... Ya de muy grande lo empezó a hablar.” [Spanish was harder for her because ... the whole family spoke Afrikaans or English at home ... She did not start speaking (Spanish) until she was older.] Ruben notes that his mother, though born and educated in Argentina, knew English well. Even though she did learn Spanish, she and those of her family “tenían un acento ellos medio duro” [They had a fairly strong accent.]

Perhaps even more influential than English were the linguistic habits of the local indigenous population. Some 12 interviewees (Bennie, Hantie, Klara [b. 1954], Kayla [b. 1950], Hentie [b. 1937], Hendrick [b. 1952], Elize [b. 1934], Maretha [b. 1958], Corlia [b. 1936], Johan [b. 1941], Winnifred [b. 1942], and Neil [b. 1940]) confirmed that either they or others they knew learned some Spanish through interactions with farmhands (*peones*) in the region, primarily native Tehuelche or Mapuche people. For example, Johan, described his childhood friendship with an “aboriginal farmhand” (“un peón, un aborígen”). A number of participants mentioned that the Boers learned not only Spanish but also other important adaptive skills from local indigenous people, such as medicinal practices and means of protecting sheep. Because native speakers of indigenous languages had themselves only acquired Spanish as a second or third language, they exposed the early Boer settlers to their own mother tongues as well. A number of interviewees

describe acquiring some ability in indigenous languages from their indigenous co-workers. For example, Hendrick muses that “Habr  sido interesante ese tiempo, porque tantas lenguas se hablaban el afrikaans, el espa ol, el gal s, el tehuelche, el mapuche.” [That must have been an interesting time because so many languages were spoken: Afrikaans, Spanish, Welsh, Tehuelche, Mapuche.] Further testament to the extent of such interactions are two senior participants who still remembered some words in Mapuche.⁷ Moreover, some indigenous outsiders to the Boer community similarly made a concentrated effort to learn Afrikaans, despite the comparatively small number of speakers and large external linguistic pressures. Eight of the bilingual interviewees (Aneke, Dawie, Elize, Hentie, Johan, Neil, Ruben, and Gerhardus [b. 1933]) stated that some indigenous farmhands learned to speak Afrikaans, and Dawie even mentioned that such individuals became “like part of the family.”

Many from the second generation of Boers (i. e., that of the parents of our interviewees) seem to have learned to speak some Spanish, despite the apparent reticence of their own parents’ generation. As Johanna Kokot de  vila wrote of her education growing up in Colonia Escalante (also known as “Colonia Boer”):

People were not accustomed to the idea that their children would learn Spanish, a language that seemed difficult to them. This erroneous idea (*error de concepto*) made it so that their children learned rural Spanish slang (*lunfardo*) without knowing even how to read (cited in Caviglia 2011: 297).

Thus, despite being learned and used by various community members, Spanish did not quickly gain status among Boer immigrants as either a language of community or a language of prestige by which to earn respect in the wider Argentine community. For Patagonian Boers before 1940, learning Spanish was pragmatic, but not an end in itself. This accounts for the heterogeneity of language histories in the community: a few community members learned Spanish well, some learned merely the basics, and some learned none at all.

4 Socialization and linguistic shift

In spite of the availability of land in Patagonia, few groups outside of the Boers chose to settle there. The land is certainly forbidding from an agricultural perspective; Charles Darwin, passing by the region during his voyage on the

⁷ Gerhardus said he remembered some “tehuelcho,” however two of the words—*ki  * ‘one’ and *co* ‘water’—were in fact Mapuche. Elize counted to six in Mapuche with several errors. Three others produced words that were unidentifiable in either language.

Beagle, called it a land “without habitations, without water, without trees” (quoted in Nouzeilles 1999: 35). Nevertheless, the view of Patagonia as a wasteland was popularized by the early Argentine state in an effort to delegitimize non-European populations who did inhabit the region (Rodríguez 2016: 131). As Nouzeilles argues, “these images of Patagonia as the uttermost part of the earth and as a primordial, pre-historical space were both created by the imperial geographical imagination” (1999: 36). By defining the land as empty, the Argentine government could arrogate it without consequence and also offer it to non-indigenous immigrant groups for repopulation. The region of Patagonia where the Boers settled had recently been taken from the indigenous population during the genocidal military campaign known as *La conquista del desierto* [conquest of the desert] in the 1870s and 1880s. The greatly expanded Argentine state then sought to realize Argentina’s claim of being a “white nation” (Rodríguez, 2016: 127) by encouraging white Europeans and their descendants to settle in this newly claimed territory.

Settlement of the region increased as the petroleum industry developed near Comodoro Rivadavia. Petroleum was first discovered there in 1907, but it did not become a lucrative investment until after the First World War, when automobiles began to be marketed more widely and worldwide demand for petroleum grew. The increasing exploitation of the region’s rich petroleum deposits, a labor dominated by foreign investment, “radically changed the local and regional economy” and led to a steady growth in population (Caviglia 2011: 287). By 1917, a total of 1401 workers were camped at the state oil deposits outside of Comodoro Rivadavia, 95% of whom were immigrants and 65% of whom consisted of Portuguese, Russians, Austrians, and Greeks (Cabral Marques 2007: 67; Solberg 1986: 68–78). This new population was fundamentally multilingual; on a practical level, Spanish became a lingua franca for all who participated in the local economy.

Despite the influx of immigrants and the growth of industry, educational resources were slow to come to the region, and this lack of easily accessible schools in Chubut during the first decades of the 20th century had an important influence on the linguistic habits of the first generation of Boers. Early settlers were told there was a government school in Chubut, but did not find one upon arrival (du Toit 1995: 289). One was eventually founded—the Escuela Nacional N° 2, established in 1915 (Caviglia 2011: 294)—but it was not easily accessible to most Boers. A number of farm schools also appeared and disappeared during the same period, with the languages of both students and instructors being English, Spanish, and Welsh in addition to Afrikaans (du Toit 1995: 292). According to the

writings of a local pastor in the area, schooling was of an ad hoc nature in the region through the 1930s (296). An anecdote about one rural school (La Escuela Rural N° 25), founded by wealthy settlers Conrado and Ana Visser in the area of Colonia Escalante, illustrates this:

The children spoke Afrikaans, although they knew something of the Spanish language ... In order to begin the classes, the teacher gave classes in Spanish to Ana Jacoba Van Zyl–Visser's wife—she translated them to English for her husband don Conrado Visser, and he translated them to Afrikaans for the students. (Caviglia 2011: 301).

Eventually, as Spanish became more associated with industry, it became a common means of communication among all the immigrants to the area, and this inevitably endowed it with more social prestige. By the middle decades of the century, some parents were able to incorporate Spanish at home alongside Afrikaans, while others sought informal instruction by Argentine community members. Schools were still often far from the isolated family farms, and families either lacked resources to board their children elsewhere or needed the children on hand to assist with chores. Johan recalls having to walk six kilometers to reach the closest school, which was merely a small shed. Such challenges began to be mitigated by efforts made in the 1940 and 1950s under the leadership of President Juan Perón (in office 1946–55, 1973–74), who implemented educational programs aimed at the integration of rural, mostly poor populations—including Boer settlers as well as indigenous residents in Patagonia—into national culture (Rodríguez 2016: 133).

The increase in educational opportunities had a profound impact on the third generation's relationship with their Argentine neighbors. As their knowledge of Spanish increased, participants indicated that Spanish became the *de facto* social language. In fact, it can be argued that a desire to be on par with their Argentinian peers drove the third-generation Boers to become fully bilingual. Aneke explains: “Había aprendido en el campo a hablar [castellano], cuando llegaba gente de afuera, porque tenías que hablar en castilla. Si no, quedabas mal.” [I learned how to speak (Spanish) on the farm, when people from outside (the community) arrived. You had to speak in Spanish. If you didn't, you would look bad.] Kayla told us about her integration once she moved to a city:

Así transcurrió mi infancia desde el campo, desde haber hablado sudafricano, y después una vez que uno entró en la ciudad después ya empezamos a hablar todos castellano. Y mamá ya no hablaba tanto sudafricano con nosotros, porque nosotros necesitábamos afirmar el idioma castellano...

[My childhood was on the farm, where I had spoken South African, and afterwards once I entered the city we all started to speak in Spanish. My mother already didn't speak as much South African with us, because we needed to recognize the Spanish language...]⁸

The desirability of Spanish increased in the third generation in part because of its link to commercial success “in the city,” but also because it provided a means by which Boer children could fit into this new sociolinguistic world in which Spanish was now the majority language. Johan tells how his switch to Spanish resulted from entering military service:

Y siempre, pero siempre hablando en casa el afrikáans. Castellano ya hablaba pero no me gustaba mucho ... siempre tiraba ya par hablar el afrikáans. Y después me tocó el servicio militar que, a los veinte años, y ahí ya me integré más al español ... con mis amigos ... no tenía con quién hablar afrikáans, sino me corrían a las patadas los jefes ... así fue que aprendí el español ... pero siempre me interesaba más, me gustaba más hablar el afrikáans, como me crié.

[I always, always spoke Afrikaans at home. I already spoke Spanish but I did not like it. I always preferred to speak Afrikaans. Then I was called up for military service when I was 20 and I became more immersed in the Spanish language ... with my friends ... I did not have anyone to speak Afrikaans with, and instead I was always running at the heels of my superiors ... so it was that I learned Spanish ... but I was always more interested in, and always liked more, speaking in Afrikaans, as I was raised.]

This shift due to circumstance rather than simply desire or perceived advantage corresponds to what Li Wei noted in his critique of Fishman's and Greenfield's theory of linguistic “domains” (e. g. family, friendship, religion, education, employment, etc.) as factors in explaining code-switching in a bilingual community. In his words, “While situational factors such as setting and topic do influence speakers' language behavior to a certain extent, the key determinant for language choice is the interlocutor” (1994: 10). For Argentine Boers, the decisive moment of linguistic shift was not prompted only by a spread of domains—i. e. the use of Spanish in the context of work or school—but also depended on the key element of interpersonal contact with non-Afrikaans speakers in the majority culture.

Unlike earlier dealings with local indigenous workers, who did not represent a voice of authority in Spanish, dealings with Spanish-speaking Argentine peers in school produced an acute sense of linguistic self-consciousness among members of

⁸ The use of the name “South African” to denote Afrikaans is common within the community, which also uses terms such as *africano* (African) and, in some cases, simply *Boer* (Boer) to name the language. This seems to reflect the fact that Afrikaans was not officialized as the second official language in South Africa until 1925 (Steyn 2014). When settlers arrived to Patagonia (between 1902 and 1906), they did not have a consistent term to refer to the language that they spoke, and this fluidity has carried on in subsequent generations.

the third generation. Many of these speakers were immediately aware of their own lack of linguistic capacity. Maretha notes that she began schooling at a younger age than her brothers, who spoke no Spanish. “Mis hermanos mayores cuando empezaron a ir al colegio no sabían hablar castellano.” [My brothers did not know how to speak Spanish when they began school.] She explains that Argentine children did not understand her culture and as a result she was very shy. “Yo casi no hablaba. No hablaba con nadie. No, no. No hablaba con nadie. No le daba confianza a nadie, los miraba. Pues si la maestra me preguntaba algo le contestaba, pero nada más.” [I hardly spoke (in school). I did not speak with anyone ... I did not open up to anyone. I looked at them. If the teacher asked me a question, I answered, but nothing more.]

This shyness was often tied to a sense of shame or embarrassment over one's linguistic capacities. Hendrick recalls that he and his siblings first began to learn Spanish from the indigenous farmhands, who themselves were second-language learners.

En el campo se aprendía el español de los peones que hablaban mal ... empezamos a hablar más bien castellano con los peones y eso aprendíamos el castellano malo que hablaban los peones ... pero te das cuenta, tú cuando escuchas piensas ... es una forma más vulgar de hablar.

[On the farm, one learned Spanish from the farm-hands, who spoke badly ... we began to speak the Spanish of the farm-hands and so we spoke the bad Spanish that the farm-hands spoke ... you realize, when you hear it, that it is a low way of speaking.]

Many Boers thus found school initially unpleasant because they were teased by schoolmates. A number of subjects described the feeling of embarrassment on account of their linguistic abilities and some even recounted being bullied or taunted by other children. Aneke notes, “Sí, se burlan ... porque no sabe pronunciar bien la palabra, no sabe explicarse bien, entonces se ríen o se burlan ... cuesta un poco para explicar las cosas y entender bien, entonces te da un poco de vergüenza.” [They make fun ... because one does not know how to pronounce a word well, (or) cannot explain himself, so they laugh or make fun ... it is hard to explain things and understand well, so it gives you a little shame.]

The experience of viewing their own language or way of speaking in a stigmatized way was not limited to the Boers, but is also attested to by other minority populations of the region who learned Spanish as a second language, often in similar circumstances. Díaz-Fernández (2009) has noted a similar phenomenon in his description of the contemporaneous displacement of the Mapuche language in the Chubut region. Upon the establishment of Spanish schools, he notes, “the dominant society ascrib[ed] to the vernacular language judgments like ‘inferior,’ ‘incomplete,’ ‘useless,’ ‘illiterate,’ etc., to show the forceful need to adopt the official language.” As a result of its “low prestige,” “the vernacular language stop[ped] being useful to interact with and in the dominant society” (11–12). This

symbolic shift is evident in the testimonies of numerous third-generation Afrikaans speakers who recount an experience of social awkwardness and even shame over their inability to speak Spanish in school. However, it should be stressed that the continued pride among Patagonian Boers in the Afrikaans language during the second half of the 20th century also testifies to their privilege relative to speakers of indigenous Patagonian languages. As white Euro-descendants, the Boers were able to choose to become Argentine citizens on the basis of their shared whiteness; coming from colonial South Africa, they also brought an intimate familiarity with the racist premises of the Argentine state's discursive dehumanization and displacement of native people. Indeed, the need to identify with the side of colonial power shaped the community's shifting attitudes toward both Spanish and Afrikaans.

For many of our third-generation speakers, the feeling of shame that arose from being seen as outsiders by their Argentine peers was a motivation to learn Spanish or to speak less Afrikaans. The experience of shame or embarrassment was even documented among some of the oldest subjects, who might be considered late second rather than third generation. For example, Hentie notes:

Yo vine grande a Comodoro sin saber hablar bien castellano y los chicos se reían de mí. Entonces eso me inhibía un poco ... me acuerdo que se reían de mí por cómo hablaba ... Me sentía inferior, me sentía rara, porque todos hablaban bien y se reían de mi forma de hablar ... tal vez a los quince años, dieciséis, sentía como, me parecía que tenía como vergüenza. de, de los sudafricanos que vivían en el campo. Me parecía como que la gente los tenía a menos.

[I came at an older age to Comodoro without knowing how to speak Spanish well and children laughed at me. This made me inhibited a bit ... I felt inferior, I felt strange, since everyone spoke well and they laughed at my way of speaking ... when I was 15 or 16, I had something like shame for the South Africans who lived out in the country. They seemed lesser to me.]

Such experiences, while not universal, were also not uncommon among the Boer children. Ruben said that he spoke only Afrikaans until the age of eight. “Después cuando empezamos a ir a la escuela, empezamos a hablar castellano ... ya nos daba vergüenza. Ya no hablamos mucho el Boer, porque viste que los chicos te cargan ... Así que, por ahí te daba vergüenza hablar.” [When we began school, we began to speak Spanish ... we were ashamed. We did not speak much Afrikaans (there) because, you know, the kids teased you ... it made you ashamed to speak.] For some, the experience was even more intense, consisting not only of mild teasing, but, in rare cases, of the threat of physical violence as well. Charlize (b. 1959) recalls:

Esto solía pasar y que nos discriminaran, justamente por ser rubios y de ojos claros ... No se podía ir libremente por cualquier calle porque, porque te interceptaban ... a mí, por ejemplo, una vez me, volvía sólo, volvía de gimnasia ... y me corrieron hasta cerca de mi casa. Este, me pegaron con un palo en la nuca.

[They used to discriminate against us, just for being blond and blue-eyed ... You could not go freely on any street because they might catch you ... Once, for example, I was coming back along from the gym ... and they chased me up close to my house and hit me with a stick on the back of the neck.]

Even more than their blond hair and blue eyes, it was their language that marked them as outsiders. Charlize ends her story by adding that, “Dentro de la escuela también la pasábamos mal con esto de que no hablábamos bien, que no sabíamos leer.” [In school we also had a bad time, since we did not speak well and did not know how to read.]

To be sure, not all members found the attention to their linguistic and cultural differences to be unpleasant or embarrassing. Johan took teasing by peers in stride. “Gringo me decían muchas veces. Todavía me lo dicen. Pero eso en el colegio, no ... [lo dicen] con cariño. Lo tomo así.” [They called me *gringo* many times. They still call me that ... But, in school, no ... (they said it) with kindness. I take it that way.] Yet even for those who did not suffer because of their way of speaking, the social pressure to assimilate that increased under Perón’s nationalist government policies had a marked effect on the desire of the younger (third-generation) Boers to learn Spanish, and at the same time this contributed to the acceptance of the language on the part of second-generation parents. This process is exemplified by Hantie, who informed us that her older sister was, like Charlize, bullied for her lack of Spanish upon her entrance to formal schooling at the age of six. When it was Hantie’s turn to begin school, she avoided this scenario because she already spoke Spanish, the result of attending pre-school prior to her enrollment. Whether or not her mother’s decision to send her younger daughter to pre-school was a result of her older daughter’s experience is not certain, but it is clear that knowledge of Spanish was eventually prioritized in Hantie’s household. She said, “Cuando vinimos al pueblo, mamá priorizaba el idioma castellano. Sí, sí. Ella también lo hablaba re-mal ... Nosotros nos reíamos. Pero nosotros sí, enseguida aprendimos a hablar castellano. Mi hermana también. Y queríamos hablar castellano.” [When we came to the village, my mom prioritized the Spanish language. She spoke it very poorly as well ... We would laugh at ourselves. But right away we learned how to speak Spanish—my sister too. We wanted to speak Spanish.] This awareness of the need to learn Spanish and the difficulty of acquiring knowledge without beginning to speak at a young age marked a shift in the third generation of Boer immigrants. As a result of this awareness arising from their experiences at school, many members of the third generation became, and remain to this day, equally proficient in both Afrikaans and Spanish, as verified by native speakers of Afrikaans and Spanish, respectively, among our research team.

The conditions that led to this kind of bilingualism were not favorable to language maintenance. As the community spread out from their *campos* [farms] to the surrounding towns, it became increasingly difficult to find others with whom to converse in Afrikaans. Hantie remembers that

Mi mamá me hablaba en los dos idiomas ... Y yo, este, lo escuchaba todo eso y después me venía a la memoria las palabras. ... yo no tenía oportunidad de conversar con alguien. Creo que a muchos de los descendientes nos pasó eso.

[My mom spoke to me in two languages (Spanish and Afrikaans) ... I listened to everything and afterwards the words were memorized. ... I didn't have the opportunity to converse with anyone. I believe this happened to many of the other (Boer) descendants.]

Thus, aside from the fact that Afrikaans was less useful for success in everyday life, Spanish also gained a greater foothold in the third generation due to increasing interactions with Argentine neighbors. Such a transition is in itself not surprising, since as Fishman (1980) observed, bilingualism can usually only be maintained over generations in a context of strict separation of social functions and linguistic prestige. In his words, "Without compartmentalization of one kind or another—at times attained by ideological/philosophical and even by a degree of physical withdrawal from establishment society—the flow process from language spread to language shift is an inexorable one" (9). Absent such separation or some other clear incentive to maintain both languages, "bilingual functional redundancy cannot be maintained intergenerationally [...] The language with stronger rewards and sanctions associated with it wins out" (9). Since Spanish not only became a language of school life, but also entered the home—with some Boer parents even beginning to speak to their children, albeit haltingly, in Spanish—the loss of Afrikaans as a mother tongue in subsequent generations was a normal and expected consequence.

Without knowing the Boers' particular history and perspective, one would expect to find a more balanced bilingualism already in the second generation of immigrants and so be able to witness its waning in the third generation. What is notable about the situation of Argentine Boers is that their simultaneous use of Afrikaans and Spanish only emerged in the transition to the third generation and was slow in coming even there. Indeed, some participants of our study, born in Argentina as late as 1959—over half a century after the arrival of the first Boer immigrants—began childhood speaking entirely in Afrikaans and were notably delayed in shifting to the majority language. Yet as the testimonies in this section make clear, numerous factors help explain the Boers' trajectory. The economic expansion concomitant with the development of the petroleum industry eventually led to a growth of educational opportunities in Patagonia, bringing the Boer community into more direct contact with Argentine society. These contacts

presented new challenges to third-generation Boer children, who faced the prospect of attending school without sufficient Spanish proficiency. Eventually, the forces of social shaming, coupled with the increasing prestige associated with Spanish for the third generation, led to a decisive linguistic shift in the community.

5 Discussion

The oldest living generation of Boers, made up of members all now in their 60s–80s, is the last with functional linguistic ability in both Afrikaans and Spanish. The cultural and geographic isolation of the first two generations, when Afrikaans was held by the community to be a “superior” language, no longer exists, and Spanish has become the dominant language in all spheres of social activity. Speakers often lamented the loss of the language among the younger (fourth and fifth) generations. Imke (b. 1943), for example, notes that, “Lo único que no me gustó mucho [es que] mis hijos no quieren hablar en africano ... ni uno quiere aprender.” [The one thing I did not like is that my children do not want to speak Afrikaans ... not one wants to learn.] Sybella (b. 1948), of the same generation, notes that her family now always speaks Spanish.

Yo hablo en africano y me contestan en castellano. Los chicos igual dicen por ahí me entienden. No saben lo que es esto, lo que se llama ... les hablo pero, [dicen] “mamá qué me estás diciendo, qué me pedís” ... Quieren aprender pero no ... Hay dos, tres, que por ahí entienden un poco, pero hablar—no sé, debe ser vergüenza.

[I speak in Afrikaans and they answer me in Spanish. The boys say they understand me. They do not know what this or that is, what something is called ... I speak to them but (they say) “Mom, what are you saying? What are you asking for?” ... They want to learn, but don’t ... there are two or three around who understand a little but do not speak. I don’t know, but it must be that they are ashamed.]⁹

As most third-generation members married outside the community and as the younger generations lose their ability in Afrikaans, most bilingual speakers now have little opportunity to speak the language regularly. Corlia described how Afrikaans has slowly vanished from her own life:

Nosotros nos olvidamos [del afrikaans]. Porque yo después que falleció mis abuelos y después falleció mi mamá y después las hermanas, los hermanos que siempre hablamos, una se casó, ésta por allá, la otra por allá, por allá entonces, vos no tenías con quien hablar,

9 Similar remarks were made by Aneke, Kerina, and Ruben.

porque mi marido no hablaba sudafricano, no era sudafricano. Entonces no estaba, no se usaba en la casa. Y allí fue donde más me olvidé.

[We forgot [about Afrikaans]. For me, it was because my grandparents passed away and after them my mother. Then, my sisters and brothers with whom I always talk with, one married here and another there, and then there, you don't have anyone to talk with, because my husband is not South African and does not speak South African. Then it (Afrikaans) wasn't there, I didn't use it in the house. And that was how I mostly forgot it.]

For some of the youngest third-generation speakers, the movement away from Afrikaans resulted not only from the scarcity of opportunities for continuing to use the language with fellow speakers, but also from a feeling of detachment from the tradition it represented. Charlize states this clearly: “Como que en algún momento sentí que era como que estaba viviendo, continuando algo que no era mío. Continuando con una historia de los ancestros, y que no tenía que ver conmigo este.” [I felt at some point as if I was living or continuing something that was not my own. Continuing with a history ... of the ancestors, which did not have anything to do with me.]

In general, the oldest generation is pessimistic about the future of the language's survival, fearing that if the language is disappearing, this may be a sign that the culture is fading as well. As Corlia herself says, “Lo poquito que quedamos ya somos todas personas grandes.” [The very few (speakers) among us who remain are all old.] Ruben laments that “Acá todo castellano ... no hay gente casi que hable afrikaans.” [Around here everything is in Spanish There is hardly anyone who speaks Afrikaans.] Imke grieves the prospect of its disappearance: “Un poquito de años más ya si no quieren hablar qué lastima, se va a perder y y no tendría que ser, así tendría que seguir, no, cierto?” [In a few years, if they (the younger generations) do not want to speak—what a shame! It will be lost, and it does not have to be that way. It ought to continue on, don't you think?] The process of loss inspires in many of the third generation a nostalgia for the history and heritage of these Patagonian Boers.

Critically, this is a familiar trajectory for immigrant communities, which normally, as Fishman and others have repeatedly confirmed, face a shift of L1 to L2 in the generation of children and grandchildren. Pauwels (2016: 92) reiterates Fishman's theory in affirming that, “If the family or the community does not engage in active L[anguage] M[aintenance] efforts, then the general prediction expressed by Fishman (2013) and many other scholars applies: L[anguage] S[hift] will occur within three generations.” However, as we have seen, the Boer community's shift did not begin immediately upon arrival in Argentina, and their cultural and linguistic integration did not proceed at an even pace over the past century. The shift to L2, while eventually following a familiar pattern, was notably delayed by a

variety of factors. We have evaluated three hypotheses for this: the relative isolation of Patagonia; the Boer pride in their heritage; and the fact that Spanish was not at first a language of prestige in Patagonian society. Testimonies from community members allow us to affirm all three hypotheses: the remoteness of farms meant that many Boers did not speak much Spanish at first, or spoke only with indigenous farmhands; numerous members spoke of having a “pride” in their past as Boers; and before the growth of schools and the oil industry in the region, Spanish was not recognized as a language of prestige in Patagonian society. These factors, which can best be assessed on the basis of personal testimony about lived experience, help explain the unique history of linguistic shift among the Boer population and elucidate the reasons behind the long survival of Afrikaans in Patagonia.¹⁰

6 Conclusion

If we trace this history not from the moment of Boer immigration to Argentina in the first decade of the 20th century, but from the start of their economic and educational integration into Patagonian society a few decades later, we see that the real shift from Afrikaans to Spanish in the Boer community took place over the span of generations two (our participants’ parents), three (our participants), and four (our participants’ children). In other words, it is possible to conclude that a conventional three-generation model *does* apply if community history is divided into an initial period of isolation in the first half of the 20th century, followed by an active period of integration. As such, the Argentine Boer experience ultimately conforms to Fishman’s three-generation model, but was delayed by a little over one generation.¹¹ The Argentine Boers’ concept of linguistic and cultural identity, as expressed in oral interviews and histories, can be explained by the theory that immigration alone is not sufficient to prompt a decisive language shift. By examining the factors that led to this delay in language shift and the triggers that initiated it, this article shows how linguistic, historical, and social processes are inextricably bound together.

10 This conclusion might serve as the basis for a future study comparing the Boers with the Argentine Welsh population, which immigrated to Chubut a number of decades earlier and which, despite important demographic differences from the Boer community, has maintained a more durable bilingualism (Welsh-Spanish) even to this day (Virkel 2002).

11 An interesting parallel situation is the shift to English in modern South Africa, where the three-generation shift was only initiated in the 1950s.

Appendix

Table 1: Summary of interviewees’ demographic information.

Pseudonym	Date of birth	Monolingual (Spanish) or bilingual (Spanish/Afrikaans)	Year interviewed
Henrico	1932	Bilingual	2018
Thys	1933	Bilingual	2014
Gerhardus	1933	Bilingual	2014, 2018
Elize	1934	Bilingual	2014, 2018
Estha	1934	Bilingual	2014
Corlia	1936	Bilingual	2018
Eva	1936	Bilingual	2014
Hentie	1937	Bilingual	2014, 2018
Rentha	1938	Bilingual	2018
Kerina	1938	Bilingual	2014, 2018
Mattys	1939	Bilingual	2014, 2018
Neil	1940	Bilingual	2018
Jaco	c. 1938–1940	Bilingual	2018
Johan		Bilingual	2014, 2018
Dawie	1942	Bilingual	2018
Winnifred	1942	Bilingual	2014, 2018
Lencho	1942	Bilingual	2014
Imke	1943	Bilingual	2014, 2018
Willie	1947	Bilingual	2014
Ruben	1947	Bilingual	2014
Hantie	1947	Bilingual	2014, 2018
Sybella	1948	Bilingual	2018
Kayla	1950	Bilingual	2014, 2018
Irma	1950	Monolingual (married into community)	2014, 2018
Bennie	1950	Bilingual	2018
Hendrick	1952	Bilingual	2018
Aneke	1953	Bilingual	2014, 2018
Klara	1954	Bilingual	2018
Elani	1957	Monolingual (daughter of Corlia)	2014, 2018
Maretha	1958	Bilingual	2014, 2018
Charlize	1959	Bilingual	2014, 2018
Elsebe	1967	Monolingual (married into community)	2014

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