Contact and Conflict

I. Ethnic Contact , Conflict and Sociology

Most contact between ethnic groups doe not occur in peaceful, harmoniously coexisting communities. Instead it exhibits varying degrees of tension, resentment, and differences in opinon that are characteristic of every competitive social structure.

Under certain conditions, such generally accepted competitive tensions can degenerate into intense conflicts , in the worst case ending in violence.

Differences between groups create feelings of uncertainty of status, which would give rise to conflicts. Sociologists interested in contact problems between ethnic groups define conflicts as contentions involving real or apparent fears, interests, and values, in which the goals of the opposing group must be opposed , or at least neutralized to protect one's interests (prestige, employment, political power….)

This type of contention always appears as a conflict of values, in which differing behavioural norms collide, because usually only one norm is considered to be valid.

Conflicts between ethnic groups , however, occur only very rarely as openly waged violent conflicts and usually consist of a complex system of threats and sanctions in which the interests and values of one group are endangered. Conflicts can arise relatively easily if interests and values are an emotional basis.

The magnitude and the development   of a conflict depend on   a number of factors determined by the level of friction between two or more ethnic groups:

- The presence of equalizing or mitigating elements,
- The degree of uncertainty of all the participants,

.

Hence one sided explanation of the conflict or one based on irrational prejudices , will fail. Very different factors that influence each other can reinforce and escalate to cause group conflict. On the other hand tension between ethnic groups brought about by feelings of intimidation can give rise to new conflicts at any time – conflicts that can be caused by a minority as well as by a majority group.

As long as society continues to create new fears, because of its competitive orientation, the creation of new fears appears unavoidable

It is recognized that the majority of the world's population is multilingual , so that multilingualism is to be regarded as the norm rather than the exception.

Discuss in less than 10 lines)

II. Political Language Contact and Conflict

Along with sociologists , political scientists also assume that language contact can cause political conflict. Language conflicts can be brought about by **changes in an expanding social system when there is contact between different language groups.**

consider the following case:

The dominant language group in French Belgium and English Canada controls the crucial authority ,and the economy and gives employment preferences to those applicants who have command of the dominant language.

The disadvantaged language group is then left with the choice of recouncing its social ambitions, assimilating , or resisting.

Although numerically **weak or psychologically weakened** language groups tend towards **assimilation.**

In modern societies numerically stronger, more homogeneous language groups possessing traditional values , such as their own history and culture , prefer political resistance., the usual form of organized language conflict in this century.

This type of conflict becomes salient when it occurs between groups of differing socio-economic **structures** (**Urban/ rural, poor/wealthy , indigenous/ immigrant**) and when the dominant group requires its own language as a condition for the integration of the rest of the population.

Most current language conflicts are the result of differing social status and preferential treatment of the dominant language on the part of the government. **In   these cases , there are religious, social, economic, or psychological fears   and frustrations of the weaker group that may be responsible for   the language conflict**.

However, a critical factor in the expansion and intensification of such conflict remains the impediment to social mobility , particularly of a distadvantaged or supressed ethnic group .

Language problems in different areas **(politics, economics,administration, education** appear under the heading of **language conflict.**

In such cases politicians, and economic leaders seize upon the notion of language conflict , **disregarding the actual underlying causes, and thus continue to inflame from « above » the conflict arisen from below .**

This language - oriented **« surface structure»** is used to secure the deeply rooted supressed **« deep structure ».** Furthermore, multilingual conflicts in Europe , especially in urban societies , show quite clearly that language conflicts are caused primarily by attempts on the part of the dominant group.

III.Language Conflict and Contact Linguistics

Language conflict can occur anywhere there is language contact , chiefly in multilingual communities . Matheier (1984) has also demonstrated that language conflicts in so called monololingual societies .

Language conflict arises from the confrontation of **differing standards, values, and attitude structures, and strongly influences self-image , upbringing, education, and group consciousness.**

Thus conflicts can be viewed as a form of contact .

Contact linguistics have either described conflict research as an integral part of **language contact research** or have dealt with **special topics from the perpective of conflict**.

The methods used are heterogeneous and come from numerous neignbouring disciplines **(psycholinguistics, communication, research…)**

For the lack of its own method , research employs predominantly emperical procedures.

Along with interview and polling techniques, previliged informants and representative sampling , prejudice research and streotypes and attitude observation,.