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Introduction

How would you feel if you were the **last speaker** of your language? Chief Marie Smith Jones, the last speaker of the Alaskan Eyak language, gave her answer (Nettle & Romaine, 2000: 14): 'I don't know why it's me, why I'm the one. I tell you, it hurts. It really hurts.' Richard Littlebear (1999), a Native American Cheyenne member, tells of his meeting with Chief Marie Smith Jones. 'I felt that I was sitting in the presence of a whole universe of knowledge that could be gone in one last breath. That's how fragile that linguistic universe seemed.' She died, age 89, on January 21st 2008 at her home in Anchorage. Her name in Eyak was *Udach' Kuqax*a'a'ch'* meaning 'a sound that calls people from afar'.

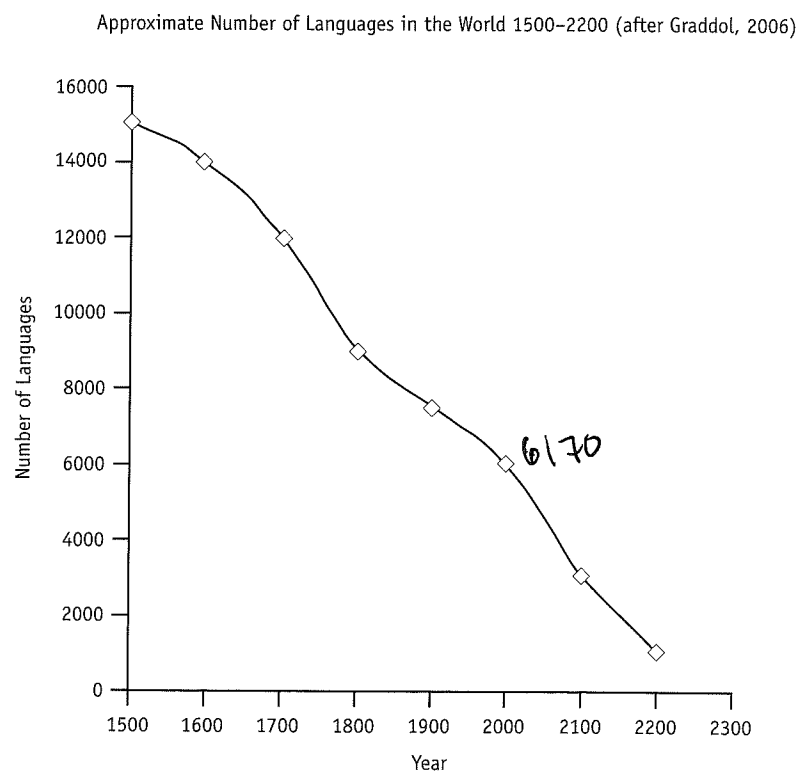
To be told that a loved one is dying or dead is one of the most unpleasant experiences in life. To talk about a dead language or a dying language sounds academic and without much sentiment. Yet languages have no existence without people. A language dies with the last speaker of that language. For humanity, that is a great loss. It is like an encyclopedia formed from that language and culture being buried. Three further examples will illustrate.

- In Cameroon in 1994/95, a researcher, Bruce Connell, visited the last speaker of a language called **Kasabe** (or Luo). In 1996, he returned to research that moribund language. He was too late. The last speaker of Kasabe had died on 5th November 1995 taking the language and culture with him. Connell reported that the last speaker was survived by a sister who could understand but not speak Kasabe, and whose children and grandchildren did not understand the language (Crystal, 2000). Simply stated, on 4th November 1995 Kasabe existed. On 5th November it was dead.
- On the 8th October 1992 a north-western Caucasian language called **Ubykh** died. A linguist, Ole Andersen, arrived in the Turkish village of Haci to interview the last speaker, Tefvik Esenc, only

to learn that he had died just a couple of hours earlier (Crystal, 2000; Nettle & Romaine, 2000). His three sons were unable to talk to their father in Ubykh as they had become Turkish speakers. Tefvik Esenc had composed his own gravestone eight years earlier: 'This is the grave of Tefvik Esenc - the last person able to speak the language they called Ubykh.'

- The last native speaker of **Cupeño** died in California in 1987, of **Catawba Sioux** in 1980, and of **Wappo** in 1990 (Nettle & Romaine, 2000).

The following graph illustrates the history of languages, and leads to a consideration of the future of the number of languages in the world.



Endangered Languages

There is no exact agreement as to the **number of living languages** in the world. Nor is there agreement about the exact number of languages that will die. There is, however, growing agreement that many or most are dying languages (Nettle & Romaine, 2000). Mackey (1991) suggests 6170

living languages. Moseley and Asher's (1994) *Atlas of the World's Languages* specifies close to 5900 discrete languages, while Bright (ed.) (1992) lists 6300 living languages. The UNESCO *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger of Disappearing* (2005) (<http://www.unesco.org/webworld/babel/atlas>) suggests there are 6000 to 6700 surviving languages; Wurm and Baumann (2005) estimate 5000 to 6000 languages in existence while the Ethnologue (<http://www.ethnologue.com/>) estimate is 6909 languages. The variation in estimate is due, for example, to the difficulty in defining a language as an invented construction (Makoni & Pennycook, 2007; Shohamy, 2006), in deciding how language is different from a dialect, and problems of gathering reliable, valid and comprehensive information about languages in large expanses such as Africa, South America and parts of Asia (e.g. see Batibo (2005) on the estimate of 2000 languages in Africa).

There are thus **approximately 6000 languages** in the world today. An overview of Krauss (1992), Gordon (2005), Wurm (2001) and Martí *et al.* (2005) suggests the following approximate distribution of those languages:

THE DISTRIBUTION OF LANGUAGES IN THE WORLD

	Approximate % of the world's languages
Europe	3%
Canada	2%
USA	2%
Central & South America	11%
Africa	32%
Asia	32%
Pacific countries	18%

LANGUAGES OF THE WORLD: ESTIMATED NUMBER OF FIRST AND SECOND LANGUAGE SPEAKERS

Chinese Mandarin	1200 million
English	750 million
Hindi	490 million
Spanish	310 million
Russian	230 million
Bengali	210 million
Arabic	200 million
Portuguese	190 million
German	128 million
Japanese	126 million

Will all those 6000 languages survive? According to Krauss (1992, 1998) of the Alaska Native Research Center, between 20% to 50% of the world's existing languages are likely to die or become perilously close to death in the next 100 years. Wurm (2001) estimates that 50% of the world's languages are endangered. The US Summer Institute of Linguistics (see M.P. Lewis (2009) and <http://www.ethnologue.com/>) has calculated that 516 languages could be classified as nearly extinct, that is with only a few elderly speakers still living. The distribution of those 516 languages is: Africa (46), North and South America (170), Asia (78), Europe (12) and The Pacific (210).

Some scholars fear it could be worse. In the long term: 'It is a very realistic possibility that 90% of mankind's languages will become extinct or doomed to extinction' (Krauss, 1995: 4). This estimated 90% death: 10% safe ratio is based on the following argument:

- 50% of the world's languages are no longer being reproduced among children. Thus many of these 50% of languages could die in the next 100 years unless there are conservation measures.
- An additional 40% are threatened or endangered. Economic, social and political change is one such threat. For example, such a threat is found in countries where there are a large number of languages and where factors such as centralization and economic and social development will take priority over language survival. Nine countries have more than 200 languages: Australia, Brazil, Cameroon, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea and Zaire. These nine countries account for about 3300 of the world's 6000 languages. Another dozen countries have more than 100 languages each (e.g. Burma, Chad, Ethiopia). Many of these countries have relatively small numbers of speakers of the different languages. Assimilation, urbanization, centralization and economic pressures will make future generations prefer majority languages.

As few as 600 languages (10%) may survive, although Krauss (1995: 4) believes this is too optimistic and suggests that 'it does not seem unrealistic to guess on these bases that 300 languages may be deemed safe'. The International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species (<http://www.iucnredlist.org/>) lists 21% of mammals, 12% of birds and 4% of fish as 'threatened' species. There are consequently enthusiastic conservation measures. If approximately 90% of the world's languages are vulnerable, **language planning** measures to maintain linguistic and cultural diversity are urgently required (Grenoble & Whaley, 2006) as is an **ecology of languages** (Mühlhäusler, 2002; Hornberger, 2002b, 2006).

Crystal (2000) suggests that there are five basic arguments why retaining **language diversity** is essential and why language planning is needed:

- 1 It is widely agreed that retaining ecological **diversity is essential**. The concept of an ecosystem is that all living organisms, plants, animals, bacteria and humans survive and prosper through a network of complex and delicate relationships. Damaging one of the elements in the ecosystem will result in unforeseen consequences for the whole of the system. Nettle and Romaine (2000) argue that cultural diversity and biological diversity are inseparable. For example, where forests are decimated, so are the homelands of people speaking a minority language. Where biodiversity and rich ecosystems exist, so do linguistic and cultural diversity (see Terralingua <http://www.terralingua.org/>).

Evolution has been aided by genetic diversity, with species genetically **adapting** in order to survive in different environments. Diversity contains the potential for adaptation. Uniformity

holds dangers for the long-term survival of the species. Uniformity can endanger a species by providing inflexibility and inadaptability. The range of cross-fertilization becomes less as languages and cultures die and the testimony of human intellectual achievement is lessened. In the language of ecology, the strongest ecosystems are those that are the most diverse. That is, diversity is directly related to stability; variety is important for long-term survival. Our success on this planet has been due to an ability to adapt to different kinds of environment (atmospheric as well as cultural) over thousands of years. Such an ability is born out of diversity (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000).

- 2 **Languages express identity.** Identity concerns the shared characteristics of members of a group, community or region. Identity helps provide the security and status of a shared existence. Sometimes identity is via dress, religious beliefs, rituals, but language is almost always present in identity formation and identity display. Language is an index, symbol and marker of identity (see Chapter 18).
- 3 **Languages are repositories of history.** Languages provide a link to the past, a means to reach an archive of knowledge, ideas and beliefs from our heritage. 'Every language is a living museum, a monument to every culture it has been vehicle to' (Nettle & Romaine, 2000: 14). The range, richness and wealth of cultures, homelands and histories are lost when a language dies. This limits the choice of 'pasts' to preserve, and the value of life past and present. It is analogous to humanity losing one of its whole libraries built over years. The Sicilian poet, Ignazio Buttitta (1972), expressed it thus:

Shackle a people, strip them bare, cover their mouths: they are still free. Deprive them of work, their passports, food and sleep: they are still rich. A people are poor and enslaved when they are robbed of the language inherited from their parents: it is lost forever.

Batibo (2005), in discussing the potential demise of many of Africa's 2000 languages, provides the example of medicine. If African languages die, so will centuries of knowledge of the powers of natural medicines: 'some of the traditional medicines used by some of these communities have proved to be effective in treating complex diseases such as cancer, asthma, leprosy and tuberculosis, as well as chronic cases of STD, bilharzia and anaemia' (p. 41). Harrison (2007) provides a wealth of examples of how ideas and knowledge die with the demise of a language: about seasons and the sea, myths and music, origins of the world and of infinity, landscapes and legends, cycles of nature calendars and of time.

The Latin language died, but some of its culture and the Roman influence continued although in a diminished form (J.N. Adams, 2003; J. Edwards, 2002). The stored knowledge and understandings in oral languages (without literacies) may die with the death of that language. Written text may store accumulated meanings after language death, although translations will often lose a degree of stored insight and nuance.

- 4 **Languages contribute to the sum of present human knowledge.** Inside each language is a vision of the past, present and future. When a language dies, its vision of the world dies with it. If the world is a mosaic of visions, one part of that mosaic is lost. Language not only transmits visions of the past but also expressions of social relationships, individual friendships as well as community knowledge, a wealth of organizing experiences, rules about social relationships plus

ideas about art, craft, science, poetry, song, life, death and language itself. A language contains a way of thinking and being, acting and doing. Different languages contain different understandings of people as individuals and communities, different values and ways of expressing the purpose of life, different visions of past humanity, present priorities and our future existence.

Language lies at the heart of education, culture and identity. When a language dies, so does a considerable amount of the culture, identity and knowledge that has been passed down from generation to generation through and within that language. Knowledge about local land management, lake and sea technology, plant cultivation and animal husbandry may die with language death. Each language contains a view of the universe, a particular understanding of the world. If there are approximately 6000 living languages, then there are at least 6000 overlapping ways to describe the world. That variety provides a rich mosaic.

Crystal (2000) suggests that there are a number of solutions to avoid language death. While the solutions will be different for languages at different stages of survival and revitalization, he suggests that an endangered language will progress if its speakers:

- increase their prestige within the dominant community;
- increase their wealth relative to the dominant community;
- have access to a stable economic base;
- increase their legitimate power in the eyes of the dominant community;
- increase the number of domains in which their language is used;
- have a critical mass in communities and regions;
- have a strong presence in the educational system;
- have a literacy in that language;
- make use of electronic technology;
- have a strong sense of ethnic identity;
- have internal and external recognition as a group with unique unity;
- resist the influence of the dominant culture or are protected and formally recognized by that dominant culture.

- 5 **Languages are interesting in themselves.** Crystal (2000) argues that language itself is important, each language having different sounds, grammar and vocabulary that reveal something different about linguistic organization and structure. The more languages there are to study, the more our understanding about the beauty of language grows.

Language Policies

The solution to avoiding language death involves **language policy-making**, with interventions to arrest the decline of a language. This is also termed minority language **revitalization** (see King (2001) for a discussion of terminology). Some majority languages, particularly English, have expanded

considerably during the last century. Many minority languages are in danger of extinction and therefore need extra care and protection. A free language economy will mean the extinction of many languages. Intervention by **language planning** is essential to avoid such trends.

In contrast, a language policy-maker who is concerned only for majority languages will regard protecting rare languages as expensive and unnecessary, and will wish to standardize the variety of language in the country. In the US, for example, many politicians prefer monolingualism to bilingualism. The preference is for the assimilation of minority language communities into a more standardized, monochrome language world.

It is important to note **variations in attitude** to the language environment. C.H. Williams (1991a) sums up differing 'environmental' attitudes to the survival and spread of minority languages. First, the **evolutionist** will follow Darwin's idea of the survival of the fittest. Those languages that are strong will survive. The weaker languages will either have to adapt themselves to their environment, or die. The biological evolutionary metaphor assumes that language loss is about survival of the fittest: if a language fails to adapt to the modern world, it deserves to die. Natural selection (Social Darwinism) suggests the inevitability of weaker forms dying. A different way of expressing this is in terms of a free, *laissez-faire* language economy. Languages must survive on their own merits without the support of language planning.

There are criticisms of this evolutionary or laissez-faire viewpoint.

- 1 Survival of the fittest is too simplistic a view of evolution. It only accents the negative side of evolution: killing, exploitation and suppression.
- 2 There are human-made reasons why languages die due to political and economic policies. **Language shift** (in terms of numbers of speakers and uses) occurs through decisions that directly or indirectly affect languages and reflect economic, political, cultural, social and technological change. It is therefore possible to analyze and determine what causes language shift rather than simply believing language shift occurs by accident. Social and political factors, and not just 'evolution', are at work in language loss. Power, prejudice, discrimination, marginalization and subordination are some of the causes of language decline and death. The history of Native American languages in the United States is an example of language genocide and eradication rather than suicide or natural change (see Chapters 9 and 11). Language loss is thus not 'evolutionary' but determined by politicians, policy-makers and peoples (May, 2001).
- 3 Evolutionists who argue for an economic, cost-benefit approach to languages, with the domination of a few majority languages for international communication, hold a narrow view of the function of languages. Languages are not purely for economic communication. They are also concerned with human culture, human heritage, identity and social relationships, and the value of a garden full of different languages rather than the one variety.
- 4 Those who support an evolutionary perspective on languages will typically support the spread of majority languages and the replacement of minority languages. Those who advocate monolingualism often feel that their particular culture and perspectives are the only legitimate or modern varieties – others are inferior and less worth preserving. A more positive view of evolution is

interdependence rather than constant competition. Co-operation for mutually beneficial outcomes can be just as possible as exploitation (C.H. Williams, 1991a, 1999).

The second environmental approach to languages is that of **conservationists** (C.H. Williams, 1991a). Conservationists will argue for the maintenance (and increasingly the enrichment) of variety in the language garden. For conservationists, language planning must care for and cherish minority languages, revitalizing and invigorating. Just as certain animal species are now deliberately preserved within particular territorial areas, so conservationists will argue that threatened languages should receive special status in heartland regions (or on reservations). Native Indian languages in North America and the Celtic languages in Britain and France have invoked the conservationist argument. In Ireland, certain areas (Gaeltacht) are officially designated for Irish language conservation.

The third attitude to languages is that of **preservationists** (C.H. Williams, 1991a). Preservationists differ from conservationists by being more conservative and seeking to maintain the status quo rather than to develop the language. Preservationists are concerned that any change, not just language change, will damage the chances of their language surviving. Such a group is therefore traditionalist and anti-modern in outlook. Whereas conservationists may think globally and act locally, preservationists will tend to think locally and act locally.

One example of language preservation may be when language is closely tied in with religion. The historical survival of Pennsylvania German within the **Amish** community in the US has been a classic illustration of a preservationist approach to language. The Pennsylvania Germans, sometimes called the Pennsylvania Dutch, came to the US from Germany in the early 18th century. They originally settled in farming communities in south-eastern and central Pennsylvania. The language is a German dialect related to that spoken in the German Palatinate along the Rhine river. Distinctive in dress, these Protestant Old Order Amish and Old Order Mennonite sectarians speak Pennsylvania German (a German dialect) at home and in the community. English is learnt at school since it is the language of instruction. English is also increasingly spoken with outsiders. Archaic forms of German are used in Protestant religious worship. The language of the community has thus been preserved within the established boundaries of that community. However, particularly among the non-sectarian Pennsylvania Germans, the language is dying. As English replaces the High German used in religious worship, the *raison d'être* for the use of Pennsylvania German in the home and community disappears. Religion has preserved the language. As religious practices change, preservation changes to transformation.

The Ecology of Language

Hornberger (2006: 280) succinctly expresses the three themes of an ecology of language perspective: 'The first theme is that languages, like living species, evolve, grow, change, live, and die in relation to other languages - a language evolution theme. Second, languages interact with the environment (socio-political, economic, cultural, educational, historical, demographic, etc.) - the language environment theme. A third theme is the notion that some languages, like some species and environments, may be endangered and that the ecology movement is about not only studying and describing those potential losses, but also counteracting them; this I call the language endangerment theme.'

Language Planning

If the world's languages are to be retained, then immediate policy interventions and impactful strategies are needed via language planning. **Language planning**, sometimes called language management or language engineering, refers to 'deliberate efforts to influence the behavior of others with respect to the acquisition, structure, or functional allocation of their language codes' (Cooper, 1989: 45). Traditionally, such language planning involves three inter-dependent and integrated lines of attack (Cooper, 1989; Kloss & Verdoodt, 1969): **status planning** (e.g. raising the status of a language within society across as many institutions as possible), **corpus planning** (e.g. modernizing terminology, standardization of grammar and spelling) and **acquisition planning** (creating language spread by increasing the number of speakers and uses by, for example, interventions with parents, language learning in school, adult language classes, literacy). In Wales, it has been found useful to also consider a fourth category: **usage or opportunity language planning** (Baker, 2008a). This refers to top-down and bottom-up language planning interventions that directly seek to increase the integrative use of the Welsh language and its attendant culture in areas such as leisure, sport, and technology, to foster social networking through Welsh, and to increase the instrumental use of the Welsh language in the economy, for example in the workplace, employment and education. McCarty (2008a) shows that efforts to revitalize Native American Indigenous languages in the United States can successfully include grass-roots language planning, through community involvement, parent-community links, asserting the link between language and ancestral land, 'master speakers' mentoring apprentice language learners, and heritage language schooling.

However, such planning is inter-connected. Grenoble and Whaley (2006) indicate that what happens inside the family is affected by government policies, and vice versa. The spreading of a language into more high status domains is both a cause and an effect of increased intergenerational transmission of a language (e.g. the use of a minority language for employment).

- 1 The bedrock of language planning is **acquisition planning**. The **intergenerational transmission** of a language (parents passing their language(s) onto their children) and language learning in bilingual education is an essential but insufficient foundation for language survival and maintenance (Baker, 2003a).

Acquisition planning has recently changed its emphasis from acquisition of a language in school. It is now particularly concerned with language reproduction in the family as well as language production at school. In all minority languages, there are families who use the majority language with their children. If this occurs across successive generations, the language will rapidly decline (Gathercole, 2007; B.E. Lambert, 2008; Morris & Jones, 2007, 2008; Shin, 2005). All minority languages need a **supply line**, and if families fail to reproduce such languages in children, bilingual education has to attempt to make up the shortfall (Baker, 2006a).

Parents may believe that there are economic, employment or educational advantages of speaking a majority language (e.g. English) to their children and not the minority language. Or that the majority language has such high prestige in the neighborhood that parents feel the minority language has associations of poverty or powerlessness. Such attitudes can have an immediate effect on the fate of a language. A lack of **family language reproduction** is a principal and direct