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Beliefs and Ideologies in Policy Formation for Endangered Languages

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Thanks and absolution to: Julia Sallabank

Preamble

- Today's talk contains reflections based on literature research, and primary work with communities to document and revitalize languages in:
 - Aboriginal Australia (NSW, WA, SA) – all moribund
 - Eastern Indonesia (Lombok, Sumbawa) – vibrant but in diglossic relationship with national language, showing shift in urban areas
 - Some theoretical and practical suggestions about developing local policies for maintenance and revitalization of languages and cultures, mostly at individual, family and group levels
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Structure of presentation

- Global linguistic diversity
 - Threats to diversity
 - Language shift – processes and causes
 - Ideologies, beliefs, and attitudes
 - How to access and assess them
 - Implications for policy formation
 - Individual language policy
 - Family language policy
 - Group/institution language policy
 - Conclusions
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Global language diversity

- No easy way to distinguish ‘dialect’ and ‘language’
 - In some regions of the world we have very unreliable data – this is particularly true in South Asia, including Pakistan and India (see SEL talks by Prof Abbi and Prof Mishra, available on YouTube)
 - International survey by *Ethnologue* shows ...
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Explore The Languages Of The World

Ethnologue contains information on 7,097 known living languages.

Begin by clicking [World Languages](#) in the page header or using one of the Browse By indexes in the page footer.

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Global distributions are skewed

- The actual size of populations who speak these 7,000 different languages is often hard to calculate but it varies widely, from over 1 billion to just a single individual
 - What are the top 10 largest languages in the world today?
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Major world languages

Numbers of speakers in millions (2010)

	Mother tongue	Wider communication	
1	Mandarin	875	1,000+ mostly China
2	Hindi/Urdu	366	490 mostly India and Pakistan
3	English	340	600+ *global
4	Spanish	325	420 *multinational
5	Arabic	280	350 *multinational
6	Bengali	205	211 India and Bangladesh
7	Portuguese	176	200 *multinational
8	Russian	167	280 mostly former Soviets
9	Japanese	125	126 mostly Japan
10	German	121	130 *multinational

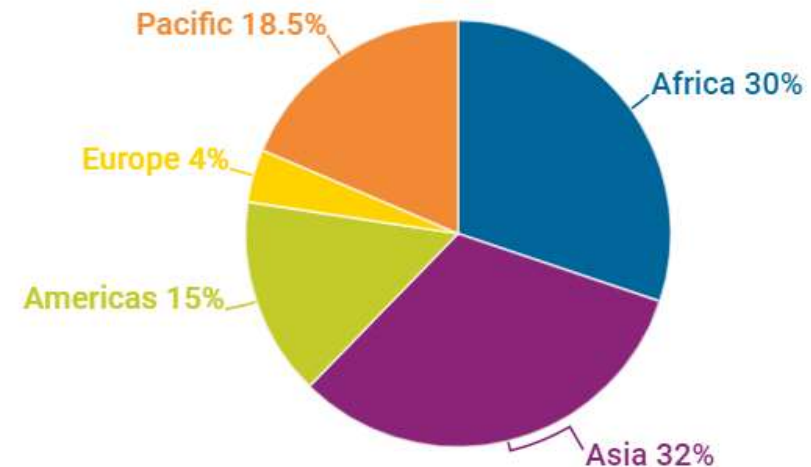
Distribution of languages (Ethnologue)

What continents have the most indigenous languages?

Asia has the most indigenous languages, closely followed by Africa. 

Combined, they account for nearly 2/3 of the world's languages. Myriad factors – terrain, cultural history, the spread of ancient civilizations – play into how many languages have originated within a certain area.

Percentage of the world's languages, by region



Speaker community profiles

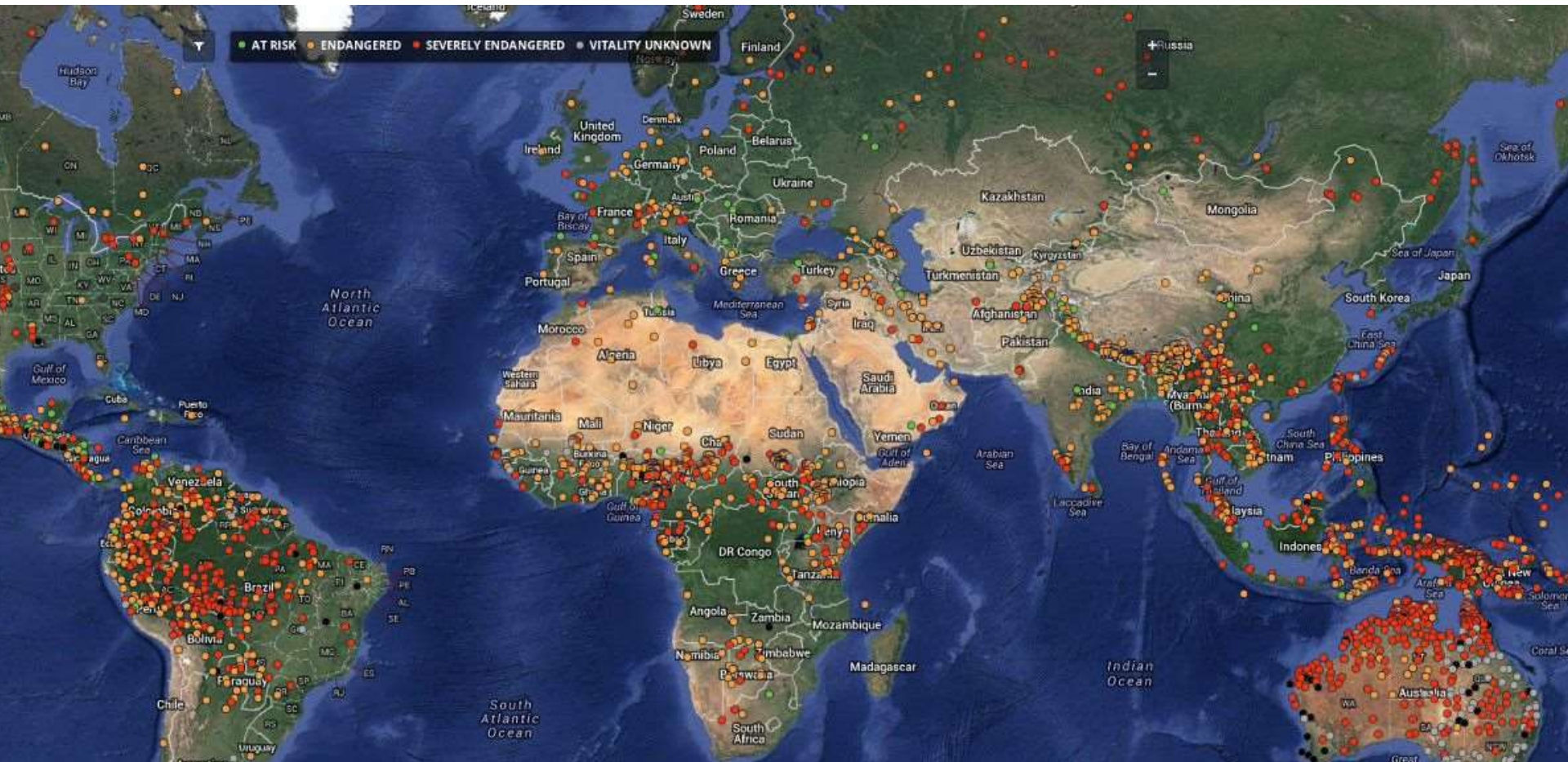
1. intergenerational language transmission
2. percentage of speakers within total population (**not** absolute numbers)
3. domains and functions of languages in use
4. language attitudes and ideology of wider community, including recognition and status
5. speakers' ideologies and attitudes toward their own language (pride, shame etc.)

See also Unesco factors, EGIDS

Typology of language situations

- **Viable (safe, strong)** - spoken by all age groups, learnt by children, actively supported (can be large or small populations)
 - **Endangered** - socially and economically disadvantaged, under heavy pressure from larger language, spoken by reducing population and could disappear without community support
 - **Moribund** - languages no longer learnt by children with few older speakers, little social function
 - **Extinct** - no native speakers
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Alliance for Linguistic Diversity



Problems with the typology

- Granularity is too crude – at level of “languages”, not communities or sub-groups or families
- Ignores local linguistic ecologies, e.g. multilingualism, dynamics of change in progress
- Assumes homogeneity of processes and outcomes
- Commodifies languages as ‘objects’ not intricate socio-cultural phenomena (see Dobrin, Austin & Nathan 2009)
- Need to understand local ecologies and processes and causes of change, especially language shift

Language shift

- Some languages have become extinct as a result of wars, genocide, disease or loss of population, e.g. Great Andaman
 - Many languages have seen a radical reduction in speaker numbers in past 40 years across many regions of the world, often within one or two generations, as speakers shift to dominant languages with more economic, social, political power
 - increasing age profiles of remaining speakers — lack of transmission to children
 - Krauss 1992 “the coming century will see either the death or the doom of 90% of mankind’s languages”
 - less extreme estimate is 50% (**only** 3,500 languages!)
 - *Endangered Languages Project* (Hawaii) estimates one language is lost every 2.5 months
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Language shift

- World-wide pattern of language loss - languages move **safe --> endangered --> moribund --> extinct**
 - Historical evidence, eg. Italian peninsula: Oscan, Umbrian, Piceni, Etruscan, Gaulish all replaced by Latin around 2000 years ago
 - In last 200 years and especially last 65 years process has speeded up through colonialism, rise of hegemonic nation states (with monolingual ideologies), migration, urbanisation, and globalisation
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Causes of language shift

Highly variable across communities and contexts

- *Demographic* – population reductions, intermarriage, changes in family structure, relocation
 - *Socio-economic* – change in life-style, increased external communication, employment, migration for work, education or access to services
 - *Political* – pressure to adopt local/national languages and conform to cultural expectation via, e.g. education, discrimination, access to services
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Causes of language shift 2

- *Attitudes* – internal (within minority) and external (within local majority, and/or regional and national) Bradley & Bradley (2002, 2019) identify as main driving force
 - Internal
 - Positive to minority language can lead to maintenance
 - Negative to minority language can lead to shift
 - External
 - Negative to minority language can emphasise shift OR lead to reaction and maintenance as push-back
 - If not negative, mostly laissez-faire (“it’s your problem”)
 - Rarely, positive to minority language supports maintenance
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Causes of language shift 3

- *Ideologies and beliefs* (Austin & Sallabank 2014)
 - “an ideology can be defined as a system of widely shared ideas, patterned beliefs, guiding norms and values, and ideals accepted as truth by a particular group of people” (Steger 2003: 03)
 - language ideologies: “morally and politically loaded representations of the nature, structure, and use of languages in a social world” (Woolard 2021) or “socioculturally motivated ideas, perceptions and expectations of language, manifested in all sorts of language use” (Blommaert 1999: 1)
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Language ideologies

Characteristics:

- ❑ Socially constructed and shared
- ❑ Unconsciously accepted (tacit, taken-for-granted)
- ❑ Speakers often unaware of actions and reactions based on their socio-culturally inculcated beliefs
- ❑ based on deep-seated predispositions and strongly held ways of thinking and perceptions concerning:
 - language **practices** (what people do, or believe they do) and
 - language **policies** (what people *should* do).
- ❑ “assumptions about language statuses, forms, users, and uses that, by virtue of their ‘common sense’ naturalization, contribute to linguistic and social inequality” (McCarty 2011:10)

Some examples

- ‘Language is changing and getting worse from generation to generation’
 - ‘people who can’t read or write are ignorant and stupid’
 - ‘We can’t write our language’
 - ‘Sanskrit is ancient and pure’
 - Tibetan saying: གེ་དཀླུ་ལེ་ར་བེ་ལྗོང་ལྷུ་ལེ་ར་བ་ངལུ [lon̄ba re=la t̄h̄ə re, rdewa re=la ʃkad re] ‘Every valley has a river and every village has a dialect’ (Lhawa 2021)
 - ‘Migrants should learn proper English’
 - ‘I’d rather die without passing on my language than leave behind a degenerate version like the children are learning’
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Language ideologies 2

- ❑ Speakers internalize ideologies of linguistic inferiority, which can lead to linguistic and cultural shift
 - ❑ Gramsci et al. (1971) notion of **hegemony** – cultural beliefs presented by the group whose language practices are dominant in a community to establish and maintain control, propagates idea status quo represents a ‘common-sense’ or ‘normal’ state of affairs, and reflects ‘natural’ values.
 - ❑ We are talking about **predispositions** to behave in certain ways, not **deterministic** cause-effect relations, i.e. hegemony and inferiority can be resisted – language choice is potentially liberating and not constrained
 - ❑ Language policy construction (or **language management** Spolsky 2009) is built on the notion that beliefs and ideologies can change
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How do we access ideologies and beliefs?

- Distinguish **overt** (stated, conscious, public) ideologies and beliefs from **covert** (unstated, unconscious, private) ones
 - Can often be in conflict, e.g. people express positive views in public to support for their heritage language but have negative private views that result in failure to use it with their children at home, perhaps also believing that “other people are keeping the language alive” (cf. Dauenhauer & Dauenhauer 1998; King 2000; Kroskrity 2009; Ó hÍfearnáin 2013; Dobrin 2014)
 - How can we access overt and covert ideologies and beliefs?
 - Direct questioning, via language survey or interview
 - Participant observation of language use in action
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Direct methods

Questionnaire survey is common (Sallabank 2014) but problematic:

- Respondents may try to second guess the researcher and supply what they think they want to hear
- Surveys in the majority language can skew results, e.g. Ni & Lai (2017) report on a sociolinguistic survey of language attitudes among Khroskyabs speakers in Tibet – all 88 responses to a Chinese-language online survey were positive about Khroskyabs, follow up interviews with 10% of participants in Khroskyabs show all had negative attitudes and supported shift to Tibetan or Chinese

Other methods: interview, observation, participant action research (engages community members, trains and empowers them – see SEL talk by Prof Suraratdecha)

Metapragmatics (Sliverstein 1976, 2001)

- talk about talk, the socially constructed ways of expressing the meaning of talk – several types:
 - talk about **semantic** meaning (referential-predicational function of language), e.g. “*kitab* means ‘book’”
 - talk about **pragmatic** meaning (sociocultural function of language), e.g. “Tell your brother ‘I’m sorry’”, “Don’t tell jokes at a funeral” [Note: this can be highly regimented, as in Sasak: “to say ‘to eat’ use *makan* to your brother, *bekelor* to your father, *madaran* to a respected elder’ (system of speech levels)]
 - Code choice itself can be an **iconic** expression of sociocultural meaning, e.g a child who responds in Urdu to a parent speaking to them in Torwali
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Kinds of metapragmatic utterances

- Metaphors, e.g. Sanskrit is the mother language
- Idioms or sayings
- Behavioural rules, e.g. “you should say ... when ...”, “don’t say ... when speaking to ...”
- Judgements about how individuals or groups use language, e.g. “young people don’t know the difference between A and B”
- Code choices (iconic representations)
- Silverstein argues there are **limits** on metapragmatic awareness that help explain why some linguistic forms seem to be available to their users for conscious comment, while other forms seem to escape awareness despite efforts by a researcher to ask speakers to repeat them or characterize their use

What does this mean for research?

- Need to acquire fluency in the language under study so as to be able to understand the significance of metapragmatic utterances
 - should value speakers' explicitly verbalised models "as constructs that are by definition 'real' to the members of groups and can provide resources for members to deliberately change their linguistic and discourse forms" (Kroskrity 2000: 7)
 - Develop accounts of overt and covert metapragmatics so they can inform language policy (individual, family, group/institution)
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Whose ideologies and beliefs?

- **vernacular** language ideologies: tacit or explicit ideas and beliefs that members of a speech community have with respect to their own linguistic repertoire (Woolard & Schieffelin 1994)
 - For minority speech community
 - For majority speech community
 - **institutional** language ideologies: overt and covert ideas and beliefs that social and political organisations have about language, e.g. about the language of government or education (Indonesia: *satu negara, satu bangsa, satu bahasa*)
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Whose ideologies and beliefs?

- **disciplinary** language ideologies: more or less explicitly articulated theoretical principles and methodological practices orienting work by linguists and anthropologists (see, e.g. Bauman & Briggs 2000; Errington 2001; Irvine & Gal 2000; Silverstein 2000), e.g.
 - All languages are descriptively equal
 - All languages can and should be written
 - It's our job to save languages before they disappear
 - Languages are part of human knowledge and hence the heritage of all human beings (Unesco “intangible cultural heritage”) – risk of commodification
 - ...

Looking in the mirror

- **disciplinary** language ideologies often differ from and conflict with vernacular and/or institutional ideologies, e.g. in Australian Aboriginal communities ways of speaking are owned by individuals and groups who have the rights to use them – it is not public information to be shared with all
 - Need to be **reflexive** and **critical** about our own theories and practices in relation to others
 - Austin (2021), Austin & Sallabank (2019) question cross-discipline ideologies that language documentation is useful for language revitalisation
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Looking in the mirror

- Linguists share what Spolsky (2011) calls ‘linguicentrism’, i.e. the assumption that language is at the centre of human culture and existence. Few people and governments seem to care about the threat to endangered languages, and this should warn us to think very carefully before we assume that the beliefs and ideologies of linguists, sociolinguists, and linguistic anthropologists are in harmony with those of the speech communities, and relevant institutions, e.g. education (see Austin & Sallabank 2014: 14)
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Looking in the mirror

- language endangerment discourse often valorizes people and practices in a way that pits them against ‘modernity’ (e.g. ‘tribal’), while ‘hyper-traditionalizing’ and dehumanizing them
 - this reshapes the way language is envisaged, through the discourse itself and the intersection of access to tangible (even if imagined) benefits and language-based processes of authentication.
 - one consequence is focus on the “ancestral code” while decrying code-mixing as degenerate, rather than seeing it as an adaptive response to changing norms (Childs, Good & Mitchell 2014)
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Drinking the Kool-Aid

- language revitalisation programmes often **unthinkingly adopt Western linguistic ideologies** about needing ‘standard’ languages (hence eliminating non-standard varieties), fixed literacy (“proper spelling”), “elevating literate forms and uses, and negatively sanctioning variability” (Woolard 1998: 17) to show that they are “just as good as” the majority language
 - this can influence expectations and assumptions which may stand in the way of achievable goals, e.g. creating a new generation of “fluent speakers” cf. iconic uses of fixed expressions in specific domains
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An example

- Gamilaraay language of NSW, Australia
 - No fluent speakers since 1970s, but relatively well documented
 - Linguists and schools think of creating dictionaries, textbooks, language lessons – children as the locus (= institutional and wider community ideologies)
 - Community ideology “language is sleeping” – major use is for symbolic representations in phatic communication, and social performances using fixed expressions, e.g. “Welcome to Country” speeches (Austin 2014)
 - Example: at meeting of Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Geneva, 9–13 July 2012
 - “Thank you Mr Chair. Yaama Maliyaa. Anne Dennis ngayaa. Gamilaraay ngayaa. Australia-dhi ngayaa. Nginda ngayaa wingangay-lay-nha. Dhaymaarr ngayaa wingangay-lay-nha. Guuguu ngayaa wingangay-laynha.”
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An example

- revitalisation is embedded within a broader ideology and politics of resistance (to past injustice) and reconciliation (for future)
 - goals for language revitalisation need to be tailored to community ideologies for achievable outcomes that do not discourage people and turn them off from language learning
 - major outcomes are also **non-linguistic** and relate rather to perceived improvements in social well-being, self-esteem, confidence, reducing truancy from school, and improving employment opportunities (“we’ve got a language, it’s on the internet, just like French or Mandarin”)
 - language revitalisation and support can assist with dealing with trauma and social-psychological challenges for communities (see Olko 2021 project “language as a cure”)
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Drinking the Kool-Aid

- danger of Western ideology that makes the children the locus of learning and maintenance, rather than accepting variable and continuous learning through the life cycle, or incorporating adults into policy
 - Domain expansion seen as a goal of revitalisation or maintenance, but forcing languages into ‘high’ domains may stretch the capacities of L2 learners too far, accelerating unwelcome change (e.g. code mixing)
 - notions of language “purity” may be imported as older fluent speakers see how younger people speak as divergent, voicing negative evaluations that put further pressure on learners and their own beliefs about themselves
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Ideological clarification

- Fishman (1991) argues that the success of language policies aimed to “reverse language shift” requires **prior ideological clarification**
 - “the process of identifying issues of language ideological contestation within a heritage language community, including both beliefs and feelings that are indigenous to that community and those introduced by outsiders (such as linguists and government officials), that can negatively impact community efforts to successfully engage in language maintenance and renewal” (Kroskrity 2009:73)
 - Roche (2019) argues critically that resolution of contestation or contradictions is not always necessary, but may be a source of strength/solidarity for maintenance
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Ideological clarification

- Often “clarification” is not possible **before** a language policy is implemented; contradictions or conflicts and their resolution may only emerge dialectally as a consequence of development and application of the policy, e.g. language maintenance
 - Understanding and describing ideologies and beliefs is therefore an ongoing continuous process in policy formation and application, and informs the goals and possible outcomes
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Case study for family language policy

- Lebanese Arabs in UK (Eid & Sallabank 2021)
 - explores home language use and policy
 - ethnographic methods – native-speaker community member, project carried out over several years
 - semi-structured interviews (24 parents, 15 children), participant observation, field notes
 - qualitative and quantitative analysis of collected data
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Case study:

- in family: Lebanese Arabic (LA), modern standard Arabic (MSA), English, French
 - parents and children believe HL maintenance can foster a sense of ‘Lebaneseness’, and help children access highly valued socio-cultural significance of LA
 - MSA has high esteem -- emotional aesthetic appeal, described as “beautiful”, “musical”, “rich” and “the most expressive” Arabic
 - children appreciate MSA for “pride” value more than instrumental “profit”
 - hegemonic ideology of wider community devalues Arabic relatively anyway in UK, compared to European languages or Mandarin Chinese, so children’s view conforms
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Case study: Lebanese Arabs in UK (Eid & Sallabank 2021)

- “pride” value of the HL in family, culture and religion may outweigh both profit incentives and hegemonic language ideologies
- HL teaching and multiliteracy development remain largely the responsibility of parents and communities; little support from government and educational institutions
- need for **cooperation** between HL families, schools, and educators, to support families to devise and implement informed family language policies that place value on HL proficiency, multilingualism, and multiliteracy
- **empower** heritage families to maintain linguistic, cultural and ethnic heritages (Spolsky 2012)
- locus of maintenance is **home** as much as school

Conclusions

- In a globalising world, no country or location is isolated, and no country can escape linguistic and cultural issues/rights
 - No country can afford to adopt a mono-cultural ideology – political and economic costs are high, and missed opportunities are too great
 - Understanding language shift, loss and maintenance fundamentally requires understanding beliefs and ideologies about language value, meaning, structure, and use
 - Access to ideologies has to be via multi-pronged approach, placing importance on documenting and making sense of meta-pragmatics, ideally through participant observation of practices, behaviour, and overt expression of values
 - People can hold conflicting beliefs without contradiction
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Conclusions

- There is a need for better education and information about the values and benefits of multilingualism and multiculturalism for individuals, families, policy makers
- Co-operation, collaboration, empowerment is essential – a intercultural communication becomes paramount
- Dangers of ghetto and siege mentality on several sides
- need more training at all levels to deal with socio-politics of language and cultural developments, including training in ethical, moral, and social justice aspects
- Local, regional, and global opportunities to contribute to the continuation of richness of world's linguistic and cultural diversity, reaffirm identities, while opening avenues for communication and increased respect for minority and endangered languages

Thank you!

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