

Endangered Languages

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1. Introduction

This chapter is about language shift, language loss, and language endangerment: what it means, why it is happening, and responses at individual and community levels, by policy-makers, and from academia. [See also Hornberger and De Korne \(this volume\) on language revitalisation.](#)

2. Previous research

The field of endangered languages study, which includes language documentation and description (also known as ‘documentary linguistics’), emerged in the 1990s in response to the prospective loss of a large proportion of world languages this century. According to one frequently cited source, *Ethnologue*,¹ ‘7,139 languages are spoken today’, of which 42% are ‘endangered’, i.e. ‘users begin to teach and speak a more dominant language to their children’. The respective responses of academia, policy-makers, and communities to what has been called a worldwide crisis (Krauss 1992, Roche 2022) reflect the different ways in which it affects them.

Policy-makers may see linguistic diversity as an expensive or divisive impediment to national unity; if governments support minority language maintenance, it is often through bilingual education as a transition to the national language. Academic linguists decry loss of linguistic diversity, and thus of data, especially for cross-language comparison, classification, and history; they have responded by documenting and describing languages before they disappear (‘language preservation’), often focusing on rare or interesting features. Languages are seen as a scientific resource, or a treasure for all humankind (a view also promoted by international organisations like UNESCO as ‘intangible cultural heritage’). For linguistic communities, language shift and loss may be felt in a far more immediate and personal manner as just one outcome of discriminatory policies, marginalisation, and demographic and socio-political changes. Responses need to take these into account. Communities have undertaken language and cultural revitalisation programmes, some long-standing, e.g. Māori (New Zealand), Hawaiian, and Welsh, among many others. There are links between language shift/maintenance and socio-economic and political inequality, physical and mental wellbeing, and political and cultural subjugation; language becomes a source of identity, pride and empowerment to overcome historical trauma from colonialism and social, political, and cultural oppression of minorities (Roche 2021). This chapter discusses language documentation, showing how linguists can support communities in reclaiming and re-appropriating linguistic heritage.

Since the 1990s the rhetoric and public discussion around this topic has been dominated by notions of ‘language death’, ‘loss’, ‘destruction’ and ‘linguicide’, often with a sense of inevitability. Paradoxically, despite the rhetoric, the number of languages listed by *Ethnologue* is actually increasing: up from 7,099 in 2017, and from 6,000 estimated by Krauss (1992), of which he

¹ www.ethnologue.com/guides/, accessed 2021-06-21.

calculated that 90% were likely to be no longer in use by 2100 if trends continued. This will be discussed more below.

In addition to counting, linguists have also sought to measure the endangerment level or viability of individual languages. Thus, UNESCO (2003) proposed a language vitality scale ('strong' > 'threatened' > 'endangered' > 'moribund' > 'extinct'), based on nine factors:

1. Use in the family (intergenerational transmission)
2. Absolute number of speakers
3. Proportion of speakers within the total population
4. Shifts in domains of language use
5. Response to new domains and media
6. Materials for language education and literacy
7. Governmental and institutional language attitudes and policies, including official status and use
8. Community members' attitudes towards their own language
9. Type and quality of documentation.

Despite the apparent comprehensiveness of this scale, there is little guidance on how to measure the factors, or how to weight each component against others, so intergenerational transmission remains the most widely-used gauge of language vitality. Cessation of intergenerational transmission is commonly cited as a cause of language shift, but it is actually part of the process. It should also be noted that until Ethnologue adopted an alternative scale proposed by Lewis and Simons (2010), language endangerment measures generally pointed downwards, with no account taken of efforts to revitalise languages; this led to complaints to UNESCO by communities whose languages were categorised as 'extinct' (see 3.1 below).

The number of languages counted has increased due to new and better data collection, and increased recognition of languages previously 'unknown to science', or grouped as 'dialects' of a single language. Sign languages are now recognised, including 'village sign languages' used in small communities, rightly accepted as equally valid as spoken ones; many are endangered, often through shift to larger urban or national sign languages. The majority of the world's population is multilingual, and multilinguals utilise different elements of their linguistic repertoire at will, not necessarily differentiating between named languages (Luepke and Storch 2013; García and Wei 2014). Linguistic differentiation is nevertheless important for identity construction by groups and individuals, and reclaiming language(s) is a key part of rectifying ongoing injustices.

Who counts as a speaker, and how good (or 'fluent') do you have to be? Measures of language vitality are silent on this. Most of the world's languages remain under-described, so there are very few proficiency tests for minority and endangered languages, or ways to identify who counts as a 'native speaker'. For many, 'mother tongue' does not necessarily mean 'first language' or 'regularly used language', but rather the ancestral or heritage language. People who grew up speaking a

minority language may have lost fluency due to education policies, societal or economic pressures, and discriminatory attitudes. Where intergenerational transmission has been broken, first language speakers may be very old, with middle-aged or younger people likely to be 'semi' or latent speakers (who heard the language when young but do not have productive fluency), or second language or 'new' speakers. These new speakers, who may also be core language revitalisation advocates, are often not counted as legitimate speakers by others, or by linguists.

In the 1980s linguists explored structural and functional changes due to contraction of the speaker base, using terms like 'language attrition'. Dorian (1989) identified 'stylistic shrinkage' as an early change: speakers are unable to produce a wide range of genres and are restricted to elementary conversational exchange or invariant simple sentences. This has structural consequences on sentence organisation (syntax), word formation (morphology) and pronunciation, including loss of distinctive sounds not found in the dominant languages (Palosaari and Campbell 2011). Sociolinguists also researched language shift, with Fishman (1991) influential in identifying non-linguistic factors, and how attention to them could assist with 'reversing' language shift.

Mainstream linguistics became interested in the early 1990s, especially because of Hale et al. (1992) and Robins and Uhlenbeck (1991). The Comité International Permanent des Linguistes (CIPL) promoted international discussion in arenas such as UNESCO, which compiled its nine-factor vitality scale. Popular accounts appeared, such as Crystal (2000), Abley (2003) and Dalby (2003). Funding for fieldwork and documentation of endangered languages became available from Foundation for Endangered Languages (founded 1996), Endangered Language Fund (founded 1997), Volkswagen Foundation (Dokumentation der bedrohte Sprachen (Dobes) programme, founded 2000) and Arcadia Fund (ELDP, founded 2002). Dobes also established a digital language archive, as did Arcadia (ELAR). The US National Science Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities established the Documenting Endangered Languages (DEL) programme. All the large funder initiatives limited projects to documentation and description of highly endangered languages (i.e. excluding those which are considered to be merely 'threatened'), and disallowed applied work, including language revitalisation.

The early 21st century saw the establishment of specialist training courses in language documentation and revitalisation at academic institutions, such as SOAS and University of Hawai'i, and an increase in related modules such as Field Methods in many general linguistics departments.² Fieldwork and documentation training became a regular part of Summer Schools or Institutes. For overviews of specific developments in the past 25 years see Austin (2016), and Seifart et al. (2018); in section 2 we present critical reflections on some of the methodological approaches and outcomes which evolved over this period.

2. Critical issues and topics

2.1 Discourses of endangerment

As mentioned above, until relatively recently, rhetoric about endangered languages focused on loss, decline, and negative consequences. Linguists commonly refer to languages as 'dead', 'extinct',

² Fieldwork-based language documentation and description, along with sociolinguistic study of shift and revitalisation has been established in mainstream linguistics in Australia and New Zealand since the 1970s.

'obsolescent', or 'moribund'; and use terms like 'semi', 'partial', or 'passive' to describe speakers (Cameron 2007). For example, Crystal (2000) takes a somewhat fatalistic view:

To say that a language is dead is like saying that a person is dead. ... If you are the last speaker of a language, your language – viewed as a tool of communication – is already dead. (Crystal 2000: 1-2)

Many speakers and supporters of endangered languages dislike this rhetoric of finality, especially given the relative success of efforts to 'revive' so-called 'dead' and highly moribund languages in recent years: e.g. Cornish and Manx in the British Isles, Miami, Mohegan and Mutsun in the USA, and Kaurua and Gamilaraay in Australia. Some feel that using the term *language death* may in itself have a causative effect, hastening a language's demise by encouraging pessimism or denying funding because the language is 'too far gone'. Others object to such casually derogatory terminology. Even the term *endangered* may be seen as negative: e.g. in the Isle of Man, Manx (whose last traditional native speaker died in 1974) is consciously promoted as a living language.

Less objectionable is describing a language as 'sleeping' or 'archived', or 'which does not have any speakers at present'; and 'latent' speakers (see section 1). This affirms that the process is reversible and that community members have agency. Endangered languages were highlighted internationally by the 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages declared by UNESCO, where the focus shifted to 'development, peace building and reconciliation'.³ The rhetoric of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (IDIL2022–2032)⁴ is in terms of 'Indigenous language users' human rights', 'empowerment of Indigenous language users', and 'making a decade of action for indigenous languages'. This is much more positive and forward looking, aimed at overcoming past injustices and discrimination, and places Indigenous people and their voices at the centre of concern.

2.2 Hegemony

Terminology and discourses are important because they play a role in causing ideologies of deficit to be naturalised by minorities: what Gramsci (1971) termed *hegemony*. Negative attitudes towards minority language varieties are held not only by majority language speakers, but are also assimilated by speakers of minority languages themselves; they lead to 'linguistic insecurity' and unwillingness to speak minority languages. Labov (1966: 489) claimed that 'the term "linguistic self-hatred" may not be too extreme'. Ting (2021) uses a critical discourse framework to look at how dominant government discourses have influenced Indigenous people's perception of their languages, and suggests that it can resemble Stockholm-syndrome-like behaviour. So parents might 'choose' to speak a 'more useful' language with their children, when actually their choice is not free, but is influenced by dominant discourses, such as denial of multilingualism. Although the majority of the world's population has a repertoire of languages at their disposal for different purposes, prevailing discourses insist that in order to speak a dominant language properly, the home language has to be abandoned.

³ <https://en.iyil2019.org/>. accessed 2021-07-02

⁴ <https://en.unesco.org/news/upcoming-decade-indigenous-languages-2022-2032-focus-indigenous-language-users-human-rights>, accessed 2021-07-02

2.3 Ideologies

Ideologies are socio-culturally shared belief systems, which are often unconscious (Van Dijk 2013: 177). They 'are largely acquired, expressed, and reproduced by discourse, and that hence a discourse analytical approach is crucial to understand the ways ideologies emerge, spread, and are used by social groups' (Van Dijk 2013: 176). Silverstein (1976, 2001) coined the term 'metapragmatics' to refer to 'talk about talk, the socially constructed ways of expressing the meaning of talk' which can make ideologies visible, through e.g. metaphors, idioms, behavioural rules and judgements, and even code choice itself. The last of these can be iconic of ideological stances towards particular ways of speaking (e.g. a child refusing to reply in their parent's language but responding in the dominant language a community is shifting towards).

Vernacular language ideologies have been broadly defined as tacit or explicit ideas and beliefs that members of a speech community have with respect to their linguistic repertoire (Woolard and Schieffelin 1994). There is frequently a disjuncture between the beliefs of members of speech communities and the ideologies of linguists, institutions, and governments (whose language policies are frequently ideologically driven). As we note in Austin and Sallabank (2014: 1), 'This book [or chapter] would not have been written without the ideological shift over the last 10-30 years towards broadly positive attitudes in favour of 'saving' endangered languages.' What 'saving' means, however, is open to interpretation, and often to misunderstandings (see below).

2.4 Essentialism

Much of the discourse on endangered languages is essentialist and deterministic. The strong version of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis argues that our way of thinking, and thus our cultural identity, are determined by the lexicon and syntax of our language. A corollary claim is that when a language dies, a unique way of looking at the world also disappears, and that loss of a language means extinction of a unique creation of human beings that houses a treasure of information and preserves a people's identity (Grimes 2001). Seifart et al. (2018: e336) are even more encompassing: 'we lose the traditional knowledge of an ethnic group, much of it bound up in language: knowledge of food and water resources and local agricultural practices, ways of managing ecologies for sustainability, kinship and social systems that embody variants of how to live together to mutual benefit, how to rear self-confident and happy children (Diamond 2012), visions of humans' place in nature, and so much else, both material and spiritual'. This kind of deterministic essentialism denies that socio-culturally acquired knowledge can be passed on even when languages are not, or when they change their form inter-generationally. It presents a constricted view of the flexibility and dynamics of human creativity.

Language and culture are closely linked, although not necessarily in a deterministic way. Kroskrity (2000: 13) observes that 'even dominant ideologies are dynamically responsive to ever-changing forms of oppositions', e.g. moves from 'generic he' to 'he or she' and then to 'they'. Investigating metapragmatics and discourses about language attitudes, structures, functions, and uses, and thereby uncovering ideologies, is therefore a key step in addressing language endangerment, especially in support of campaigns for empowerment and recognition of linguistic human rights.

Academics are also influenced by their own ideologies, by the research community's own discourses and by fashion in theories, valuation, and ranking. Thus Dobrin et al. (2009: 41) point out that the audit culture which dominates Western society, including academia, leads to commodification and 'reduction of languages to common exchange values ..., particularly in competitive and

grammatical contexts such as grant-seeking and standard-setting where languages are necessarily compared and ranked'. Speaker numbers (from Ethnologue) and vitality ranking (from UNESCO) feed into this transformation of socio-culturally dynamic ways of speaking into objects and numbers. Commoditising forces have also impacted how linguists see their relationships to the individuals and communities with whom they work, with moral or professional obligations to 'give back' being expressed as transacted objects such as dictionaries, subtitled videos, primers, or mobile apps, 'rather than through knowledge sharing, joint engagement in language maintenance activities, or other kinds of interactionally defined achievements' (Dobrin et al. 2009: 43). A consequence of objectification can be double endangerment, i.e. endangerment of the language along with endangerment of the materials once collected to document and/or support it.

Speaker community views can also be essentialist. Sallabank (2013) found that community members tend to express strong overt associations between language and identity, often accompanied by purism and hyper-valorisation of the 'ancestral code' (Childs et al. 2014), the imagined form of the language before shift began. The adaptive value of code-mixing and code-switching, let alone borrowing of lexicon, especially for newly introduced technologies or objects, is negated,⁵ and linguists and speakers seek 'pure' or 'original' expressions that separate out codes into differentiated describable ideals.

2.5 Typologies

Typologies of language vitality may fail to take account of power relationships and ideologies, conflict situations, the effects of language planning activities, or changing relationships between languages or in emerging attitudes. Indeed, Schiffman (2002: 141) claims that typologies are theoretically 'passé' and 'guilty of the latter-day sin of essentialism'. Documentation of endangered languages has also in large part been driven by a desire to establish structural and functional typologies by cross-language comparison, giving rise to calls for standardisation,⁶ both in representations and in content. Thus 'interlinear glossing' (the annotation of word morphological structure requiring alignment of language segments and glosses, typically in a dominant academic language) is seen as the 'gold standard', blinding researchers to alternative representations and the inherent demands of interpretational literacy that such glossing requires. To some extent the dominance of a few software tools, such as ELAN for transcription and annotation⁷ and FLEx for glossing and dictionary-making,⁸ has led to homogeneity in analyses and representations that obscure linguistic diversity.

2.6 Relationship of documentation and revitalisation

The forced imposition of a colonial and/or national language, and assimilation to a majority culture, has resulted in many people feeling a loss of self-worth and pride. These practices have left deep and painful scars, often taking the form of multi-generational historical traumatising. Too often, linguists have taken language data from communities without even acknowledging their contribution to the scholarship, let alone making the research results accessible in terms that the participants can understand, challenge, or use. Thus, there are barriers for access to the terabytes of recordings and linguistic analysis stored in digital archives now (see 4.2). It is therefore essential for

⁵ despite it being common in larger dominant languages like English

⁶ such as the 'Leipzig Glossing Rules' (ADD REFERENCE) or GOLD generalised ontology (ADD REFERENCE)

⁷ <https://archive.mpi.nl/tla/elan>, accessed 2021-07-02

⁸ <https://software.sil.org/fieldworks/>, accessed 2021-07-02

non-community researchers to be culturally sensitive and to attempt to rectify exploitative practices, rather than prolonging them.

Austin and Sallabank (2018) argue that the relationship between documentation and revitalisation is fraught, with the outcomes of documentation stored in archives frequently being not being useful for the creation of language support materials (inappropriate topics or genres, difficult to hear recordings, lack of learner-directed or child-directed speech samples, lack of interactional language for learners to scaffold) and in formats that are impossible to use without technical training and fluency in the researcher's language. In addition, language practices evidenced by the archived corpus may not match the perceptions or preferences of speakers and language activists, who may prefer purism and the ancestral code for learning materials. Sugita (2007) and Amery (2009) have argued that to support language revitalisation, documentary corpora must include a variety of interactions, identity and relationship work, colloquialisms, swear-words and idiomatic expressions, intimate language, and commonly occurring speech formulas, proverbs and sayings, all of which applied linguists know are a short-cut to fluency and native-like usage. In addition, especially useful for learning are conversations about everyday life, particularly in non-traditional contexts like shopping, medical centres, or sporting events. Samples are also needed of inter-generational interaction, including code-switching, and the language practices of younger generations. Austin and Sallabank (2018) also argue that documentation of revitalisation can also be a means to enhance meta-discussion of learning outcomes, curriculum and materials review, evaluation, and support for language programmes; as Nathan and Fang (2009) point out, language classes can provide a locus for uncovering children's language attitudes, paths of acquisition, developmental stages, literacy, and new types of language use.

3. Main research methods

The data collection methods commonly used in fieldwork involve elicitation of decontextualised key words and structures intended to facilitate inter-language comparability (see 2.5); standardised questionnaires or experimental tools;⁹ and grammaticality judgements. This may be supplemented by narratives, songs, and rituals (not infrequently monologic retellings divorced from their social context); conversation tends to be avoided because transcribing and annotating it is difficult and time consuming. The recording agenda is usually set by the linguist.

Observation can capture language practices in context, while elicitation and self-report capture how people think they speak, i.e. perceptions and beliefs about language. Grammaticality judgements reflect how people think they or others should speak, i.e. language ideologies. Elicitation often results in formal, 'correct', citation forms, skewed towards an idealised ancestral code (or in a diglossic context, a 'High' language). It has been argued that linguists should document language ecologies, not just individual languages or varieties (e.g. Mühlhäusler 2000, Grenoble 2011), with proper attention paid to multilingual repertoires, mixed codes, translanguaging, contact effects, and language variation and change. Ethnographically-informed participant observation and recording of natural(istic) interactions is the only way to capture the full range of language use, how people use language to establish and maintain social relationships, and the social meanings of different ways of speaking and signing (Dobrin and Schwartz 2016). An ethnographic understanding of a given

⁹ See the diverse range of such tools at <https://www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/tools-at-lingboard/questionnaires.php>, accessed 2021-07-01.

community is a prerequisite to culturally sensitive language planning and maintenance activities (Childs et al. 2014: 171; see also 2.6 above).

4. Future directions of practices

4.1 Diversity and the particular

Researchers and communities seeking to document and describe endangered languages need to adopt a diverse array of data collection and analysis techniques, incorporating participant observation, and reducing reliance on ‘standard’ questionnaires, experimental protocols, and ready-to-hand tools. This means focussing instead on the particularities and uniqueness of given endangered languages contexts (or ecologies), and involving true collaboration with community members. In the period from around 2000 to 2015 funders and documenters aimed at wide but thin sampling to create corpora that could result in grammars, dictionaries, and text collections (often presented as a revival of the ‘Boasian trilogy’ (Woodbury 2011). More recently, there is a focus on particular domains of language use (especially endangered cultural practices such as ritual speech or interactions in now infrequently occurring contexts), multimodality (e.g. ‘whistled speech’, or ‘drum language’) which vary widely between communities, as well as inter-speaker variation, drawing on concepts and techniques from variationist sociolinguistics. The consequences are richer, more specific, and more varied accounts of endangered languages and communities, less subject to being typologised and more concerned with representing what is special and unique about particular contexts.

The dominant ideology among researchers until recently has also been that ‘real’ language and cultural documentation must take place in isolated, distant, difficult to get to, and often dangerous locations, away from the influences of dominant communities where ‘true’ knowledge would be preserved. Diaspora communities, even those where languages and traditions are strongly maintained, were excluded as possible sites for research. However, projects like the Endangered Language Alliance¹⁰ in New York City have demonstrated how much can be done with immigrant and diaspora speakers, singers, and signers. As travel became impossible in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, researchers evolved innovative ways to work ‘at a distance’, using technological developments such as collaboration software, and shifting data collection and analysis towards speakers and local experts, including language activists. This adaptive and collaborative approach is likely to persist in some form well into the future.

4.2 Transdisciplinarity

Language documentation has tended to be done by linguists only, and often by individuals, perhaps with locally employed and trained research assistants who speak the endangered language. There have been exceptions which involve cross-disciplinary collaborations, such as Pande and Abbi (2011) on Andamanese languages and birds; the value of transdisciplinary collaboration was clear from workshops run by the SOAS-based Plants, Animals and Words project that brought together biologists, ornithologists, botanists and linguists for cross-fertilisation of data collection and analysis techniques and outcomes.¹¹ Such collaborations are demanding and involve learning about the

¹⁰ <https://elalliance.org/>, accessed 2021-07-01.

¹¹ <https://www.soas.ac.uk/linguistics/events/plants-animals-words/>, accessed 2021-07-02.

methods and metalanguage of all participants, but the results of multi-faceted collaborations for documentation of ethno-biological knowledge in particular can be impressive.

4.2 Community empowerment and decolonisation

As mentioned in 2.6 above, endangered language communities have often experienced research as exploitative. Recently there has been an 'Indigenous efflorescence' (Roche et al. 2018), with community members demanding equitable research partnerships. There is growing interest in many communities in traditional knowledge and Indigenous paradigms of knowing, which may clash with Western scientific models which seek to quantify measurable entities and results. However, it is important not to make essentialist assumptions about 'what communities want', nor to assume that there is one 'Indigenous knowledge paradigm'.

There has been a progression of approaches towards linguistic fieldwork since the 1990s (Grinevald 2003; Cameron et al. 1992): from 'research ON a language' to 'research FOR and WITH the language community', which recognised the need for collaboration and reciprocity (Czaykowska-Higgins 2009; Rice 2006, 2009, 2011). Grinevald (2003) and Leonard and Haynes (2010) proposed a further stage, where projects are community-driven and the role of a linguist researcher is to train and mentor local researchers and to produce outputs requested by the community, who are also in charge of publishing policy. Nevertheless, the researcher-centered approach is still the predominant model for many funding bodies. Dobrin and Schwartz (2018: 255) argue for a more nuanced exploration of 'complexity and diversity of what goes on in particular researcher-community relationships'.

One major problem to be confronted is that most of the larger digital archives of endangered languages, which now store terabytes of audio, video and text recordings, plus linguistic analysis for some of them, are inaccessible to anyone who does not know English (or, in the case of AILLA¹², Spanish, and for Pangloss,¹³ French -- all ex-colonial languages). This is because the archive interfaces, and virtually all of their metadata (descriptions of what the deposits contain) are in English, so locating information and accessing and understanding it are restricted. Metadata also focuses on the standard categorisations set up by researchers (via the OLAC¹⁴ and CIMDI¹⁵ specifications) to enable sharing between archives and individuals, rather than descriptions that make sense to speakers and communities. The Mukurtu Project¹⁶ aims to respond to these roadblocks to access and use, and to 'empower communities to manage, share, narrate, and exchange their digital heritage in culturally relevant and ethically-minded ways', but its impact has not yet been widely felt. Another problem with current archives is that stored files are in formats which require knowledge and training in specialist software for access, and the software interfaces are typically restricted to English or other ex-colonial languages. Researchers rarely convert their materials into formats like PDF or plain text that anyone can read.

Recently, some have begun to explore monolingual language documentation and revitalisation, studying endangered languages in the languages themselves, rather than the dominant, typically colonial tongues. This involves the creation of new genres and metalanguage (e.g. McDougall 2019 describes work in Luqa from the Solomon Islands). The University of the South Pacific offers a

¹² <https://ailla.utexas.org/>, accessed 2021-07-01

¹³ <https://pangloss.cnrs.fr/>, accessed 2021-07-01

¹⁴ <http://www.language-archives.org/OLAC/metadata.html>, accessed 2021-07-01

¹⁵ <https://www.clarin.eu/content/component-metadata>, accessed 2021-07-01

¹⁶ <https://mukurtu.org/about/>, accessed 2021-07-01

module for MA students to research their own languages, and to write term papers in the language or the local lingua franca (e.g. Bislama for Vanuatu students). In 2020 the journal *Language Documentation and Description* began publishing abstracts of papers in Indigenous languages and lingua francas, along with English, and in 2021 the first paper with a section in an Indigenous language appeared (Harvey 2021 in Kala Kawaw Ya). In future, we may see more of this kind of research and publication, shifting the status relationship in research and academic discourse away from colonialising languages to the endangered languages themselves.

5. Related Topics

minority/indigenous language revitalisation; language learning; language education; corpus linguistics; sociolinguistics for language education; multilingualism; ecology of language; language policy and planning; family language policy; critical discourse analysis; identity; language and politics; sign languages; language attrition; language and ageing; linguistic ethnography; linguistic anthropology; linguistic landscape.

6. Further Reading

Austin, P. K. and Sallabank, J. (eds.) (2011) *The Cambridge Handbook of Endangered Languages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (Introduces language endangerment from the perspectives of language ecology, speakers and communities, contact and change, and society and culture. It includes the essentials of language documentation and archiving, and hands-on views of advocacy and support, development of writing systems for previously unwritten languages, education, training the next generation of researchers and activists, dictionary making, language policy, economic aspects, and applying technology and new media in support of endangered languages.)

Bradley, D. and Bradley, M. (2019). *Language Endangerment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (Introduces endangerment as an academic field of study, exploring the causes of language shift and the different pathways observed in communities. The approach is interdisciplinary and covers linguistic, social and other factors that contribute to shift. Examples are drawn from the authors' research in Asia and elsewhere.)

Leonard, W. Y. and De Korne, H. (eds) (2017) *Language Documentation and Description* 14. Special Issue on Reclaiming Languages. London: EL Publishing. <https://liddjournal.org/issue/15> (Examines language reclamation strategies to counter forms of marginalisation of minority language speakers and communities. The focus is on grass-roots responses to the pressures and opportunities of specific contexts, aiming to shift power imbalances. The volume critically examines revitalisation and associated discourses, and the roles of researchers and communities and their actions from a social justice perspective.)

Thomason, S. (2015) *Endangered Languages: An Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (Introductory overview covering causes and processes of endangerment, and the consequences and outcomes for communities and academic research. It describes documentation and revitalisation methods, illustrated with case studies, some drawn from the author's own long-term work with the Montana Salish community.)

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Abstract

According to most estimates, at least 50% of the world's languages are in danger of no longer being spoken by 2100. This chapter investigates how language vitality is assessed, what it means to speak a language, and how language endangerment occurs. For linguists, loss of linguistic diversity means less data for linguistic analysis, but for speech communities language shift and loss may be just one outcome of discriminatory policies, marginalisation, and demographic and socio-political changes. Increasingly links are being made between language shift/maintenance and socio-economic inequality, wellbeing, and political and cultural subjugation.

The chapter also looks at responses to language endangerment: at community level, by policy-makers, and from academia. We trace the development of the field of documentary linguistics and how it is driven largely by linguists' concerns and various essentialist assumptions. We discuss documentary methods and the relationships between academic linguists, speakers, and language activists, and how to promote more meaningful collaboration.

Keywords

language endangerment, language shift, language revitalisation, ideologies, hegemony, revival, documentation, preservation, archiving, language policy

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