Documenting Language Loss and Endangerment: Research Tools and Approaches

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New Knowledge and Tools for Action

Support for endangered languages grew rapidly in the early 1990s, the result mainly of research documenting an accelerating rate of global language loss. While efforts to redress language attrition are probably quite ancient, the past two decades have seen redoubled energy devoted to research and practical action on reversing language loss, producing ever more sophisticated analytical tools, creation of specialized agencies, and increased opportunities for discussing the phenomenon. This chapter discusses such international efforts to document and support endangered languages with a view to informing thinking about language vitality in the U.S. context and internationally.

The subject of the world's endangered multilingualism has also become a focus of intergovernmental attention, a direct result of dedicated scholars placing the question on the agenda of public authorities (Brenzinger, 2007; Simons & Lewis, 2012; Terralingua, http://www.terralingua.org).

Pioneering work in Australia on estimating language vitality and endangerment has contributed to this evolving international agenda, but space permits discussion of only some key developments. In the early 1960s, Stephen Wurm (1963) assessed research on the indigenous languages in two Australian states, New South Wales and South Australia, and proposed criteria against which future research should be developed, involving four conceptual categories: ranking of languages, number of speakers, vocabulary, and structure.

While these categories expose the extreme level of endangerment and fragility of Australian indigenous languages, they also suggest the critical importance of keeping in mind the context and history of every language loss situation. Awareness of contextual specifics should complement efforts to discern what is generally true and portable across settings, especially related to the equally dramatic erosion of native languages in North America.

The first of Wurm's categories, "ranking of languages," comprised five divisions: (1) extinct, (2) small number of old individuals who remember some vocabulary items, (3) small number of old individuals who speak the language relatively fluently, (4) still spoken but not in "full tribal use," and (5) spoken in "full tribal use. "The second category, "number of speakers," also comprised five divisions: (1) single individual, (2) fewer than 5 speakers, (3) 5 to 10, (4) 10 to 50, and (5) more than 50. The third category, "vocabulary," referred to available "lexical information" and was composed of five divisions: (1) some vocabulary, (2) approximately 500 items, (3) 500 to 1,000 items, (4) more than 1,000 items, and (5) lexical information sufficient for "modern linguistic standards."
The fourth category was "structure," specifically related to information available about the formal properties of a language. This category was also composed of five divisions: (1) some information, (2) a "fair amount" of information on main structural features of the language, (3) good information on these items plus information on "subsidiary" features, (4) good information on both the main and subsidiary features, and (5) structure information satisfactory by "modern linguistic standards."

We can note variation in the numerical values from weak to strong and have some understanding of Wurm's assumptions about what is required for intergenerational vitality. It is also evident that even within the Australian indigenous context, some language ecologies are radically unlike others. Consider that the maximum level under "number of speakers" is "more than 50" and that the third and fourth categories expose how modest are the available stocks of information that would be the basis for revitalization efforts. All of this highlights the extremely fragile state of most of the originally vast number of Australian languages, some 260 prior to British colonisation (Dixon, 1980).

Issues relevant to links between knowledge of attrition, the state of a language, and a community's efforts to revitalize intergenerational communication were mapped out by Patrick McConvell (1986). He proposed a three-component typology of disruption. Type 1 refers to contexts in which "adults and children speak the target language most of the time amongst themselves." Type 2 refers to situations in which "adults understand the target language and speak it fluently and quite frequently (although not necessarily to the children); children understand the target language to some degree but do not necessarily speak it." Type 3 refers to contexts in which "old people may speak the language sometimes; middle-aged adults may know some of the language; children neither speak nor understand the language except for a few significant words."

This account shifts the focus of classification efforts onto the levels of integrity of transmission systems within a community of speakers and points to where efforts to reverse disruption of transmission systems should be directed.

Disruption is of two broad types: rupture and attrition. Rupture involves abrupt, dislocating intervention, usually from the outside, into a unique sociolinguistic reality. Attrition involves slower processes of erosion of domains of language use and types of discourse. Rupture involves destruction of natural language transmission modes of a speech community and, in its most extreme form, precludes later relearning or recovery of language competence. In language loss by attrition, a language community retains within living memory of speakers sufficient language resources to sustain a revival or renewal activity. In colonizing situations, often violent initial contact between settlers/invaders and indigenous populations provokes language loss by rupture via extermination of speakers, their forced dispersal, and various forms of denigration of a community or destruction of its unique intracommunity transmission methods. For immigrant populations and for indigenous populations post-initial contact, when loss by rupture has subsided, slower attrition occurs through displacement of unique domains of sociocultural life, transmission systems, and institutional domains.

Schmidt (1990/1993, pp. 123-125) identified five stages of language loss by attrition in Australian indigenous contexts.

- **Stage 1** languages have strong vitality, active transmission to children, are known fluently by most speakers, and are the principal means of communication of a community that deploys a wide range of speech styles. Strongly vital languages tend not to have wide internal morpho-syntactical or lexical variations.

- **Stage 2** languages involve contraction in speaker numbers and increasing use of an alternative language. However, the language is still transmitted intergenerationally (in a relatively complete form), although not all of its new learners acquire fully functional competence in a range of
speech styles. Evidence emerges of influence from the replacing language into the linguistic features of the threatened language.

- **Stage 3** languages are no longer transmitted to younger generations and remain fully functional only for some older users. Radical simplifications are imported from the replacing language, which younger members of the community are already using as their main means of communication. Intergenerational communication involves pervasive code switching, and for all speakers the repertoire of speech styles in the threatened language is restricted.

- **Stage 4** languages have no fluent speakers left. Use of the language is piecemeal (as markers and "acts of identity") and is interspersed in speech principally conducted in the replacing language.

- **Stage 5** sees loss not only of fluent but also of semispeakers of the threatened language. The replacing language is the first language of the entire community, with only occasional markers of speech "difference." The extinction of the language is complete with the death of its last fluent speaker.

(Of Australia's 260 indigenous languages, Schmidt located 20 at Stages 1 and 2, 50 to 60 at Stage 3, and 170 to 180 at Stages 4 and 5, and with more than 66% already extinct or nearing extinction (i.e., at Stages 4 and 5) with 90% of Aboriginal Australians no longer speaking ancestral languages. By 1996, contemporaneous with North American initiatives and growing world awareness of the severity of language loss, Wurm proposed a taxonomy of language endangerment. Though only one of several possible systems, Wurm's schema became highly significant when adopted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to direct resources into global documentation of language endangerment, specifically in the *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger of Disappearing* (Wurm, 1996):

1. autochthonous language, not in danger
2. endangered language
3. seriously endangered language
4. moribund language
5. extinct language

UNESCO's interest in the field of language rights, language as an expression of cultural vitality, and language education in postcolonial nation building has longer antecedents (e.g., UNESCO, 1953), but a decisive moment was its 1991 to 1993 advocacy by professional linguistic associations, especially the 1991 symposium devoted to endangered languages held under the aegis of the Linguistic Society of America. On this occasion, Michael Krauss presented information about "the crisis of endangerment of North American indigenous languages" (Krauss, 1992), making the alarming, frequently cited claim that up to 90% of the world's languages could be threatened within two generations. This claim and the accompanying discourse of crisis focused attention on the plight of the world's languages in an unprecedented way, shaping which arguments have been expressed and how the problem of language endangerment has come to be conceptualized.

Taking up the responsibility, UNESCO went on to make several important contributions to professionalization and global reach of research on language endangerment and to scholarly collaboration on documentation of rates of loss and forms of intervention to stem such loss. A series of activities in 1993, culminating in the launch of the project *Languages in Danger of Disappearing* (UNESCO, 1994), the so-called Red Book, generated a stream of publications and specialist academic and speaker community consultations. In 1996 came the issuing of the Barcelona (or Universal) Declaration on Linguistic Rights (UNESCO, 1996), issued to galvanize support and change thinking about language minority rights and the support required to reverse language shift processes.
UNESCO and "Heritage:" Natural, Built, and Intangible

As the UN agency charged by statute to address global cultural questions, UNESCO is obliged to "safeguard" the world's "heritage." This has been understood primarily as physical inheritance, best represented by the World Heritage List, on which are inscribed both natural and built physical sites deemed worthy of protection (http://whc.unesco.org/en/list).

Seeing heritage as "... our legacy from the past, what we live with today, and what we pass on to future generations," such sites are considered "irreplaceable sources of life and inspiration" (World Heritage Centre, 2012, http://whc.unesco.org/en/about/), enjoying protection since adoption in 1972 of the convention concerning Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage.

The relationship of language diversity to general heritage is elaborated much later, as shown in Investing in Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue (UNESCO, 2010). This landmark document relates notions of cultural diversity and interculturalism directly to the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), eight achievement targets drawn from the Millennium Declaration adopted in September 2000 by 189 nations and signed by 147 heads of state and heads of government. The MDGs are to "eradicate extreme poverty and hunger;" "achieve universal primary education;" "promote gender equality and empower women;" "reduce child mortality;" "improve material health;" "combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases;" "ensure environmental sustainability;" and "develop a global partnership for development." Languages are seen as a "Key Vector of Cultural Diversity," and reversing language loss is discussed as an essential action for conserving the "intangible" heritage of the world. In this way, through a distinction between "intangible" and "physical" heritage, reversing language shift is constructed as a global heritage management question.

Red Book: Sounding the Alarm and Conducting Assessments

The language extinction prediction made at the 1991 Linguistic Society of America symposium (90% loss in two generations; 10% long-term "safe") was given global prominence in UNESCO's 1994 Red Book process, taking the figures into the realm of policy and expressed without the qualified scholarly mode of the original, which had been cognizant of the poor knowledge base for the calculation. That rate of loss was so extreme that it was even possible to calculate the extinction of all human languages in the face of the supervitality of English (Crystal, 2000), rendering it the world's sole and last language!

In only two decades, however, the evidence base has improved dramatically. Critical to this were UNESCO's sponsorship of the International Clearing House for Endangered Languages in Tokyo; the 1996 revision of the Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger (Moseley, 2010; Wurm, 2001), which mapped geographic distribution of endangered languages accompanied by assessments of degree of endangerment; and, most recently, the 2008 revision of the Atlas containing unprecedented detail on 2,500 endangered languages. Informing the 2008 Atlas is a multifactor analysis (Figure 6.1) proposed by a UNESCO-convened expert group to devise an internationally acceptable assessment mode and then classify languages accordingly.

The categories and corresponding number of languages (UNESCO, 2010, p. 77) are

1. Vulnerable (607)
2. Endangered (652)
3. Severely Endangered (530)
4. Critically Endangered (573)
5. Extinct (242)
Krauss's (1992) call for action was also a call to develop improved tools of analysis and description to reach a satisfactory assessment of language endangerment. While the process of assessment and documentation has improved in accuracy, it also evolves in sophistication, as different scholars use diverse and occasionally incompatible understandings of endangerment and of remedies that can be deployed.

Brenzinger (2007) reports the formulation produced through the work of UNESCO's Experts Meeting on Safeguarding Endangered Languages between 2001 and 2003 (Brenzinger et al., 2003), based on two categories of analysis described as Set A and Set B. Set A draws together indicators capturing various levels of endangerment. Exemplifying Set A indicators are the percentage of speakers within a given population, extent of language transmission, loss of language functions, and attitudes held by individuals and the speech community toward their language. Set B indicators rank endangered languages to facilitate selection of those in greatest need of documentation. To this end, some "values" are considered; for example, a scientific value, such as the genetic status of a language in danger, which can influence its rank and community values and attitudes, as well as questions pertaining to the level of available documentation of each language concerned. On the basis of these formulations, experts produced a report and an index, the Language Vitality and Endangerment (LVE) index, as well as proposals for coordinated international action to arrest language shift. The result of applying this analysis to various situations is "nine core factors that may help to assess and understand the language situation of specific endangered languages" (Brenzinger, 2007, p. x). These are:

Factor 1: Intergenerational language transmission
Factor 2: Absolute numbers of speakers
Factor 3: Proportion of speakers within the total population
Factor 4: Loss of existing language domains
Factor 5: Response to new domains and media
Factor 6: Material for language education and literacy
Factor 7: Governmental and institutional language attitudes and policies, including official language status and use
Factor 8: Community members' attitudes toward their own language
Factor 9: Amount and quality of documentation

For each of these, a five-point scale is applied, yielding a comprehensive depiction of the vitality-endangerment status of a language. This overall score is proposed both for scholarly purposes of understanding and explanation and for policy as a guide to the various kinds of intervention that might be possible and as the target of policy intervention efforts. Factor 9 focuses on documentation of nonrevivable languages, ranking urgency according to level of endangerment, so as to preserve the language for analysis and any future possible revival efforts.

Revitalizing Languages and Reversing Language Shift

Language revitalization and maintenance can be divided into two broad approaches - ecological and sociolinguistic-economic. The language ecology approach focuses on the communicative context of which individual languages are a part, the "work" they perform in the economy of labor of communication (Mühlhäusler, 1996). The sociolinguistic approach shifts the focus to functional specialization of languages (Fishman, 2001) and the potentially critical role of diglossia, or hierarchical division of functions between the languages available to a bilingual community. Highly variegated sociolinguistic circumstances defy easy generalization and, as Walsh (2005) argues, it remains unclear why language revitalization sometimes succeeds and sometimes fails. He does note, however, that "what is clear is that the process is profoundly political" (p. 293).

In Can Threatened Languages Be Saved? (2001), Joshua Fishman reviews his earlier scale of vitality (Fishman, 1991) and several world language revival cases, aiming to uncover obstacles that face revitalization efforts. He argues that language loss is a "late-order" expression of cultural loss, indicative of advanced processes of cultural atrophy. Factors 7 and 8 of the UNESCO LVE highlight similar concerns.

In reflections on Canadian language revitalization, Fettes (1997) promotes a "triple-braid" notion of language revitalization. The three criteria - critical awareness, local knowledge, and living relationships - are mutually reinforcing for threatened languages, and his schema resides mostly in the language ecology spectrum of actions. Living human relationships in the vulnerable language are important for long-term health and critical awareness and involve overcoming negative characterization of threatened languages.

The extensively field tested model of Capacity, Opportunity, Desire (COD) was originally proposed around 1992 by Francois Grin from Geneva University and is located at the sociolinguistic-economic end of revitalization efforts. This approach to minority language revitalization was devised in response to minority languages like Welsh and Basque (Grin, 1999) and Maori (Grin & Vaillancourt, 1999), then linked to the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (Grin, 2003), and still later was applied to policy development in the preparation of a 20-year plan for revitalization of Irish in Ireland (O'Flatharta, NicPháidín, Williams, Grin, & Lo Bianco, 2008). The model partially informs documentation of a range of heritage language revival and documentation efforts in the United States (Lo Bianco & Peyton, in press).

The central idea of COD, synthesized from an extensive body of language revival research data, is to distinguish between "necessary" and "sufficient" conditions to foster language use in revival projects rather than documenting states of endangerment. The letters refer to capacity (proficiency in the
language), opportunity (availability of domains and occasions for use of the language), and desire (desire to use the language). Domains are naturally occurring settings in the social and economic life of a community in which it might be predicted that a "safe" language would be unproblematically used as the medium of exchange.

When these conditions for success are separated by researchers or applied individually or with disproportionate focus by policy makers or communities, the necessary conditions for language use are absent. However, when copresent and pursued as a mutually reinforcing ensemble of recovery actions, COD forges a sufficient basis for language use and revitalization. Ideally, the components of the COD model are measured in standardized units of time or another consistent metric, allowing quantification of effort and consistent consideration of the conditions prior to a prediction of a language use outcome. Many minority language promotion efforts prioritize one component; usually C (essentially through language teaching), neglecting to foster opportunities for use and desire. C-based efforts aim to increase linguistic ability or capacity, O-based efforts create and reward opportunities to use the language, and D-based efforts foster desire to use the language.

Reversing language shift (RLS; Fishman, 2001) encompasses both the extreme of language extinction when shift involves the entire speaker community and the less extreme fate of one of two or more speaker groups replacing the language with a locally dominant one. In the latter case, the language is locally endangered, as immigrant languages are in the United States, when there remain native speakers of the abandoned language in a separate location, or globally endangered, as are indigenous languages in the United States and American Sign Language (ASL), where there are no native speakers in a separate location. While the aims of RLS and COD are similar, the two constructs differ substantially. RLS advocacy is based on restoring languages to health as a result of "dislocation," according to the Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) framework, while the COD method requires action on all three components to foster language use and assumes, therefore, that the languages concerned are not at the most extreme stage of endangerment.

Language recovery work approached from an ecological method compared to a sociological method tends to target the communication practices of a given population and focuses on language learning and associated attitudes held by speakers and the wider community. Increasingly, this involves the connection of biological diversity with cultural and linguistic diversity, well expressed by Terralingua, an international nongovernmental organization that, according to its website, "works to sustain the biocultural diversity of life - a precious heritage to be cherished, protected, and nurtured for generations to come" (http://www.terralingua.org/). Teachers, language planners, anthropologists, and community representatives voice similar understandings and support ecological language revival activity.

Terralingua argues that the nexus between natural and cultural diversity is one of interdependency, with both in "steep decline," a "converging extinction crisis" (the mutual loss of differentiation in human and natural worlds). In this framework, Luisa Maffi develops notions of resilience and humanism to elaborate the theoretical account of these systems and a political program of intervention (Maffi, 2001; Maffi & Woodley, 2010; Skutnab-Kangas, Maffi, & Harmon, 2003).

Language ecological approaches are aligned with the reasoning evident in Investing in Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue (UNESCO, 2010), where empirical language endangerment provokes concern for cultural consequences and effects on natural biology. This focus on loss of historical memory, cultural knowledge, and the social norms and values that such loss represents characterizes a large literature (Diamond, 2001; Grenoble & Whaley, 1998; Mühlhäusler, 1996; Nettle & Romaine, 2000).

Sociological approaches and those increasingly premised on material circumstances in economies
differ considerably from this. The target of action is the wider socioeconomic envelope of communication, with attention paid to occupational, prestige, and power correlations of languages. Many who undertake analysis of language vitality in such frameworks are skeptical about the prospects of reversing language shift. We often find political scientists, economists, and employment and entrepreneurial interests stressing such links between language choice and material rewards.

### Assessing Language Vitality

Just as there are many ways to think about revitalizing languages in danger of disappearing, we have also seen that there are diverse ways to monitor and assess language endangerment. The two extreme points are what Krauss (2007) calls "safe" and "extinct," separated by a large swath of "endangered," in which lie the majority of languages. Krauss divides "the entire spectrum of endangered languages, probably 95% of the 6,000" (p. 3) into five subgroups: (i) stable, (ii) partly stable, instable, or eroding, (iii) definitively endangered, (iv) severely endangered, and (v) critically endangered. These categories are familiar from the discussion of Australia, yet it is also evident that the middle part of the spectrum cannot accommodate easily all language situations.

Perhaps the most cited model for assessing language endangerment is Fishman's (1991, 2001) Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale, GIDS, which has stimulated reactions, critique, and embellishment. GIDS and LVE, the scale devised at the Experts Meeting on Safeguarding Endangered Languages (Brenzinger et al., 2003; Moseley, 2010), have been "merged" to produce the Expanded GIDS, or EGIDS (Lewis & Simons, 2010). EGIDS is a 13-part system complete with a "diagnostic tree." Lewis and Simons devised EGIDS because "the UNESCO framework provides a richer set of categories at the weaker end of the scale" (p. 108). GIDS was stronger at the safer end, having only two levels of endargamment, compared to LVE, which identifies four levels but does not distinguish different levels on the safe end. The 13-level scale permits finer-grained differentiation of vitality, and the greater sophistication can accommodate more diverse sociolinguistic realities. EGIDS introduces the new category "Dormant" alongside previous labels "Active," "Nearly Extinct," "Second Language Only," and "Extinct." This merging is designed to allow application of EGIDS to all of the world's languages, the "first fully comprehensive quantitative analysis of the state of vitality of the world's languages" (p. 9).

However, even this may not be adequate for all contexts on the continuum of vitality, especially for aspects of language not amenable to quantification. The operating assumption of most scales is norm-deviation, the formulation being that nonendangered languages score lowest and most-endangered languages score highest, marking gradients of disruption away from a state of healthy normality. Vital languages are subject to least disruption of a normalized pattern of usage, transmission, and representation in domains (home, work, education, and community life) and media (written, spoken, and digital), which reinforce and naturalize the language within the communicative requirements of its speakers.

In their analysis on how GIDS applies to Australian indigenous languages, Lo Bianco and Rhydwen (2001) argued that schemes assuming that language vitality means "full-spectrum" functionality (e.g., higher education, digital media, specialized employment) might not realistically depict the current state or future prospects of many indigenous languages. They called for modifications to GIDS, not an elaboration, based on a different way to conceive the notion of "vitality;" noting that levels one and two do not "apply to indigenous situations or to languages whose terminological range and discourse patterns (and present power structures in the wider society) make it unlikely that these languages would ever fulfill all of the functions envisaged..." (p. 418). They also questioned whether intergenerational maintenance of these languages even requires functional extension to all GIDS categories, arguing that if such languages could tap relevant "social meanings" (McConvell, 1986,
1991, 1992) exclusively for their speakers, this might be protective. These arguments are reminiscent of Fettes's (1997) triple braid, in which minority language preservation need not reproduce all characteristics of dominant languages. If the social meanings that "indigenous languages uniquely carry were able to be assured even within social spaces and practices unprotected from the invasive pattern of English," then language use might be promoted in quite different ways from those envisaged in GIDS (Lo Bianco & Rhydwen, 2001, p. 418).

Over the next few years, important progress is likely due to large-scale application of EGIDS, generating standardized comparisons across the world's languages and deepening understanding of differences and commonalities in language endangerment contexts. Until recently; this has been hampered by what Simons and Lewis (2012) have called "the lack of a feasible common metric with sufficient precision and granularity by which to assess vitality and endangerment," a problem they aim to address.

The next edition of Ethnologue (17th edition, forthcoming in 2013) ... will make significant strides in addressing the lack of statistics on language vitality by, for the first time, providing an estimate of relative safety versus endangerment for every language on earth. This advance is made possible by the introduction and large-scale implementation of the Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale. (p.3)

*Ethnologue* (Lewis, 2006, 2009) assembles a standardized description of all known living and recently extinct (since 1950) languages (currently 7,370), including the relevant geographic distribution of languages and aspects of their profile pertaining to literacy rates, cognate languages, and language genetics.

**Language Loss by Number, Language Family, and Location**

Preliminary findings from application of EGIDS to the *Ethnologue* database confirm widespread language atrophy:

At one extreme more than 70% of languages are extinct or moribund in Australia, Canada, and the United States, but at the other extreme less than 10% of languages are extinct or moribund in sub-Saharan Africa. Overall we find that 19% of the world's living languages are no longer being learned by children. We hypothesize that these radically different language endangerment outcomes are explained by Mufwene's (2002) observations concerning the effects of settlement colonization versus exploitation colonization on language ecologies. We also speculate that urbanization may have effects like settlement colonization and may thus pose the next great threat to minority languages (Simons & Lewis, 2012, p.1).

While serious, the results are less alarming than 1990s forecasts. The central finding is that 4,867 (66%) of the world's 7,370 languages rank at EGIDS 0 to 5 and are "still being passed on to the next generation in a sustainable way" (p.10), and 1,342 (18%) are "in trouble" (EGIDS 6b, 7). This is due to disruption of the norm of complete intergenerational transmission, and though members of the childbearing generation remain proficient in the language for this large category of languages, successful intervention would be feasible to restore adequate language transfer. A further 1,161 languages (16%) are "dead or dying," located at EGIDS 8a to 10. In all of these cases, the evidence reported by the researchers shows that natural parent-to-child transmission is beyond being able to be reconstituted; 353 of these languages lost all living speakers in the past 60 years (p. 10). Perhaps the most troubling finding is that 2,150 languages (29%) are undergoing attrition (EGIDS 6b-9), a greater proportion than the languages sufficiently developed to enjoy vigorous oral use (EGIDS 6a, p. 11).
Additional causes of alarm relate to concentration of loss within particular language families and the geographic distribution of the greatest attrition. Regarding the former, "we have lost 15% of the linguistic stocks (the largest subgroups of related languages that are reconstructable) that had at least one living member in 1950" (Simons & Lewis, 2012, p. 11). In a separate analysis, Whalen and Simons (2012) emphasize the severity of language family erosion:

Language families take ... millennia to develop... There is a real sense in which Latin is not dead but, rather, one of the liveliest languages around, having been succeeded by Spanish, Portuguese, French, and other widely spoken languages. None of these modern languages, however, would allow an easy two-way conversation with an ancient Roman. However, the re-evolution of today's range of language families - not just individual languages - would take tens of thousands of years. (p.171)

The vocabulary of crisis characterizing the first forays into language loss documentation (by Krauss and others) returns as Whalen and Simons (2012) characterize this attrition of family groupings as being "truly perched on the edge of a cataclysmic loss of linguistic diversity." What is lost is the ability "to fully understand the range of humanly possible languages" (p. 171-172). This intralinguistic loss compounds a geographic bias in language extinction. When Simons and Lewis (2012) organize the findings using the 22 geographic regions used by the UN, "Australia and New Zealand" heads the list, with 216 extinct and moribund languages. The Americas follow, South America counting 200 and Canada/the United States 160. These dismal data are confirmed in percentages, so that Australia/New Zealand and Northern America (only Canada/the United States) are ranked worst, with the lowest percentages of vital languages and the highest number of endangered, dead, or dying ones. Simons and Lewis point out that the Krauss (1992) calculation, forced to rely on inadequate instruments and data sets, overstates the severity of language attrition but accurately represents the pessimistic geographic concentration in Northern America.

The disparity in language ecologies modulates the claim that "the coming century will see either the death or the doom of 90% of mankind's languages" (Krauss, 1992, p. 7), with only the remaining 10% being safe over the long term. At the same time, the more sophisticated instruments and processes of analysis confirm that language endangerment remains grave and is worsening, exacerbated by its concentration within language families. To account for the geography of language loss, Simons and Lewis (2012) make recourse to Mufwene's (2002) argument that world language vitality disparities are the product of colonization patterns, finding a strong correlation between three colonization types - trade based, exploitation, and settlement - and language loss patterns. Trade colonies are least injurious to language vitality, because colonizer intentions do not extend to establishing cultural and linguistic domination. Settlement colonization is most damaging, effecting large-scale language replacement. Mufwene asserts that "European colonial languages have endangered other languages, or driven them to extinction, typically in settlement colonies, not in exploitation nor in trade colonies" (p. 168). Settlement colonization involves large population transfers to the colony from the colonial source, who intend to remain permanently, and effect a deeper penetration of the colonized society, usually involving total domination.

Settlement processes lead to competition, divisive selection among local languages, and pressures toward colonizer language monolingualism. Newly introduced migrant populations are also subjected to linguistic assimilation. The resemblance between such colonization and British domination in Australia/New Zealand and Northern America leads the authors to concur with Mufwene's conclusion about the large overrepresentation of these regions in language loss. Essentially, we can identify here a conjoining of language loss "by rupture," through colonization affecting indigenous populations, and language loss "by process," through assimilation of recruited immigrants into the dominant culture of the colony.
Conclusion

If the language endangerment risk is less extreme than estimated in the early 1990s, it remains severe, specifically in relation to its concentration among vital language families for linguistic diversity and geographic concentration in the Northern American and Australian zones. Rapidly expanding global support for intervention policies to arrest language loss, the availability of more sophisticated documentation of language loss, and research being undertaken to bring all of the world's languages into common analytical frameworks suggest that the field of language vitality/endangerment studies and the policy domain of intervention are on the cusp of significant developments. It is reasonable to aspire to a much improved scholarly comprehension of language vitality and more effective tools of intervention within a decade or less. However, challenges remain due to the rapid dislocation of speaker populations and vast movements of people with the mobility of labor under current conditions of globalization. What is required is more effort to locate insights and generate data to account for indigenous languages within the general case for heritage languages of all kinds in the multilingual urbanized settings that are the homelands of the contemporary world. These dimensions add considerably to the conceptual demands of the task of accounting for and understanding the notion of language vitality. Further work on the role of pressure, shift, and multilingualism is essential to this task.

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