

ENDANGERED LANGUAGES

PROF. NICOLE NAU, UAM 2017

Third lecture
(05/03/2017)

QUESTIONS OF THE DAY

When is a language endangered, when is it safe?

Why should we care?

Answers by an UNESCO expert group, in the publication „Language Vitality and Endangerment”, 2003, online at:

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001836/183699E.pdf>



IN THE WORDS OF THE UNESCO EXPERT GROUP:

(<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001836/183699E.pdf>)

The extinction of any language results in the irrecoverable loss of unique cultural, historical and ecological knowledge. Each language is a unique expression of the human experience of the world. Thus, the knowledge of any single language may be the key to answering fundamental questions in the future. Every time a language dies, we have less evidence for understanding patterns in the structure and function of human language, human prehistory and the maintenance of the world's diverse ecosystems. Above all, speakers of these languages may experience the loss of their language as a loss of their original ethnic and cultural identity [...].

EXAMPLE: MIYAKO (JAPAN)

Isamu Shimoji about the Miyako language

(<http://languagesindanger.eu/book-of-knowledge/list-of-languages/miyako/>)

What is the value of the language for Isamu Shimoji?

What signs of language endangerment / vitality are mentioned in the text?

What is / can be done to maintain the language (according to Isamu Shimoji)?

ISAMU SHIMOJI

«I sing songs in the Miyako language. I record them on CDs which are then sold in the whole country [= Japan]. I do this because I want the language to last for the future generations. Actually I don't have the feeling that it's my duty or anything. What I mean is just that **there is a world that can only be described with the Miyako language**. A world which no Japanese words could express, a world which cannot be translated into Japanese. This is a kind of culture that lives within a language. And so I sing with the intention to convey this world in my songs.»



ISAMU SHIMOJI

«Our language [...] today is used among elderly persons, but the generations of children and grandchildren at school are educated in standard Japanese, and when they come home, there are less and less people to talk to them in the local language.»



ISAMU SHIMOJI

Miyako is taught in schools, but:

«I feel that such top-down movements will make the kids treat their local language education just like any other home assignment, like a kind of a school duty, some kind of burden.»

«I believe that the important thing is rather to create for the kids such an environment where they can subjectively feel compelled to face the challenge and learn the many expressions which cannot be translated into any other language, which are nowhere else to be found, which preserve the sound of this one island alone.»

UNESCO EXPERT GROUP: NINE FACTORS

„We identify six factors **to evaluate a language’s vitality and state of endangerment,**

two factors to assess **language attitudes** and one factor to evaluate the urgency of the **need for documentation.**

Taken together, these nine factors are especially useful for characterizing a language’s overall sociolinguistic situation.” (UNESCO 2003)

FACTORS THAT DETERMINE LANGUAGE VITALITY (UNESCO ATLAS)



UNESCO GRADES OF LANGUAGE VITALITY / ENDANGERMENT

5	safe
4	unsafe / vulnerable
3	definitely endangered
2	severely endangered
1	critically endangered
0	extinct

F1. INTERGENERATIONAL LANGUAGE TRANSMISSION

- 5 The language is spoken by all generations.
- 4 The language is used by some children in all domains; it is used by all children in limited domains.
- 3 The language is no longer being learned as the mother tongue by children in the home. It is used by the parental generation and up.
- 2 The language is spoken only by grandparents and older generations; the parent generation may still understand the language.
- 1 The language is used by very few speakers, mostly of great-grandparental generation.

EXAMPLE: YURAKARÉ (BOLIVIA)

«Roughly speakers of Yurakaré can be divided into three generations. The oldest generation (I), around 40 years and older, speaks Yurakaré well and often. Amongst each other they generally prefer to speak Yurakaré. They also have good knowledge of Spanish, so if a non-Yurakaré speaker is present, they switch to Spanish easily. The next generation (II), roughly between 20 and 40, speaks Yurakaré well, but not as well as the older generation. Amongst themselves they often prefer Spanish. The youngest generation, finally (III), 20 years and younger, has a passive knowledge of Yurakaré and generally does not speak it.» (Van Gijn 2006: 14)

ANOTHER EXAMPLE: WICHITA (USA)

1962: 100-200 speakers, age over 50. (Chafe 1962)

«In 1965, speakers who could use the language tended to do so at every opportunity; older people gathered for socializing or for business preferred to conduct conversations in Wichita if possible; grandparents who wished to communicate about grandchildren with the parents of the children used Wichita as a "code," even though the parent was usually unable to respond in Wichita. These occasions never produced exclusively Wichita utterances; English words and sentences were frequently intermingled» (Rood 1996)

WICHITA TODAY ?

«In 1991, Wichita was spoken by about a dozen people in central and south-central Oklahoma»
(Rood 1996)

«As late as 2007 there were three living native speakers, but the last known fluent native speaker, [Doris Lamar-McLemore](#), died on 30 August 2016.»
(Wikipedia)

Video clip on the occasion of Doris Lamar's death:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ScPkN_xGRI

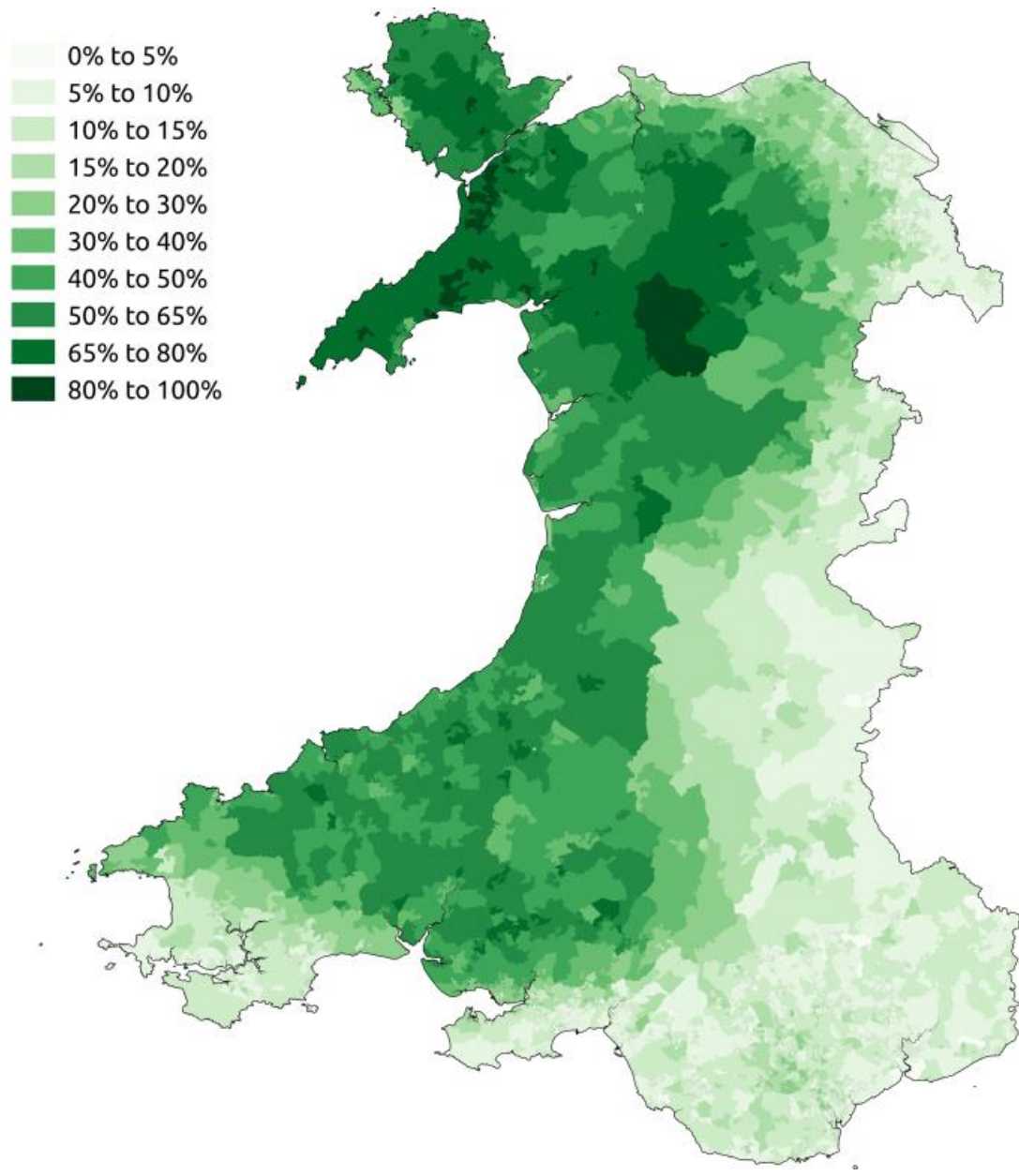
FACTOR 2: ABSOLUTE NUMBER OF SPEAKERS

FACTOR 3. PROPORTION OF SPEAKERS WITHIN THE OVERALL POPULATION

- 5** All speak the language
- 4** Nearly all speak the language.
- 3** A majority speak the language.
- 2** A minority speak the language.
- 1** Very few speak the language.

EXAMPLE: WELSH IN WALES

«The United Kingdom Census 2011 counted 3.1 million residents of Wales, 27% (837,000) of whom had been born outside Wales,^[11] and 73% (2.2 million) of whom reported having no Welsh language skills. **Of residents of Wales aged three and over, 19% (562,000) reported being able to speak Welsh,** and 77% of these were able to speak, read and write the language (making 431,000 – 15% of the total population).» (Wikipedia)



The proportion of respondents in the 2011 census who said they could speak Welsh.

(Wikipedia)

«**Gwynedd** has the highest proportion of people in Wales who can speak Welsh. According to the 2011 Census, **65.4% of Gwynedd residents aged three and over stated that they could speak Welsh.**^[4]

The proportion of Welsh speakers in Gwynedd declined between 1991 and 2001,^[5] from 72.1% to 68.7%—^[5] even though the proportion of Welsh speakers in Wales as a whole increased during that decade, to 20.5%. The Annual Population Survey conducted in **2016 estimates that 71.0%** of people three years old and above in Gwynedd can speak Welsh.^[6]


[...] **The highest percentages of Welsh speakers in Gwynedd are within the 5-15 age group, with 92.3%** of those people stating that they could speak Welsh.^[7] »(Wikipedia)

F4. SHIFTS IN DOMAINS OF LANGUAGE USE

- 5 Universal use:** The language is spoken in all domains.
- 4 Multilingual parity:** Two or more languages may be used in most social domains and for most functions.
- 3 Dwindling domains:** The language is used in home domains and for many functions, but the dominant language begins to penetrate even home domains.
- 2 Limited or formal domains:** The language is used in limited social domains and for several functions.
- 1 Highly limited domains:** The language is used only in a very restricted number of domains and for very few functions.

EXAMPLES OF IMPORTANT DOMAINS OF LANGUAGE USE (FROM HORNSBY 2014)

- ❖ home
- ❖ public encounters
- ❖ recreation
- ❖ public market
- ❖ work
- ❖ religious gatherings
- ❖ commerce
- ❖ mass media
- ❖ formal education
- ❖ formal public functions



«Note that multilingualism is a fact of life in most areas of the world. Speakers do *not* have to be monolingual for their language to be vital. However, it is crucial that the indigenous language serve *a meaningful function* in culturally important domains.»

UNESCO 2003

F5. RESPONSE TO NEW DOMAINS AND MEDIA

- 5 Dynamic.** The language is used in all new domains.
- 4 Robust/active.** The language is used in most new domains.
- 3 Receptive.** The language is used in many new domains.
- 2 Coping.** The language is used in some new domains.
- 1 Minimal.** The language is used only in a few new domains.

WHAT ARE NEW DOMAINS?

FACTOR 6: AVAILABILITY OF WRITTEN MATERIAL

- 5 There is an **established orthography and a literacy tradition** with grammars, dictionaries, texts, literature and everyday media. Writing in the language is used in administration and education.
- 4 Written materials exist, **and at school, children are developing literacy in the language**. Writing in the language is not used in administration.
- 3 Written materials exist and children may be exposed to the written form at school. **Literacy is not promoted** through print media.
- 2 Written materials exist, but they may only be useful for some members of the community; for others, they may have a symbolic significance. Literacy education in the language is not a part of the school curriculum.

FACTOR 7: OFFICIAL ATTITUDES AND POLICIES

- 5 Equal support:** All of a country's languages are valued as assets. All languages are protected by law, and the government encourages the maintenance of all languages by implementing explicit policies.
- 4 Differentiated support:** Minority languages are protected primarily as the language of private domains. The use of the language is prestigious.
- 3 Passive assimilation:** The dominant group is indifferent as to whether or not minority languages are spoken, as long as the dominant group's language is the language of interaction. No explicit policy exists for minority languages.

FACTOR 7 (CONTINUED)

- 2 Active assimilation:** The government encourages minority groups to abandon their own languages by providing education for the minority group members in the dominant language. Speaking and/or writing in non-dominant languages is not encouraged.
- 1 Forced assimilation:** The government has an explicit language policy declaring the dominant group's language to be the only official national language, while the languages of subordinate groups are neither recognized nor supported.
- 0 Prohibition:** Minority languages are prohibited from use in any domain. They may be tolerated in private domains.

FACTOR 8: SPEAKERS' ATTITUDE

- 5** All members value their language and wish to see it promoted.
- 4** Most members support language maintenance.
- 3** Many members support language maintenance; others are indifferent or may even support language loss.
- 2** Some members support language maintenance; others are indifferent or may even support language loss.
- 1** Only a few members support language maintenance; others are indifferent or may even support language loss.
- 0** No one cares if the language is lost; all prefer to use a dominant language.

FACTOR 9: NATURE OF LANGUAGE DOCUMENTATION

- 5 Superlative.** There are comprehensive grammars and dictionaries, extensive texts, and a constant flow of language materials.
- 4 Good.** There is one good grammar and a number of adequate grammars, dictionaries, texts, literature and occasionally updated everyday media.
- 3 Fair.** There may be an adequate grammar or sufficient numbers of grammars, dictionaries and texts but no everyday media.

FACTOR 9 CONTINUED

- 2 Fragmentary.** There are some grammatical sketches, word-lists and texts useful for limited linguistic research but with inadequate coverage. Audio and video recordings of varying quality, with or without any annotation, may exist.
- 1 Inadequate.** There are only a few grammatical sketches, short word-lists and fragmentary texts. Audio and video recordings do not exist, are of unusable quality or are completely un-annotated.

HOMework

Read this chapter to broaden your understanding of today's topic:
<http://languagesindanger.eu/book-of-knowledge/language-endangerment/>

Find an endangered language which you want to present in class.
Additional sources where to find a language:

<http://dobes.mpi.nl/> (go to „Documentation projects”)

<http://www.elar-archive.org/index.php>

<http://languagesindanger.eu/book-of-knowledge/list-of-languages/>

Youtube: 25 most endangered languages

at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jeGiMSbgGQY>

Or consult this book (e-book available through the library):
Brenzinger, Matthias, ed. 2007. *Language diversity endangered*.
Berlin, New York: Mouton de Gruyter.