

Languages: Expansion Or Extinction?

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Abstract: *Language is the road map of a culture. It tells you where its people come from and where they are going.*

Rita Mae Brown

Language is the divine gift of the God. It is the ability to acquire and use complex system of communication, particularly the human ability to do so, and a language is specific example of such a system. It is finest asset of man, and this distinguished a man from the animal. Without language we cannot communicate with the other peoples. Now we are all living in the multilingual world i.e. becoming globalized, so it is very important to know more than one language. In today's era, the basic knowledge of a one or more than one language has become crucial. It has become the major tool of communication between countries, cultural groups, various organizations, communities etc. Basically it is a bridge which connects individual to the outside world. It is like a vehicle that we use in presenting our ideas, thoughts, feelings and opinion to the world. Language includes speaking, writing and making gestures or body movements. Early human ancestors began using spoken language several millions years ago. Human began writing about five thousand years ago. It made it possible for human societies to develop.

Keywords: *Language, Divine, Communication, Multilingual, Globalization.*

Language is a system of conventional spoken or written symbols shared by people in a culture and used to communicate with one another. It's a system of communication used by a particular country or community. Language has a number of characteristics but the important which are playing a specific role i.e. arbitrary, productive, creative, systematic, vocalic, social, non-instinctive and conventional. The main functions of language include communication, the expression of identity, play, imaginative expression and emotional release.

Questions concerning the philosophy of language such as whether words can represent experience have been debated since Georgian and Plato in ancient Greece. Thinkers like Rousseau has argued that language originated from the emotions, Kant has held that it originated from rational and logical thought. The philosophers of twentieth century like Wittgenstein argued that philosophy is really the study of language. Major figures in this field include Ferdinand de Saussure, Noam Chomsky etc.

Languages evolve and diversify over time and the history of their evolution can be reconstructed by comparing modern

languages to determine which traits their ancestral languages must have had in order for the later developmental stages to occur. A group of languages that descend from a common ancestor is known as a language family.

There are about 6900 languages currently spoken in the world and these languages belong to the ninety four different language families i.e. group of languages who share their origin. According to Ethnologue which is of sixteenth edition, there are approximately 147 language families in the world. There are the top ten language families i.e. Indo-European, Sino-Tibetan, Niger- Congo, Afro-asiatic, Austronesian, Dravidian, Altaic, Japanese, Austro-Asiatic and Tai-Kadai and approximately their number of speakers' i.e. 2.562 billion, 1.276 billion, 358 million, 340 million, 312 million, 222 million, 145 million, 123 million, 101 million, 78 million. Number of languages that are nearly too extinct is 516. Sumerian or Egyptian is the first language ever written about 3200 BC.

The Indo-European family is the most widely spoken and includes languages as diverse as English, Russian and Hindi etc, the Sino-Tibetan family which includes Mandarin, Bodo

and the other Chinese languages and Tibetan, Afro-Asiatic family which includes Arabic, Somali and Hebrew, the Dravidian family that are mostly spoken in southern India include Tamil, Telgu etc. academic consensus hold that between 50% and 90% of languages spoken at the beginning of the 21st century will probably have become extinct by the year 2100.

Language endangerment is a serious concern to which linguists and language planners have turned their attention in the last several decades. For a variety of reasons, speakers of many smaller, less dominant languages stop using their heritage language and begin using another. Parents may begin to use only that second language which is taught in school to their children and slowly and gradually the intergenerational transmission of the heritage language is reduced and may even stop. As a result there may be no speakers or very few who use the language as their first or primary language and eventually the language may no longer be used at all. A language may become extinct or existing only in recordings or in written records and transcriptions. Languages which have not been adequately documented disappear altogether.

Language endangerment occurs when a language is at risk of falling out of use as its speakers die out or shift to speaking another language. Language loss occurs when the language has no more native speakers and becomes a dead language. If no one speaks the language at all and it becomes an extinct language while languages have always gone extinct throughout human history; they have been disappearing at an accelerated rate in the 20th and 21st centuries due to the processes of globalization and neo-colonialism where the economically powerful languages dominate the other languages. The more commonly spoken languages dominate the less commonly spoken languages, so the less commonly spoken languages eventually disappear from population. The exact total number of languages in the world is not known. Estimates vary depending on many factors. The consensus is that there are between 6000-7000 languages spoken as of 2010 and that between 50-90% of those will have become extinct by the year 2100. The top 20 languages which are spoken by more than 50 million speakers each are spoken by 50% of the world's population, and where as many of the other languages are spoken by small communities most of them with less than 10,000 speakers. Language deaths should not be confused with language attrition also known as language loss, which describes the loss of proficiency in a first language of an individual.

Language endangerment is a matter of degree. At one corner of the scale are languages that are active, and are even expanding in numbers of speakers or functional areas of use, but nevertheless exist under the shadow of a more dominant language. At the other corner, few languages that are on the verge of extinction i.e., loss of all individuals who continue to identify the language as being related to their identity. In between are many degrees of greater or lesser vitality.

There are two dimensions to the characterization of endangerment, 1) The number of users who identify with a particular language and the number and 2) nature of the uses or functions for which the language is employed. A language may be endangered because there are people less in numbers who claim that language as their own and neither uses it nor

pass it on to their children. It may also be endangered because it is not being used for daily activities, so loses the characteristically close association of the language with particular social or communicative functions. Form follows function and languages which are being used for fewer and fewer domains of life also tend to lose structural complexity, which in turn may affect the perceptions of users regarding the suitability of the language for use in a broader set of functions. This can lead to a downward spiral which eventually results in the complete loss of the language.

Ethnologue reports data that are indicators of the two major dimensions of language use i.e., users and functions. When data are available, we report the following factors which may contribute to the assessment of language endangerment:

- ✓ The speaker population
- ✓ The ethnic population; the number of those who connect their ethnic identity with the language whether or not they speak the language
- ✓ The stability of and trends in that population size
- ✓ Residency and migration patterns of speakers
- ✓ The use of second languages
- ✓ The use of the language by others as a second language
- ✓ Language attitudes within the community
- ✓ The age range of the speakers
- ✓ The domains of use of the language
- ✓ Official recognition of languages within the nation or region
- ✓ Means of transmission whether children are learning the language at home or being taught the language in schools
- ✓ Non-linguistic factors such as economic opportunity or the lack thereof

Such factors interact within a society in dynamic ways that are not entirely predictable but which do follow recognizable patterns and trends.

The concern about language endangerment is centered, first and foremost, around the factors which motivate speakers to abandon their language and the social and psychological consequences of language death for the community of (former) speakers of that language. Since language is closely linked to culture, loss of language almost always is accompanied by social and cultural disruptions. More broadly, the intangible heritage of all of human society is diminished when a language disappears. Secondly, those concerned about language endangerment recognize the implications of the loss of linguistic diversity both for the linguistic and social environment generally and for the academic community which is devoted to the study of language as a human phenomenon.

Anthropologist Akira Yamamoto has identified nine factors and that he believes will help prevent language death:

- ✓ There must be a dominant culture that favors linguistic diversity.
- ✓ The endangered community must possess an ethnic identity that is strong enough to encourage language preservation.
- ✓ The creation and promotion of programmes that educate students on the endangered language and culture.
- ✓ The creation of school programmes that are both bilingual and bicultural.
- ✓ For native speakers to receive teacher training.

- ✓ The endangered speech community must be completely involved.
 - ✓ There must be languages materials created that are easy to use.
 - ✓ The language must have written materials that encompass new and traditional content.
 - ✓ The language must be used in new environment and the areas the language is used (both old and new) must be strengthened.
- Language shapes thought and emotions, determining one's perception of reality.

Benjamin Whorf.

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