

Will Indigenous Languages Survive?

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Abstract

Much attention has been focused on the survival of Indigenous languages in recent years. Many, particularly anthropologists and linguists, anticipate the demise of the majority of Indigenous languages within this century and have called on the need to arrest the loss of languages. Opinions vary concerning the loss of language; some regard it as a hopeless cause, and others see language revitalization as a major responsibility of linguistics and kindred disciplines. To that end, this review explores efforts in language revitalization and documentation and the engagement with Indigenous peoples. It remains unclear why some attempts at language revitalization succeed, whereas others fail. What is clear is that the process is profoundly political.

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WHAT ARE INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES?

Broadly defined, an Indigenous language is any language that is “native” to a particular area. On this basis, Hawaiian is indigenous to Hawaii notwithstanding that it originally came from somewhere else, whereas the English used in Hawaii is non-Indigenous. Mandarin could be described as an Indigenous language of China along with a number of other less prominent languages. But how long does it take for a language that has migrated into a new setting to become an Indigenous language? For instance, should one regard Yiddish (Fishman 2001b) or the Spanish of Puerto Ricans in New York City (Garcia et al. 2001) as Indigenous languages? Each has had a presence in New York City for ~100 years and has by now achieved a status and nature distinct from their parent languages. Clearly the definition of an Indigenous language will be a matter of degree. No one is likely to argue that Hawaiian is a language indigenous to Hawaii, whereas some may claim that the

Portuguese of Brazil is simply a variant of a language indigenous to Portugal, and the “real” Indigenous languages are those spoken by minorities: typically small-scale groups such as those captured in “Small Languages and Small Language Communities” in the *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*. In this account this narrower sense is usually adopted even if its precise definition remains elusive.

In addressing the question of the survival of Indigenous languages we must also consider how this question articulates with endangered languages. To put it briefly, Indigenous languages overlap with endangered languages but are not coextensive: Some Indigenous languages (in the narrower sense at least) are not endangered languages. For example, Crowley (1998) sees many Indigenous languages in the Pacific as not being endangered. However, Dixon (1991) sees many of these languages as endangered. Therefore, what counts as endangered is contested by linguistics scholars. Even a “large” language such as Catalan, with a speaker population of more than 11,000,000, can be regarded as endangered (Mir 2004; see also Strubell 2001). The assessment is complicated by the vast range of situations involving Indigenous languages.

THE RANGE OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE SITUATIONS

In recent years, a considerable amount of literature has appeared on language endangerment and language revitalization, and much of this refers specifically to Indigenous language situations. Among the more comprehensive collections of papers are Robins & Uhlenbeck (1991), Brenzinger (1992) (with a focus on East Africa), Fishman (2001a), Grenoble & Whaley (1998), Matsumura (1998), Hinton & Hale (2001), Bradley & Bradley (2002b), and Janse & Tol (2003), to mention a few. And organizations such as the Foundation for Endangered Languages have produced a series of conference proceedings including Blythe & Brown (2003)

and Argenter & Brown (2004). Entire issues of journals have been devoted to these issues, including *American Anthropologist* (2003, Vol. 105, Issue 4), on language ideologies, rights, and choices and dilemmas and paradoxes of loss, retention, and revitalization; *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* (1999, Vol. 30, Issue 1), on issues of authenticity and identity in Indigenous language education; *Current Issues in Language Planning* (2001, Vol. 2, Issues 2 and 3), on language planning and language revival; the *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* (1998, Vol. 132), on Indigenous language use and change in the Americas; *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* (2000, Vol. 21, Issue 5), on language, nationalism, and minority rights; *Practicing Anthropology* (1999, Vol. 21, Issue 2), on reversing language shift; and a substantial portion of *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* (2002, Vol. 12, Issue 2), on the discourse of language endangerment. Also, numerous Web sites are devoted to endangered languages, among them being the UNESCO Red Book of Endangered Languages (<http://www.tooyoo.l.u-tokyo.ac.jp/Redbook/index.html>), which itself has many links to other Web sites of interest.

Individual monographs have appeared on general themes (Abley 2003, Crystal 2000, Dalby 2003, McWhorter 2001, Nettle & Romaine 2000) or on specific languages [House (2002) on Navajo; King (2000) on Quichua; Stebbins (2003) on Sm'algyax]. Compared with the literature on these themes in the 1980s and earlier, there has been an exponential growth in the past 10–15 years. Why such interest?

Many would link the increased attention to a series of articles appearing in the Linguistic Society of America's journal, *Language*, in 1992 (Hale et al. 1992). Perhaps the most famous of these is "The World's Languages in Crisis" (Krauss 1992), in which the general picture is one of widespread disaster that is only likely to get worse. According to Krauss we can expect to lose half of the world's ~6000 languages this century, and by the end

of this century most of the languages still left will be endangered. Whether one agrees with Krauss's gloomy predictions, there has been a tremendous outpouring of effort to document, preserve, and revitalize Indigenous languages since Krauss's clarion call to the linguistic community. It is, of course, not Krauss alone who has triggered this interest, but his is one of the most often quoted statements on the state of the world's languages.

In a brief survey like the *Annual Review* it is possible to give only a flavor of the diversity of Indigenous language situations rather than provide detail on their social, political, and economic contexts. In one account alone (Ash et al. 2001), we find examples of language maintenance or restoration in remote Australia, in Nicaragua, in Boston, and for Belfast Irish. Irish is an interesting case because it is seen by many as a failure in the attempt to maintain an Indigenous language (e.g., Ahlqvist 2002, Carnie 1996, O Dochartaigh 2000): "...[T]he smell of failure has hung around the 'revival' movement like a corrosive fog for decades" (McCloskey 2001, p. 43). Nevertheless we are told, "Irish currently has perhaps 20,000 or 30,000 native speakers among whom are reasonably large numbers of young people. In addition, it has perhaps 100,000 people who use the language regularly in their daily routines.... There is little chance that Irish will become moribund (at least in the technical sense) in the next 100 years" (p. 45).

Such differences of opinion are not confined to Irish. The Pacific is an area of great linguistic diversity and small populations of speakers. This is an area where we would anticipate little chance of survival for Indigenous languages, a view shared by Dixon (1991) and Mühlhäusler (1996). However Crowley (1995) is much more optimistic than are some commentators and suggests that one should not be concerned by small language populations: Linguistic behavior is what is important and on that basis it turns out that there is "no immediate prospect of large-scale language shift, despite the very small average size of

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization

individual languages” (p. 335; see also Crowley 1998). And what about Africa? This is an important area because Africa has ~2000 languages, i.e., around one third of the world’s languages. Brenzinger et al. (1991) are negative (see also Brenzinger 1992), but Mous (2003) informs us that “[m]ost African languages are not on the verge of extinction and many smaller languages, i.e., languages with fewer than 50,000 speakers, are quite stable and do not show reduction in number of speakers” (p. 157). I return later to consider some of the reasons for such divergent opinions.

Let us return to some situations in which Indigenous languages have a major position in a modern nation-state. In Guatemala, Mayan languages are spoken among a majority of the population, and the languages are all closely related; so it is possible to have a more unified approach to Mayan language revitalization. Mayas in Guatemala are now using their languages in schools, and they are taking steps toward gaining official recognition of their languages (England 1998). Similar to Ireland, New Zealand has had mixed opinions on the success of its language maintenance efforts. Spolsky’s (2003) measured assessment reflects how difficult it can be to achieve success even when there has been a vast investment of community and government support: “[T]here has not yet been language revitalization in the sense of the restoration of natural intergenerational transmission. Balancing this, there is good evidence that language loss has been checked, and that school-related and community-approved processes are leading to steady-state language maintenance” (p. 571).

In the real estate business there is an old proverb: location, location. It is clear that some attempts at language revitalization succeed because of where the language community happens to be. This means that for language communities that straddle the artificial borders, which have arisen from colonization, one part of the community is better off than is the other. So the Ojibwe north of the Canadian border are better resourced

than the Ojibwe to the south in the United States (R. Rhodes, personal communication). Within Australia the state of New South Wales is much better resourced than the state of Queensland (M. Walsh, personal observations). An Indigenous language like Quichua receives different treatment in Ecuador, Bolivia, and Peru (Grinevald 1998, Hornberger & King 1998, King 2000). Even more problematic is the case of the Garifuna community, which spans Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, St. Vincent, and also the United States (Langworthy 2002).

It is useful now to consider the range of language types. Prominent among these are contact varieties, such as pidgins, creoles, and lingua francas. Pidgins arise in a contact situation where a simplified language taking features from more than one language is used to meet fairly basic communicative requirements. The process of simplification is pidginization. In contrast with pidgins that have no native speakers, a creole can emerge when a pidgin becomes more developed (through creolization) to meet a fuller range of communicative requirements and, crucially, becomes a community’s mother tongue. A lingua franca is a common language used for routine communication by groups of people who speak different local languages, such as Swahili in parts of Africa. In some cases, Mühlhäusler (1998, p. 154) claims that pidgins are important to language ecologies as buffers, allowing a continued diversity of local languages as the requirement to communicate across cultures is met by these pidgins, leaving local languages relatively unaffected. However, as the pidgins become creoles they can become linguistic predators in their own right. Battibo (2001, p. 312) sees Indigenous *lingue franché* as a danger to other Indigenous languages. To the extent that the processes involved in pidginization are similar to language shift, there may be lessons to be learned when looking at Indigenous language situations (Goodfellow & Alfred 2002). In the midst of all the supposed death of traditional languages, new Indigenous languages are

appearing, for instance Copper Island Aleut. This hybrid of Russian morphology with an Aleut lexical base is claimed to result from a situation in which language shift ceased before it became complete (Vakhtin 1998).

Indigenous languages may also employ a different modality, e.g., sign languages. Such Indigenous languages can be vulnerable because recent technologies have made it possible for people to be “saved” from being deaf, in particular, the sign language of the Australian Deaf community, Auslan (Johnston 2004). This can be a deeply divisive issue because people are faced with the choice of joining the mainstream or potentially being disadvantaged by sticking with their Indigenous sign language. The same applies to Norwegian Sign language (Vonen & Hjulstad 2004). Describing the situation in Thailand, Nonaka (2004) complains that there has been much more emphasis on national sign languages to the virtual exclusion of what she refers to as “Indigenous sign languages”—those restricted in use to small communities in Thailand. This example displays the difficulty in deciding what to label Indigenous. In Australia the “national” sign language is used only by a tiny proportion of the population, albeit dispersed with regional variations, so to that extent, the number of speakers is “small”; meanwhile, little is known about the other “Indigenous” sign languages used by Australia’s Indigenous peoples [notwithstanding the excellent coverage by Kendon (1988)]. In my view, the national sign language, Auslan, is Indigenous to Australia: After all, where else is it used? Are we to call Australia’s Aboriginal sign languages more Indigenous? In any case, the point made by Nonaka is valid: Discussions about the survival of Indigenous languages tend largely to ignore sign languages in general, let alone those that are more highly localized.

In considering the range of language situations, it should be noted that particular cultural practices can assist as well as hinder the survival of Indigenous languages. In northern Australia, Gurr-goni has a tiny speaker

population, but there is a cultural imperative that children should learn their father’s language. As a result, their mothers, who are mostly not Gurr-goni, teach the children after they have learned it themselves (Green 2003). Concerning Ilgar, another Indigenous language of northern Australia, Evans (2001) observes, “On the other hand, he never talks it [Ilgar] to his own sisters, both of whom do speak Ilgar, because of a strict taboo on conversation between opposite-sex siblings. This leaves him in the odd position of talking his mother-tongue to people who don’t speak it, and not talking it with the couple of people who do” (p. 278).

Language endangerment has been around for a long time. Hill (1978, p. 69) estimates at least half the world’s languages have disappeared in the past 500 years. Dalby (2003) considers the spread of Greek and Latin throughout the Mediterranean world and concludes that of the ~60 languages originally spoken in the Mediterranean area in 100 B.C.E., only 10 survived. Among those displaced were Etruscan, Gaulish, Iberian, Oscan, and Punic, and we know little of these languages; however, Punic, the language of Carthage, “continues” in the Latin expression of greeting, *ave*. In the recent scholarly focus on language death and survival, the tendency has been to ignore the fact that languages have ebbed and flowed for millennia.

MEASURING ENDANGERMENT: LANGUAGE VITALITY AND DECLINE

Which Indigenous languages are endangered, and to what extent are schemes for evaluating endangerment suitable for the range of situations encountered with Indigenous languages? Perhaps the best known scheme is the eight-stage Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) proposed by Fishman (1991). In brief, GIDS provides a sociolinguistic taxonomy for endangered languages. At one end (stage 8) an endangered language needs to be reconstituted before

B.C.E.: before common era

GIDS: Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale

it can be restored as a vernacular. In stage 6, certainly one of the most critical in the scale, informal, intergenerational communication in the language needs to have geographic/demographic concentration and institutional reinforcement. Stage 5 extends the focus from mainly oral communication in stage 6 to literacy. Stages 4 and below bring on functional expansion: schools, then in other cultural institutions like higher education, government, and the media.

This has attracted criticism and calls for modification [for instance, Lo Bianco & Rhydwen (2001) propose modifications to the basic GIDS approach for Australian Indigenous languages]. Bourhis (2001, p. 103) has set out structural variables affecting ethnolinguistic vitality—"seen as a necessary tool of analysis complementing the reversing language shift model proposed by Fishman (1991)"—applied to French Quebec, which happens to be one of the very few, generally acknowledged success stories in terms of reversing language shift. Hinton (2003, p. 51) notes that the emphasis for GIDS has been on European languages rather than Indigenous languages of the Americas or Australia. She also observes that the role of literacy may be quite different in these latter contexts in that there is rarely a long tradition of literacy (2003, pp. 52–53), and because the GIDS approach has an emphasis on literacy it may not be the most appropriate model in these contexts. Building on Edwards (1992), Grenoble & Whaley (1998b) propose a typology of language endangerment in which there is an array of microvariables and macrovariables and literacy is given prominence. Applying their own framework to a number of case studies, they already see the need for improvement in the model. Another model on language ecology is provided by Mühlhäusler (1996) in which a range of factors in the environment of a language are considered. In particular he considers the role of the linguist: "The ecological metaphor in my view is action oriented. It shifts the attention from linguists being players of academic language games to be-

coming shop stewards for linguistic diversity, and to addressing moral, economic and other 'nonlinguistic' issues" (p. 2). In this approach, fundamental questions include, what is the home for this language, and what resources will be needed to support it? The former question invites one to look at contexts of language use (family/local; community/township; regional; national), identities associated with language use, and the communicative functions of the language used. Furthermore, Mühlhäusler (2002b) argues that one cannot preserve a language, although one can preserve language ecologies. The model has been applied in a range of situations (Amery 2000, 2001; Mühlhäusler 2002a), but it has not been without criticism (e.g., Crowley 1998, 1999; Edwards 2001). Edwards is particularly annoyed about Westerners taking on an exaggerated approval of small-scale societies and their local knowledges while disdaining their own society, and he wonders, "how many of those academic researchers and writers who wax poetic about what is indigenous and small actually alter lifestyles themselves" (2001, p. 237).

Apart from such general discussions, a number of commentators have set out to enumerate degrees of endangerment: We have already seen Fishman's eight-stage GIDS. Describing the demise of languages in Canada, Kincaid (1991) presents five levels running from "viable" to "extinct." Another five-level classification is proposed by Wurm (1998, p. 192), but the terms do not quite coincide. And, in discussing Australia's Indigenous languages, McConwell & Thieberger (2001, pp. 55–56) set up a language-endangerment index. This remains an evolving process in which new schemes continue to emerge and older schemes are refined. A primary difficulty is establishing the level of competence of speakers in this numbers game.

Some scholars claim that a minimum number of speakers/learners are needed to allow Indigenous languages to survive. For instance, Krauss (1992) suggests that a language needs 100,000 speakers to be "safe" and that

a language with fewer than 10,000 speakers should be regarded as “endangered.” By this measure, ~600, or 10%, of the world’s 6000 languages are “safe” and some 60% of the world’s languages are “endangered” now. Within the 90% of “unsafe” languages there are concentrations of potential disaster: For the Australia/Pacific region, 99.5% of the languages have fewer than 100,000 speakers (Nettle & Romaine 2000, p. 40). For Mexican languages, Garza-Cuarón & Lastra (1991, p. 97) propose a minimum threshold of 500 speakers. More generally, George (quoted in Wright 1995, p. 219) declares that “[n]umbers are fundamental . . . There is a certain critical mass. As soon as you have that size of group, that number of speakers, then maintenance or revival becomes feasible.”

But what is that critical mass and how does one determine its size? Tonkin (2003, p. 323) reminds us how difficult it is to decide where one language ends and another one starts and how problematic are statistics on numbers of speakers (see also de Vries 1992). Nevertheless “many linguists, and many popular writers on linguistics, seem perfectly content to quote figures they know are, at best, imprecise (Tonkin 2003, p. 323). Referring to Coast Tsimshian, a language of northwest British Columbia in Canada, Stebbins (2002, pp. 67–68) points out that being a speaker is not just a matter of having the knowledge but having the right to display that knowledge so that today’s “nonspeakers” will later be teaching the language to others. In effect, it is culturally inappropriate to reveal one’s level of linguistic competence until one has reached a certain age and status within the community. A similar practice is reported for Aboriginal Australia (Evans 2001). In any case, only rarely have researchers undertaken the kind of fine-grained linguistic demography carried out for Canada’s Indigenous languages as a whole (e.g., Norris 2003, 2004) or for Nunavut in particular (Tulloch 2004). In an insightful paper, Evans (2001, p. 250) explores the notion of “last speaker” and demonstrates “the way in which the broader social system

determines individuals’ perceived right to be a speaker, as well as their linguistic performance.” His is just one of a number of studies showing the gap between language competence and use (see also Ferrer & Sankoff 2004).

LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE AND REVITALIZATION STRATEGIES

There is a considerable range of strategies for maintaining or revitalizing Indigenous languages. Advice has been around for some time (Brandt & Ayoungman 1989), but some attempts have been more successful. Targeting particular language situations may be one way to improve these efforts, so a range of terminology has sprung up to differentiate, for example, between language maintenance and language revival, where methods may be employed for a language with a substantial number of speakers (which will be different to methods used on a language with no speakers at all). There are terms such “language degeneration” (Craig 1997), “language displacement” (Brenzinger 1997), “language revascularization” (Spolsky & Shohamy 2001), and “language regeneration” (Paulston et al. 1993). The discussion of the competing terminologies and their implications for intervention in what I refer to here as “language maintenance and revitalization strategies” could take up a whole paper in itself: Suffice it to say, the terminology is still in flux.

Intervention can be handled at a regional, state, or national level and can be channeled through educational or technological means. I return to the role of technology later. Educational strategies have received a good deal of attention in the literature, and a good starting point on this is the Web page called “Teaching Indigenous Languages” (<http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~jar/TIL.html>). For languages with few speakers, the Master-Apprentice system, which essentially involves an older speaker working on a one-on-one basis with a nonspeaker (Hinton 1997, 2002),

has been developed in California but has been taken up by others. Another approach is immersion, and there can be degrees of immersion (Hale 2001). As one would expect, many language programs are handled through schools, but there can be a danger that the Indigenous community will think that schools can handle the “problem” (Maffi 2003, p. 73). Within schools, should the Indigenous language be treated like any other school subject (geography, history, science) (Hinton 2001b, p. 7)? If it is, then there will be insufficient time to gain fluency unless it is supplemented with other, nonschool-based activity. Too often language revitalization efforts end up with minimal knowledge of the language. One response is to enrich the language for advanced learners and users: Just as some second language learners of English need to acquire an academic register, some Indigenous language programs are consciously seeking to achieve this goal, for instance academic Navajo abilities (Arviso & Holm 2001, p. 205) (see also Slate 2001).

The involvement of Indigenous people in the process is important in many ways. Some Indigenous people have ended up using linguistic archives (Hinton 2001d) as part of the process. More generally, Indigenous people have gained training in a range of suitable skills for language revitalization. One leader in this arena has been the American Indian Languages Development Institute (McCarty et al. 2001) (see also Hobson 2004). More generally again, some communities have gone through a careful planning process to meet Indigenous needs (Patterson 2002) (see also Linn et al. 2002). And within an even wider strategy, regional or national language policy can play a role (Grenoble & Whaley 1999, Spolsky & Shohamy 2000).

On the flip side, some strategies/practices can be divisive and self-defeating. Too often, resources developed for a tiny language community will not be shared with a neighboring Indigenous language community using the “same” language. For example, Greenlandish is seen as a linguistic role model by the Inuit

in Nunavut, but the resources are not shared because of a view that the dialects are too different and, in any case, the writing systems differ; however among the Inuit, some groups do not share resources with other Inuit, even though the writing systems are the same (S. Tulloch, personal communication). There are also shaming practices: A misplaced expectation about the competence of younger speakers can trigger criticism from older speakers, the end result being that those younger speakers are reluctant to use their language (Hill 2001).

Then there are what some scholars have referred to as “avoidance strategies” (Dauenhauer & Dauenhauer 1998). In brief, many Indigenous people are faced with a very formidable task: regaining their ancestral language when they have no active command of it, and there is few resources to assist them. For those of Irish descent, it is relatively easy to become a speaker of Irish: There are abundant resources and courses. Even so, most of us would tend to make this a lower priority than it needs to be if we are to gain adequate fluency. In short, it is a major commitment to learn a language from scratch as an adult and achieve passable fluency. There is little wonder then that some Indigenous people defer active language learning. In the meantime, other activities may be engaged in that are, indeed, worthy but will not, of themselves, achieve the goal of regaining the language. These activities include traditional dancing, discussions on intellectual property, and the uses of technology.

I now briefly consider the role of technology in language revitalization. The populations of Indigenous languages are often fairly small but geographically dispersed. This has necessarily spawned a focus on technology as a way of handling this tyranny of distance. One example is the First Voices Project (<http://www.firstvoices.com>), which seeks to provide “web-based tools and services designed to support Aboriginal people engaged in language archiving, language teaching and culture revitalization.” Overall this is a vast

topic (Eisenlohr 2004), so I simply flag it here.

Technology can be used for online courses, e.g., Ward (2001) on Nawat (aka Pipil) (see also Ward 2003), as a means of bridging the supposed gap between documentation and revitalization. Audiotaping samples of a range of languages can be a first step in documentation (e.g., Moore 2001). And there are numerous arrangements for acquiring and archiving documentation, for example, the DOBES (dokumentation bedrohter sprachen/documentation of endangered languages) model, funded through the Volkswagen Foundation (Wittenburg 2003). For a general understanding of this enterprise, a good starting point is the Digital Endangered Languages and Musics Archive Network (<http://www.delaman.org/>). There can be mixed results: “Throughout the last two years our multiple attempts at digital video recording of the last handful of Wichita (Caddoan, North America) speakers not only did not generate much new Wichita, it did not even regenerate any data of the quality that was recorded over 30 years ago” (Rood & Mirzayan 2004).

More generally there can be many pitfalls for technology. For instance, CDs have been produced with great effort and expense only to be quickly used in the first place (some children have become bored with them in minutes) and later have become unusable CDs. Technology used effectively can be of assistance, but people need advice about general principles of good practice in the care of CDs/other technology. For instance Bird & Simons (2003) provide detailed advice about language documentation, and Buszard-Welcher (2001) (e-published and updated at http://www.potawatomilang.org/Reference/endlgsweb_update.html) poses the question, can the Web save my language? She then provides some of the answers. Another major resource in this area is the Web site on technology-enhanced language revitalization at the University of Arizona (<http://projects.ltc.arizona.edu/gates/TELR.html>).

This group also sponsors the Indigenous Languages and Technology (ILAT) discussion list (<http://projects.ltc.arizona.edu/gates/ilat.html>), in which advice can be given and issues aired. A kindred list, Resource Network for Linguistic Diversity (<http://www.linguistics.unimelb.edu.au/RNLD.html>), focuses on languages in the Australia-Pacific region but has value for a much wider group of practitioners. Finally, the E-MELD (Electronic Metastructure for Endangered Languages Data) project provides advice on best practice for data archiving and retrieval (<http://linguist.emich.edu/~workshop/E-MELD.html>).

LIVING (?) LANGUAGES, PRESERVATION, AND THE ROLE OF LINGUISTS

To set the scene, consider this statement by two Tlingit oral historians, Dora Marks Dauenhauer and Richard Dauenhauer: “Preservation . . . is what we do to berries in jam jars and salmon in cans . . . Books and recordings can preserve languages, but only people and communities can keep them alive” (quoted in Maffi 2003, p. 67).

A spectrum of opinion has formed regarding Indigenous languages, ranging from those who see both documentation and revitalization as important goals to those who believe that both the documentation and revitalization of such languages is basically a waste of time. The latter view is perhaps more likely to be found among at least some nonlinguists—like the stereotypical cab driver who asks what you do for a living and then wonders why anyone would bother collecting stuff on Indigenous languages, let alone revitalizing them. Among linguists, this view by now is usually regarded as politically incorrect, so it is unlikely that any linguist is going to be making such pronouncements.

Of course, many linguists see documentation as an essential prerequisite for revitalization. Certainly revitalization efforts for languages such as Kaurna (Amery 2000) have

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relied on a substantial documentary base from the nineteenth century and, for Miami, (Hinton 2001c, Hinton & Baldwin 2004) on earlier sources as well. But others are skeptical about the validity of revitalization. Dixon (1991), for example, complains,

Many grants have been made to (Australian Aboriginal) communities where a language ceased to be spoken many years in the past, with the aim of 'reviving' it (an impossible task). Very little money has been directed into the twenty-five or so languages that are still being passed on to children. These are the only languages with any hope of survival and they do require urgent assistance if they are in fact to survive." (p. 239; see also Dixon 1997, p. 146)

Nevertheless he is passionate about the urgent need for documentation: "If this work is not done soon it can never be done. Future generations will then look back at the people who call themselves 'linguists' at the close of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century, with bewilderment and disdain" (Dixon 1997, p. 138). This can be found under the section, "What Every Linguist Should Do."

Joining the chorus of favoring documentation over revitalization is Newman (2003, p. 6): "I am troubled by the notion that researchers have an obligation to spend half their time doing what I would call linguistic social work." Under the heading "We Linguists Care Too Much," Newman complains of effort and money going into language revitalization projects instead of basic linguistic documentation. He is pessimistic about much of this documentation actually getting done: "Dixon's challenge to linguists to get out into the field will fall on deaf ears because it runs counter to the prevailing culture and personality of the people who now make up the discipline of linguistics" (p. 5).

To make matters worse he claims it is very difficult to undertake detailed linguistic documentation in Africa, Asia, or Latin America,

and most of our non-Western colleagues are not really interested in doing fieldwork or in documenting Indigenous languages. Therefore, Igbo speakers who are trained in linguistics will study Igbo rather than some other language less documented. For Newman (2003), the endangered languages issue is a hopeless cause essentially because the discipline of linguistics either ignores the problem, "wastes" its time on "linguistic social work" (which can include fairly mundane tasks like copying tapes for Indigenous people who want them) or simply continues "to talk about the matter, as surely will be done *ad nauseam* at one international meeting or workshop after another" (p. 11).

There are then some people who want revitalization of Indigenous languages but disfavor their documentation, or at least dissemination of, and access to, that documentation. This is particularly so among some Indigenous groups who are variously antilinguist, antiliteracy, or antiresearch whether in terms of the activity or its products. For instance, a grass roots Indigenous language center in the Kimberley area of Western Australia has developed a policy in which they prefer to restrict access to existing documentation and caution against the writing down of stories (Newry & Palmer 2003, p. 104).

In all this is a recurring theme of the linguist's role. Ladefoged (1992) suggested that in some circumstances it might be more appropriate for the linguist to butt out, allowing Indigenous people in other countries to reach their own decisions about Indigenous languages—including abandoning them. This drew some pointed criticism, including Dorian (1993) who points out that the choice Indigenous people make may be subject to external pressures so that the choice is scarcely a free one. Mufwene (2003), however, thinks that such decisions can be an appropriate response to the changing social and cultural environment. Nagy (2000) sees the linguist as wearing five hats: being involved in general social science, theoretical linguistics, sociolinguistics, applied linguistics, and technology

(see also Crowley 1999). The multifaceted nature of this work means that the next generation of scholars will need appropriate training in the first instance and a reward structure that will advance rather than retard their careers. The pressures on linguists working with Indigenous communities has triggered a call for the profession in particular and academia in general to assist in these efforts (Grinevald 1998, 2003; Hill 2002; Maffi 2003; see also Whalen 2004).

Bradley & Bradley (2002, p. xx) present a rosy picture of that engagement: “It is extremely encouraging that most linguists are now aware of and concerned about language endangerment, and that many are now working with communities to provide documentation and help them in LM [language maintenance] efforts.”

However, Crystal (2003) is not so sanguine: Even if the academic community is aware and taking responsibility (a view not shared by Dixon or Newman) the message has not really gotten through to the general public. He contrasts the funding available for environmental conservation with that available for Indigenous languages and their preservation. Although the resources for these languages have substantially increased in recent years, much more is needed. He suggests that we need to engage the media and the arts in bringing this pressing issue to public consciousness.

THE FATE OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES AND WHICH MIGHT SURVIVE

What is the minimum record for a language?: “One way of killing a language is to get rid of all the speakers. In a few places in Australia there were massacres of such severity that there were literally no speakers left to pass a language on to the next generation. There is known to have been a language called Yeeman spoken around Tarooma in south-east Queensland. That is all we know—its name. Not one word of the lan-

guage was recorded before the entire tribe was wiped out in 1857” (Dixon et al. 1990, p. 5). Other languages are preserved through minimal material like Pictish, an early language of Scotland, mainly through place-names (Price 2000b).

Dalby (2003, p. 233) gives examples of what he refers to as the afterlife of a language. The following are words from the Indigenous language of Sydney, Dharuk: boomerang, koala, wallaby, waratah, and wombat. In Dalby’s view, these remnants cannot be taken to indicate the survival of the languages from which they have come. However, we find that sometimes words that are apparently English retain their Australian Aboriginal semantics; for example, the word “father” in at least some forms of Aboriginal English retains the semantic scope of the Aboriginal term for which it is supposedly a translation equivalent, including father and father’s brother (Harkins 1994). This range of meaning is frequently encountered in the Indigenous languages of Australia, and so we end up with an English word with Aboriginal semantics. The flip side of this kind of survival is the reduction in meaning, or “flattening” as Whiteley (2003) puts it when describing the fate of the Hopi term, *kachina*, as it has passed into English, essentially referring to the kind of doll available in tourist shops in the American southwest, thus losing the constellation of meanings associated with spiritual values among the Hopi.

This is one point along a spectrum of reconstitution and modernization where presumably at the other extreme is the situation where an Indigenous language continues unchanged across all domains by all people. Absurd as this suggestion is, it seems that some commentators harbor views not too far from this. Less extreme examples of purism can be found among linguists as well as Indigenous people, and as Wilkins observes, they can be complicit in this process. Wilkins (2000) critiques his own grammar of a Central Australian language for its “hypertraditionalising tendencies”:

Contemporary Arrernte speech is full of English-based words and codeswitching, but my grammar fails to discuss and account for these phenomena, and presents an account of Arrernte that “weeds” out much of the contact influence and stresses its “traditional” qualities. In this I certainly have Arrernte coconspirators who want to present a “pure” vision of the language. It is not uncommon for Arrernte people who are transcribing their own texts to edit their spoken versions so that all traces of English forms and codeswitches are missing from the written version, and what remains is some idealized form of Arrernte that certainly does not represent how a person speaks. (p. 72)

Moreover Goodfellow (2003) complains about purism among linguists and Native Americans as she sets out details of generational differences in Kwak’wala speech (see also Dorian 1994). The issue of authenticity also arises in connection with another Native American language: “It is funny, poignant, and thought-provoking to realize that the most commonly used words in Mutsun right now are words that never existed when the Mutsun language was still alive” (Hinton 2001c, p. 414). These newly created words capture nontraditional expressions like “hello” and “please” as Hinton (2001c, p. 413) reminds us that the people trying to revitalize their language are often more interested in the pragmatics of language use and nonverbal communication features such as facial expressions and gesture than what linguists have tended to document: vocabulary and grammar.

The question of whether Indigenous languages will survive hinges crucially on the intended outcomes. Thieberger (2002) argues that decisions about the appropriate target for language maintenance programs are too often driven by structural linguistics in which the supposed ideal is intergenerational transmission of the language with all its complexity retained. Such a position is often in conflict with the actual preferences of the people group who identifies with the language in question

and in any case may not be achievable. For some Indigenous languages, the main priority will be preservation and archiving rather than achieving fluency.

There is a spectrum of nay-sayers and yea-sayers: on the one hand, a general belief that not much will survive and whatever does is likely to be “tainted,” and on the other hand, the view that it is acceptable to reconstitute and modernize Indigenous languages. As one of the Nay-sayers, Dalby (2003), referring to attempts at language revitalization in California, complains that

their limited scope is all too evident. If the only words of Wiyot that you use are *yes* and *no*, and only in a particular semicere-monial context, this is no longer a language, any more than musicians are speaking Italian when they say *andante* and *fortissimo*. These are simply loanwords used in a special context, and so are the Wiyot *yes* and *no* at tribal councils otherwise conducted entirely in English. As for the new language classes, it has to be admitted that Karuk and Yuchi as now spoken by learners are no longer the Karuk and Yuchi of the past. Modern child and adult learners have an English accent and their grammar is very strongly influenced by English, their dominant language. (pp. 250–51)

Among the Yea-sayers, Crystal (2000, p. 162) comments on Kaurna, an Indigenous language of the Adelaide Plains in South Australia:

The revived language is not the same as the original language, of course; most obviously, it lacks the breadth of functions which it originally had, and large amounts of old vocabulary are missing. But, as it continues in present-day use, it will develop new functions and new vocabulary, just as any other living language would, and as long as people value it as a true marker of their identity, and are prepared to keep using it, there is no reason to think of it as anything other than

a valid system of communication. (see also Bentahila & Davies 1993)

And even linguists can have a blinkered view about these issues when a California-based specialist on Irish laments, “Almost all of these languages (of California), with the lonely exception perhaps of Diegueno, are now gone from the face of the earth, never to be heard or spoken again” (McCloskey 2001, p. 12). It seems extraordinary for him to say this when language revitalization had been active in California well before his book went into print [e.g., Hinton (1998, p. 83) writes, “there is a rapidly growing movement among Californian Indians to save their languages: to learn them as second languages, and to develop programs to bring their languages back into daily use”]. If McCloskey (2001) was seeking some mystical ideal of precontact language usage, then perhaps his claim would make more sense; but he makes it abundantly clear that the Irish of the twenty-first century is considerably different from what the founders of the revival movement had hoped for in the late nineteenth century (pp. 47–48). This issue of authenticity can lead to some strange outcomes, for instance in the tension between competing varieties of Authentic Quichua (the local Spanish-influenced variety) and Unified Quichua (the standardized national variety) (King 2000).

So which languages have the best chance of survival, and how good are we at predicting the fate of languages? Mackey (2003, p. 64) recalls earlier predictions about the fate of minority languages in America where the received wisdom of the early 1940s was that most minority languages would not make it to the end of the twentieth century. The current use of Spanish in California and of French in Quebec (including improved status) puts the lie to these predictions. Mackey (2003) warns that current predictions about the fate of languages should be treated with caution:

If language as code is a system of systems, language as behavior is a multidimen-

sional and multifunctional system of mutually modifying practices. If we could quantify these practices and plot the results on a time scale, we could perhaps extrapolate the curve with a tolerable margin of error over the short term. But whatever is projected would still be subject to changes in its own environment, which by the nature of things could be triggered by the unpredictable behavior of people and compounded by the hazards of history. (p. 79)

However, he suggests that the growth of the Internet, email, and other communication technologies may be relevant to the fate of languages: “Widespread availability of these horizontal interaction systems may well retard the demise of some of the world’s 6600 languages, half of which—it is predicted—will not survive the twenty-first century” (p. 77).

It is through such an interaction system that Irish can have a presence “on the west coast of California, several thousands of miles from any physical Gaeltacht” (McCloskey 2001, p. 50): “It occurs to me first that, for a linguistic community that has been told over and over again that it is dead or as good as dead, this is a most lively, interesting, and enjoyable network to be a part of—even in the peripheral way in which I can participate in it from this distance” (p. 51).

In the longer term, Dalby (2003, p. 277) asserts, “A time will certainly come when English, French, Spanish and the other national languages of the world—somewhere around two hundred in total—are the only languages still in use, each dominant within its own borders.” Dalby suggests that this time “will be reached in under two hundred years from now” (p. 279) and “by then it will be easy to foresee the speed with which the last milestone will be attained, the point at which only English is spoken. It is closer than you think. And no more bilingualism then” (p. 280).

Bradley (2002) provides another example of the difficulty in predicting the future of an

Indigenous language when he reports on the Bisu of Thailand:

I thought the language was well on its way to death in 1976, but more than twenty years later my former coworker is leading a revival which is publishing textbooks, books of traditional stories and so on, and has recruited linguists from Payap University to assist. . . . Now the Bisu have gone to Burma and found the Pyen, who also speak a very closely related EL [endangered language]. I thought Pyen was completely dead, and would not have been able to go and look for it; but the Bisu found it, and now the Pyen are talking about sending a group to Thailand for literacy work. Thus broken ethnic links can be re-established, and self-esteem enhanced. (p. 8)

Let us return to the question of which languages have the best chance of survival. Even languages such as Maori, which are frequently listed as success stories, can be given only a rather qualified “report card” (Spolsky 2003; see also King 2001). Among the Indigenous languages of the Americas, Navajo’s future at one time seemed assured, but now this is less certain (Spolsky 2002). Over the past 100 years, Hebrew has been a major success story (perhaps the only one that most people will accept) and is likely to flourish in the near future (Nahir 1998, Spolsky & Shohamy 2001). One important reason for that success was the concentration of effort in Palestine and later Israel. A fairly small population had a very strong ideology that the use of Hebrew was crucial to their Jewish identity. Not only did they value increase in the use of Hebrew in public, but also they were able to build on a very long tradition of education in Hebrew as a religious language and then “revernacularize” it.

Overall, we must consider what gets lost as languages decline. A useful summary is provided by Hill (2001). This includes the loss of syntactic categories such as ergativity as

one progresses from “traditional” Dyirbal to neo-Dyirbal (languages of north Queensland in Australia). However, Aikhenvald (2002) in referring to Tariana, an endangered language of the Vaupes area of Brazil, demonstrates that it is wrong to think of language obsolescence as always involving the loss or reduction of morphological categories. Instead, “Obsolescent languages can be innovative in that they develop new categories and new terms within existing categories” (p. 144). Nevertheless, many have lamented the loss of traditional knowledge in general (Florey 2001) and specifically concerning the environment (Maffi 2001a,b; Mühlhäusler 1995). Hill (2001) also refers to decay in discourse, and this decay can result in the loss of particular genres or registers. However, sometimes discourse strategies can survive even when much of the lexicon, morphology, and syntax of the language have gone. The English used by an Indigenous people can also retain the pragmatic practices of their Indigenous languages. For one example, one can look to the English used by Aboriginal people in the highly settled southeast of Australia (Eades 1991, Walsh 1997a). Here, most of the linguistic forms are ostensibly identical to Standard Australian English, but the deployment of those forms for pragmatic use makes them significantly different.

As a reality check, consider what many of us have “lost.” One hundred years ago the dominant cultures in the developed world would have had a rich lexicon and discourse on horses and horse-driven transport. This richness has either been lost entirely or has shrunk to highly specialized contexts. By now, most of us would be hard pressed to tell the difference between a brougham, a cabriolet, and a landau (three types of horse-driven vehicle). How much do we feel the loss? Some would argue that this stuff is irrelevant to the present times and would regard this as useless knowledge—with the possible exception of doing better in some quiz show. Others would point out that the knowledge is not really lost because it has been preserved in

dictionaries and other written accounts. The latter is true to an extent, but the full richness of the lexicon—let alone the discourse—has gone unrecorded and largely unlamented. So why are some of us getting so worked up over the loss of specialized vocabulary in Indigenous languages?

SOME INDIGENOUS VIEWS

A group of Native American students attending the 1993 Oklahoma Native Languages Development Institute wrote

We've had 10 linguists
Just about ten
They came and went
But we don't know when.
(Yamamoto 1995, p. 3)

This view, of course, reflects a dissatisfaction with some linguists and a sense that there is no long-term commitment to the community in whose languages they are interested. Such dissatisfaction can discourage the engagement of linguists in the language revitalization process: "One thing we don't need any more: linguists! The linguist is gonna want more money again. We don't even get money!" (Cyr 1999).

Some non-Indigenous people see Indigenous involvement as crucial. Bird (2001) argues that in order to succeed in language maintenance efforts, it is crucial that the community members themselves collect data and create written materials of their language. However, in order for them to do so fruitfully, it is necessary for them to understand basic linguistic principles. The role of the linguist in such cases is to provide community members with the linguistic skills they need to preserve their language. (p. 275)

And some have argued for forging a formal agreement between linguists and the Indigenous community (e.g., <http://www.onr.com/cabeceras/Iquito%20,2002.pdf>). In this way what Indigenous people want out of the process can be negotiated. In some instances, their requirements are based more on spiritual issues than on an expectation that the

"whole language" will be restored. Manriquez (2001) sees just one word of her language as a means of entry to "the pearly gates, the happy hunting grounds" (p. 542). In Aboriginal Australia, at least some small portion of an Indigenous language is seen as necessary for access to places (Walsh 1997b). Particularly for places of special significance it is felt that access to such a place can be gained only when there is someone who can speak to the spirits that inhabit that place. And the "place" will understand only the language of the land-owning group in whose territory that place resides. So there is a fear that language loss may lead to powerful places being effectively closed down. This is a strong incentive to retain enough of the language belonging to a place to gain access to that place. Other Indigenous people see their language as a means of access to prayers: "Without prayers, our lives cannot be good, for without words there can be no prayers" (Lee & McLaughlin 2001, p. 23) (see also Kirkness 2002). And in the Boston area, the Wampanoag are attempting to reclaim their language after a long interruption:

It is the belief of the Wampanoag that their language is not merely a means to communicate one's thoughts. It was given to them by their creator as one of many gifts and responsibilities. For Wampanoag, it is the language their creator would prefer them to use in prayer and ceremony, something they have not done for six generations. (Ash et al. 2001)

In comparison, the Maori scholar and activist, Timoti Karetu (2002), is concerned that his language will end up with a largely religious or ceremonial function: NZ Latin.

We conclude with an observation from an elder of the Kaurua group from Adelaide in South Australia, someone who has been closely involved in the revival of his language in recent years:

I used to try to speak the language; I'd say "Mai yungainja udejega" (Come and have something to eat, my friend) and they'd say "Stop that, stop that, speak English" and I used to get rather annoyed as to why they would do that. Then I realized years later why they did that. They knew that if I learned all the things they knew anthropologists would be able to ask me and quickly get the answers to the questions they were seeking. The old people said "We'll not teach the children either, so they (the anthropologists) will have to spend 40,000 years learning what we have learnt, rather than learning it in two minutes". (O'Brien 1990, p. 110)

CONCLUSION

In this brief review it is apparent that the community of scholars is divided on the question of whether Indigenous languages will survive. At the end of one spectrum are the nay-sayers, who make dire predictions with Dalby's suggestion (2003) that the world will end up becoming monolingual in English. On the other end are the yea-sayers, who range from cautious optimism (at least something can be done for pretty well any language) to those with boundless (and some would say, Pollyannaish) enthusiasm. Hill (2002) has critiqued the discourse of language endangerment, and no doubt her critique will be

recritiqued. This can be a touchy subject in which people are reluctant to say (or write) what they really think. Ladefoged's rejoinder (1992) to the call to arms by Hale et al. (1992) earned him a rebuke from Dorian (1993) in quick time, whereas Maffi (2003, p. 71) provides a longer term view: "Positions such as those expressed by Ladefoged back in 1992 may now sound naïve, if not aloof." I anticipate that Newman's suggestion that the whole enterprise is a "hopeless cause" (1999, 2003) will evoke criticism in due course. Without getting into the rights or wrongs of these positions, we need frank and forthright discussions of the issues (e.g., Dauenhauer & Dauenhauer 1998). We also need good clear statements of advice (e.g., Hinton 2001b, 2002; Linn et al. 2002). It takes a tremendous commitment on the part of the Indigenous communities and those who might assist them if Indigenous languages are to survive. After all the accounts of success and failure and what might work, it is difficult to predict which Indigenous languages will survive. Nor is it easy to predict how much of these languages will survive—and for what purposes. I leave the last word to an Indigenous person: Darrell Kip, one of the founders of the Blackfeet immersion school in Montana, often cautions people wanting to save their language not to wait until conditions are perfect. "Just do it!" (Hinton 2001a, pp. 58–59).

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