1   Language revitalization as a global issue

1   Introduction

Over the past fifty years and with increasing frequency, innovative programs have appeared around the world with the aim of revitalizing languages that are at risk of disappearing due to declining numbers of native speakers. The nature of these initiatives varies as greatly as the languages that are their targets. In some instances, they are nearly national in scope, such as the efforts to preserve Irish, yet in other instances they involve small communities or even a handful of motivated individuals. Many of these programs are connected to claims of territorial sovereignty, though cultural sovereignty or a desire to maintain a unique ethnic identity is just as often the explicit goal. While in one context a revitalization effort may be centered around formal education, in another it may be focused on creating environments in which the language can be used on a regular basis.

Although tremendous variety characterizes the methods of and motives for reinvigorating languages, revitalization, as a general phenomenon, is growing and has become an issue of global proportion. There are now hundreds of endangered languages, and there are few regions of the world where one will not find at least nascent attempts at language revitalization. This comes as little surprise when considered in light of the confluence of several socio-historical factors. First, language death and moribundity (i.e. the cessation of children learning a language) are occurring at an exceptionally rapid rate. While the precise number of languages in the world is difficult to determine (see Crystal 2000:2–11 for a concise discussion), and predicting the total number of languages that will cease to be spoken is harder still (Whaley 2003), there is a general consensus that at least half of the world's 6,000–7,000 languages will disappear (or be on the verge of disappearing) in the next century. As Crystal (2000:19) points out, "To meet that time frame, at least one language must die, on average, every two weeks or so," a startling fact, to say the least.

Whereas the phenomenon of language death has been present in all epochs, the rate of decline in linguistic diversity is probably unique to

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our time, perhaps only rivaled by the loss of linguistic diversity believed to have happened during the agricultural revolution 10,000 years ago (e.g. see Maffi 2001). Given this high rate of language death, we must recognize that a significant proportion of communities in the world today are confronted with the loss of a language that has traditionally been an integral feature of their identity. In many such instances, efforts are being made to halt the process of language shift and to promote the usage of a heritage language.

The sheer number of threatened languages cannot alone explain the ever-expanding number of language revitalization initiatives. To this we must add a second major socio-historical shift, the general trend towards recognizing the rights of minorities, both as individuals and as groups, within modern nation-states. Particularly since the end of the Cold War, there has been a collapse of hegemonic patterns in many portions of the world that had actively, and explicitly, worked to suppress cultural difference, and as a consequence in many places ethnic groups and minorities have increased flexibility in pursuing their own political agendas (Kymlicka 1995). In a very real sense minority communities have been emboldened to pursue territorial, political, and cultural rights. Though this has meant a burgeoning number of ethnic conflicts (Moynihan 1993), it has also meant rethinking human rights at a basic level to include the protection of such things as the choice of language. Consider, as just one example, language from Article 5 of UNESCO's Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, which states: "All persons should therefore be able to express themselves and to create and disseminate their work in the language of their choice, and particularly in their mother tongue; all persons should be entitled to quality education and training that fully respect their cultural identity." Similar statements can be found in declarations from many transnational organizations, such as the European Union, the Organization for American States, and the Organization for African Unity, as well as in recent legislation in a number of countries. Though the effectiveness of these proclamations and laws in ensuring cultural rights is a matter of some debate, there is little doubt that they have encouraged ethnic communities around the world to pursue activities that assert their cultural identities, and these activities often include programs to promote heritage language use.

A less understood factor that has had a role in the increased interest in language revitalization is "globalization." Very broadly defined, globalization is "a process of increasing international integration of economic life" (Whaley 2003:969); it is characteristically accompanied by the adoption of neoliberal political structures, at least to some degree. As the process has transformed or eliminated traditional political and economic

barriers among nations, there has been a greatly enhanced ability for information, money, people, goods, and services to move between regions. Because of the political and economic might of the United States, it is hardly surprising that mass consumerism and American pop culture have now spread to most regions of the world.

Most discussions of globalization have concentrated on the modernizing and assimilatory effects that such forces have on communities, both big and small, as individuals in the communities are brought into the international economic system and are exposed with increasing regularity to languages of wider communication, the national culture of the state in which they are embedded and non-traditional economic habits. Much less examined is the fact that globalizing forces have triggered reacting forces as some people seek to assert, or better to reassert, their unique cultural identity. More often than not this effort to underscore uniqueness is represented by a "traditionalist" constituency within a community that finds itself interacting with a "modernizing" constituency which advocates greater integration with a regional, national, or international community. A great many language revitalization programs have emerged as a consequence of these dynamics. Since language is a visible and powerful indicator of group identity, it has accurately been recognized as an important way to maintain links with one's cultural past and to protect one's cultural uniqueness in the present.

This picture of broad social, historical, and economic trends that have prompted the appearance of numerous language revitalization programs is necessarily both simplified and incomplete, but it provides a general context for the implicit question underlying all portions of the book: How can language revitalization efforts be successful?

2   Assessing language vitality

Assessing and understanding language vitality is a complex enterprise, as a large number of intertwined factors enter into it, yet the degree of language vitality is the basic indicator used in determining the appropriate type of language revitalization program. A language spoken by several thousand individuals on a daily basis presents a much different set of options for revitalization than a language that has a dozen native speakers who rarely use it. Moreover, assessing changes in language vitality over time provides the easiest measure of success for attempts to revitalize a threatened language.

As interest among linguists in issues of language endangerment has increased over the last two decades or so, there have been a number of different studies focusing on how to assess language vitality. One of the most comprehensive comes from the collaboration of linguists in

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UNESCO's Ad Hoc Group on Endangered Languages.[1] They have worked together to create a document entitled *Language vitality and endangerment* (UNESCO 2003), which lists nine factors in language vitality. The UNESCO Ad Hoc Group is very clear that the nine factors need to be considered in conjunction with one another, a point which we also would like to underscore here. As we discuss in Chapter 2, the particulars of each individual language situation will mean that some of the factors are more relevant than others.

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

As is clear from this list, the first three factors have to do with the numbers of speakers of a language, as well as their distribution across generations and throughout the population. Factors 4–7 identify how and where the language is used. Factor 8 addresses perceptions about the value of a language by its speakers. Factor 9 identifies the material that has been produced about a language.

    Even under quick review, it becomes clear why one cannot separate the influences of these factors from one another. For example, the use of the language in both new and existing domains (Factors 4 and 5) is very much dependent upon community attitudes, as well as governmental policies. Factor 9 is somewhat of an oddity in this list since the existence of language documentation is not an evaluating factor *per se* in assessing language vitality; reasonably good documentation exists for some languages that are extinct, whereas there is poor documentation for highly vital languages. Rather, the level of vitality helps in assessing the urgency for new language

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[1] The document was vetted and refined in a working symposium held in Kyoto, Japan in November 2002. The group members who contributed to the document are listed in Appendix 3 of the UNESCO guidelines (UNESCO 2003): Matthias Brenzinger, Arienne Dwyer, Tjeerd de Graaf, Colette Grinevald, Michael Krauss, Osahito Miyaoka, Nicholas Ostler, Osamu Sakiyama, Maira E. Villalón, Akira Y. Yamamoto, and Ofelia Zepeda. Some readers may object to what would appear to be a heavy reliance on UNESCO guidelines in this section. We have used these guidelines as the starting point for our discussion precisely because they have been endorsed by a relatively large group of linguists from around the world.

documentation and, in addition, may influence decisions about the viability of a language for revitalization. Simply put, a seriously endangered language should be documented as quickly and as thoroughly as possible.[2] The more extensive the documentation, the easier revitalization (or even reclamation) will be in the future should a community desire it. This is not to say that documentation must necessarily precede revitalization, but rather that revitalization efforts rely on dictionaries and descriptive grammars, recorded speech, and so on.

For assessment purposes, the fundamental question for vitality is the size and composition of the speaker population. Intuitively, it would seem that the larger number of native speakers of a language, the more likely it is to be maintained and be healthy (Factor 2). However, a large number of speakers does not guarantee vitality because speaker population must be considered in relation to other speech communities. For example, nearly 200,000 people speak Tujia, a Tibeto-Burman language in southern China, a number that would place it well within the "safe" range for some measures of language endangerment (e.g. Krauss 1992). However, in nearly every community where the language is spoken, Tujia speakers are outnumbered by speakers of another language (typically a dialect of Chinese) by a ratio of 10:1. Indeed, only 3 percent of ethnic Tujia are able to speak the language, and probably less than half that number use it regularly. Clearly, Tujia is endangered despite a speaker population that dwarfes most in the world. Therefore, absolute speaker numbers, though an important demographic, are not a good diagnostic for determining the vitality of a language.

At least equally significant is the percentage of the total population which can speak the target language (Factor 3); language shift is indicated if a large percentage of the (ethnic) population speaks a different language instead of the local language, as in the case of Tujia just described. Note that this does not mean people speaking one or more languages in addition to the local language; multilingualism is a reality for much of the world. Instead, Factor 3 is concerned with the percentage of the community which does or does not know the local language. The higher the percentage for a particular region, the greater the vitality of the language in most cases.[3]

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[2] We consider language documentation to be one of the primary roles of linguists (see also Newman 2003). We discuss the relationship between documentation and revitalization in Chapter 3, section 8, and the role of the linguist in Chapter 7, section 7.

[3] Though in general learning second (or third, or fourth) languages in addition to a local language does not serve as a good indicator of language shift, there are regions of the world where it does, particularly those where multilingualism is not the norm (e.g. the United States).

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The intergenerational transmission of a language (Factor 1) is typically, and appropriately, used as a benchmark for whether a language will maintain its vitality into the indefinite future. In the broadest of terms, one finds three types of situations. In the first, all generations, including children, have fluent use of the language. In the second, the language is used by parents and grandparents but not the children, though children know the language; and in the third category, only the grandparent/elder generation would maintain knowledge of the language. This kind of characterization is helpful as a way to frame the issue of intergenerational transmission and to highlight the fundamental fact that only when children are acquiring a language does it stand much chance of long-term use. For a language to be vital, it must be actively used by children.

Intergenerational transmission, however, is not necessarily uniform across a speaker population. In one village children may regularly use a local language, but not in another. In one family children may be discouraged from using a local language, while next door it may be an expectation. In these ways, there may be a dwindling number of children overall who learn a language (not a good sign for long-term viability of the language), yet there are pockets of robust use (which may cause one to deem it vital). The dynamics of intergenerational transmission are perhaps more important to understand than any other relevant factor in assessing the need for language revitalization.

In light of this fact, we pause in our discussion of the UNESCO factors in assessing language vitality to present a more finely grained categorization system for intergenerational transmission. Krauss (1997) employs a helpful ten-way distinction.

a   the language is spoken by all generations, including all, or nearly all, of the children
a−   the language is learned by all or most children
b   the language is spoken by all adults, parental age and up, but learned by few or no children
b−   the language is spoken by adults in their thirties and older but not by younger parents
c   the language is spoken only by middle-aged adults and older, in their forties and up
c−   all speakers in their fifties and older
−d   all speakers in their sixties and older
d   all speakers in their seventies and older
d−   all speakers in their seventies and older, and fewer than 10 speakers
e   extinct, no speakers

Given the caveat that there may not be uniform patterns across a speaker population, a language is healthy and has high vitality if ranked (a),

somewhat less so at (a−), and by level (b) is already endangered where revitalization is required if the language is to survive. As one goes down the scale, the language is increasingly endangered and closer to complete loss, making it more and more difficult to implement a revitalization effort.

Is such a detailed scale necessary in assessing language vitality for a particular situation? At some level perhaps the answer might be no, since it is quite clear that at stage (b) the language is already on a clear path towards moribundity. However, the scale (and others like it) have some important uses. First, it is helpful for indicating the comparative vitality of a language spoken in different places. For example, Inuit is robust and safe in Greenland, where nearly all children learn it (a), but varies in Canada from safe to endangered (a in the east, b in central, and c in the west of Canada), to Alaska (b–c), and in Russia, where Inuit is seriously endangered (d), with only a couple of remaining speakers (Krauss 1997:26). In some cases, such information can be employed to make decisions about where a language revitalization effort should be focused, or where fluent individuals are most likely to be found. Furthermore, the scale is a helpful guide in assessing the feasibility of different sorts of revitalization programs, a point we take up again in Chapter 7 and very important in determining the urgency for language documentation.

Returning to the factors in language vitality outlined by UNESCO, yet another diagnostic is the range of domains where the language is being used. Simply put, the "stronger" a language, the more domains in which it is found. Thus a healthy, vital language is used in a range of settings with a wide variety of functions, and the most healthy language would accordingly be a language used for all functions and purposes. Extinct languages are found at the opposite end of the spectrum, no longer spoken at all and used in no domains. (Note that there are some languages which are no longer utilized for conversational purposes, but are used in some domains, frequently religious. This suggests degrees of extinction, a matter we consider in section 3.) In between the two ends of the scale are a variety of intermediate stages, with languages used in limited settings. A prime example is provided in situations where individuals use one language primarily in the home and for casual social encounters, but another language as the primary means of communication at the workplace, at school, and in public and/or official settings.

Domains are often geographically determined, with one (local) language used in the local community, whether that be socially, in stores or service encounters, for educational purposes, and in forms of public address. A different language (one that is regionally or nationally dominant) is used outside of the community, and only this language is used for education, government and commerce outside of the local setting. It is common

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for this to be a situation of stable bilingualism that can occur over a long period of time, with the use of each language having clearly defined domains.

The UNESCO guidelines for assessment recognize six levels of usage in existing language domains: (1) universal use; (2) multilingual parity; (3) dwindling domains; (4) limited or formal domains; (5) highly limited domains; and (6) extinct. Universal use refers to the active use of the language in all domains. Regardless of whether speakers are multilingual or not, they feel comfortable using the local language in any setting. Multilingual parity indicates the use of one or more dominant[4] languages in official and public domains versus the use of non-dominant languages in private and more local domains. As was just noted, stable bilingualism often arises in this situation, and as a result it is not uncommon in many places in the world. It is somewhat misleading, however, to consider this multilingual *parity*, as the terms *dominant* and *non-dominant* suggest in and of themselves. The dominant language is generally favored by more people in absolute terms, while the non-dominant one almost always has a more restricted speaker base and in most cases is not learned as a second language by first-language speakers of the dominant language. Moreover, as UNESCO (2003) points out, the dominant language is often viewed as the language of social and economic opportunity. Therefore, there are pressures on speakers of the non-dominant language to shift to the dominant language, but not *vice versa*. Parity, then, must be understood to be a stable balance in domain use for individual speakers, and not as a descriptor of the more general relationship between the languages involved.

The next three levels represent incrementally decreasing use of the language, beginning with the category of dwindling domains. The local (i.e. non-dominant) language is used increasingly less, with the marked and significant shift occurring when parents cease to speak the language at home. This, of course, most often effectively ends intergenerational trans-mission, and children no longer learn the language. The next level is the use of the language in only limited or formal domains, such as religious ceremonies, rituals, and festivals. The domains included here often involve the elderly generation, and the UNESCO definition states that these limited domains may include use in the home where the elderly (grand-parent) generation is present. One diagnostic of this level is that, although people may continue to understand the language, they cannot speak it. The next step beyond this is very limited domains, where the language is

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[4] The terms *dominant* and *non-dominant* are found in UNESCO (2003); see section 3 for our discussion of terminology.

used only on very restricted occasions, and only by particular community members (such as tribal or religious leaders, generally of the elderly generation). Here the use of the language is ritualized, although there may be people who have some memory of it. Finally, extinction occurs when the language is not used in any domains.

In cases of language attrition, a language has been moving along this scale, since it is used in fewer and fewer settings with fewer and fewer functions (and, usually, by fewer and fewer speakers). As this correctly suggests, the relationship between language and domains is a dynamic one for many local languages, and thus the trends of change are relevant. If a language is used in increasingly fewer domains, it is a sign of lessening vitality. Alternatively, if a language is used in an increasing number of domains, it shows signs of returning vitality and may even be gaining ground over other languages.

Related to the issue of current use in domains is the question of whether the language is used in new domains as they emerge (Factor 5; see section 1.2). If, for example, a store is established in an agrarian community for the first time, the relative vitality of a language is signaled in the choice of language use there. Is it the language used by the farmers with their families and in their work, or is it the language used when farmers leave the community and sell their produce at a market in a nearby town? The latter signals a greater stress on the local language; not only is a new language being brought into the daily experience of the community, but there is now present in the community a symbol that all spaces of economic exchange belong to the non-local language. As the actual number of domains increases, if use of the language does not expand into these new domains, that is a signal of declining vitality, for although the absolute number of domains in which it is used remains steady, the relative number has decreased.

New domains are often created in the modern world with the emergence of new technologies and media. Some local languages have been used in radio broadcasts around the world, far fewer in television broadcasts, and almost none in major films. As these media come to isolated regions, they become domains of usage that make quick inroads into a social space previously connected to local languages. For example, the advent of video rental trucks, which distribute videocassettes in Native American communities, has been cited as contributing to language attrition. These trucks have provided easier access to videotapes of major Hollywood productions to even relatively remote communities in the US, not only facilitating the spread of English but effectively creating yet another domain where the Native American language is not used. The internet offers another example of the emergence of a new domain which is accessible for some

communities in the world, in particular in Europe and North America. While the internet might potentially supply a creative way to increase local language use (indeed, many revitalization efforts see it in just this way), the fact remains that the internet, at this point, is overwhelmingly dominated by a handful of languages. Therefore, it is a difficult matter to co-opt it as a domain for local languages. Even if some web sites arise which employ a local language, speakers of the local language will make greater use of the internet in a non-local language. Thus, the presence of a language in any given domain does not in and of itself guarantee vitality. The greater consideration is how much the language is used in that particular domain: thirty-minute weekly radio broadcasts, a website, or a page in a newspaper which is otherwise written in the national language may have powerful symbolic value, but they do not translate into signs of high vitality.

A critical domain for language usage is education. In regions where a nationally (or regionally) administered education system exists, the languages of education become a key determinant of language use in other domains. When mandatory schooling occurs exclusively in a national language, the use of local languages almost inevitably declines. When local languages are part of the formal educational process, they typically maintain a higher degree of vitality, though here again the amount a specific language is used plays into the equation. Many schools which purport to have local language education teach the language as a secondary subject, and the curriculum as a whole is taught in a language of wider communication, yet "Education *in* the language is essential for language vitality" (UNESCO 2003).

In most cases – anywhere where formal schooling takes place – this requires literacy in the local language, and so the extent of literacy is yet another marker of language vitality (Factor 6). Ideally, for sustaining vitality in a local language, all subject matter needs to be taught in the language, and pedagogical materials must be available to teachers and students. This in turn mandates the existence (or development) of discipline-specific materials, which in turn requires technical terminology in the lexicon of the language. In terms of ranking the correlation between the availability of such materials and language vitality, again there is an overall continuum with a fully developed literacy on the one end, with the language used in writing and reading in all domains, especially education and governmental and other official business. In addition, a wide range of written materials exist and are used, such as literature, religious texts, newspapers, textbooks, dictionaries, and so on. On the other end of the scale is a lack of literacy, no orthography, and no written language. Identifying the different levels in between these two end points is complicated. UNESCO recognizes four intermediary levels. These focus on the