



Listing Major Causes of Language Endangerment
(Short Communication)

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Abstract

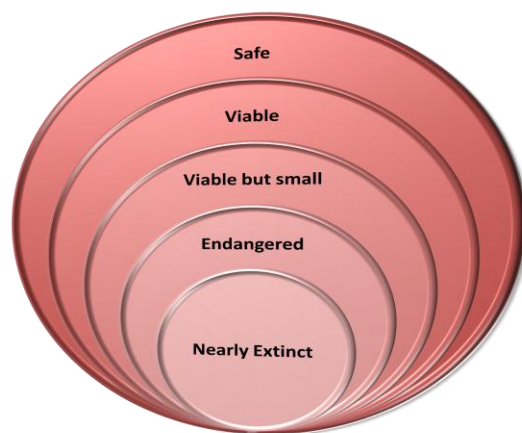
Language endangerment refers to a state in which one language is likely to become extinct in near future. In the words of Hornsby (2014), a language is deemed endangered when the children in a community are being spoken to in a language other than that of their parents. According to Crystal (2000), only 600 of the 6,000 or so languages in the world are 'safe' from the threat of extinction. According to one count, 6,703 separate languages were spoken in the world in 1996. Of these, 1000 were spoken in the Americas, 2011 in Africa, 225 in Europe, 2165 in Asia, and 1320 in the Pacific, including Australia. The prime objective of this study is to review the secondary data (available online and offline) and thereby list up major causes of language endangerment. It is imperative to mention here that the prime concern of the present study is list up major causes of language endangerment rather than discussing the ways of language revitalization, language preservation, or language promotion.

Keywords: Language endangerment,

Introduction:

Given the unprecedented loss of languages resulting into loss of knowledge, sociolinguistic identity, and social values, linguists, world over are flummoxed over finding concrete solutions of documenting or preserving linguistic heritage. Language endangerment necessitates discussions on the needs, causes, consequences, and remedies of under the purview of social, political, and economic flags. However, this study confines its concern to exploring only major causes of language endangerment. In what follows, we shall see 15 causes of language endangerment. Before we see the causes of language endangerment, it is desirable to present the following figure that indicates five level indicators of language at risk.

Five level Indicators of Languages at Risk



Source: Crystal D, (2000), *Language Death*, Cambridge, page:20

2

The first level is safe; the second is viable which indicates that its population base is sufficiently large and it is likely to survive to a long term. As for viable but small, such a language has more than 1000 speakers and is spoken in communities that are isolated but aware of their linguistic identity. As for endangered language, it is spoken by fairly good number of people in favourable circumstances and with a growth in community so that survival of the language could be possible. The last layer is nearly extinct which is thought to be beyond the possibility of survival because such a language is spoken by few elderly people.

Findings:

The following are the causes of language endangerment from linguistic and non-linguistic perspectives based on empirical evidences. The fact that an array of linguistic and non-linguistic factors are attributed to language endangerment has been endorsed by Nettle & Romaine (2007), Brenzinger (2007), Crystal (2000), Swadesh, (1948) and a host of other contemporary sociolinguists.

Major Causes of Language Endangerment:

1. Confinement of Language to Priests

Many languages became endangered because they remained largely confined to the literary genius of religious and spiritual minds. Sanskrit is a good example as it was not made available to all sections of society for fear of distortion as minor mistakes in pronunciation could destroy the unique character of Sanskrit as language of divinity.

2. Fear of Complex Learning

Many learners remain deprived of learning a language for the reason that they were told that the said languages are difficult to learn as they require a great amount of rote learning, memorization of word declensions and learning complex rules.

3. Globalization of English

Today, English has become the best means of globalization in almost all sectors be it industrial, economic, social, cultural, linguistic, or whatsoever. We all know how English has become an indispensable entity in our daily paraphernalia. With globalization of English and its growing popularity, most of the languages are being outshined as English has become the only source of communication with global citizens. Though, the surge of English could be good news in the interest of global economy, it poses a potential threat to the promotion and preservation of several endangered languages across the globe.

4. Lack of Economic Activities

Language, Newspaper & Currency become powerful only when its circulation is high. Hence, if a language does not become a language of economy; unless a language throws an economic incentive or job opportunity to its people, it is bound to be endangered. Thus, lack of economic activities and opportunities is one of the major causes of language endangerment.

5. Intra Community Marriage: Intra community marriage also prevents from getting exposed to the language and culture of other communities which in turn contributes to language loss.

6. Lack of Interlingual Communication

Lack of interlingual communication among different social groups in terms of code mixing and switching also causes loss of language.

7. Linguistic Jingoism

The feelings of a giving prestige symbol of nation; symbol of civilization, symbol of progress to a particular language and the feelings of giving low prestige to an endangered language contribute to the loss of a language.

8. Political Bias

Political bias also proves detrimental in the promotion of a language as it creates discrimination among social groups and plays a divisive role on sociopolitical grounds.

9. Lack of Institutional support

For lack of institutional supports like representation of a language in public domains, e.g. academia, administration, sports, entertainment, and the media, the situation of language shift arises and the speakers of an endangered language drift to the dominant language causing loss of the language.

10. Lack of Research on Endangered Languages

Document the language. All languages need to be documented and described for communities and individuals to have access to them. A dictionary or grammar can be a legitimizing force, affecting attitudes about the status of the language, and can provide the basis for preparing language revitalization materials for that language.

11. Lack of Sense of Pride

Reestablish pride in and value for the language. This entails the active support and participation of individuals throughout the community, as well as the development of teachers and curriculum designed to meet current and future needs.

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