

**Contribution to the UNESCO encyclopedia of life support systems
(EOLSS) 6.20B.10.3**

**DOCUMENTING ENDANGERED LANGUAGES AND LANGUAGE
MAINTENANCE**

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Keywords: endangered languages, ethnolinguistics, language documentation, language endangerment, language maintenance, language policy, language revitalization, language shift, mother tongue education

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Summary

Several scholars predict that up to 90% of the world's languages may well be replaced by dominant languages by the end of the 21st century, which would reduce the present number of almost 7,000 languages to less than 700. This review article attempts to describe processes that are underlying this severe threat to the majority of the languages currently

spoken. However, the central focus of discussion will be on aspects related to the documentation and maintenance of the world's linguistic diversity.

The main causes of language endangerment are presented here in a brief overview of the world's language situation. Selected studies on endangered languages provide insight into the case-specific aspects of these language shift situations. Finally, language documentation and maintenance efforts of scholars, international institutions, such as provided within the framework of UNESCO, as well as the role of academic cooperation in recent language documentation activities will be discussed.

The fundamental task for linguists is the research on the collection of data from endangered languages. Linguistics may preserve language data in documenting languages. However, the members of the speech communities uphold or give up languages. For that reason, only the speakers of endangered languages themselves can opt for and execute language maintenance or revitalization measures. Linguists and other scholars can assist communities in such attempts, for example by making language resources from archives available to them, by training community members to become language workers or even linguists, and also by helping to produce language learning and teaching materials. Linguists and community members should together take on the responsibility for documenting the wealth of linguistic diversity in order to pass on this legacy to future generations.

1. Introduction

In his article *Who am I in this land? What people am I part of?*, Sergey Haruchi, representative of one of the minority peoples in the Russian North gives the following account on his relation to the Nenets people and their language:

I experienced no shock on realising that I belonged to the Nenets people. Everything was formed during my childhood; both my father and my mother spoke Nenets. They did so without embarrassment, even in the presence of strangers. Regretfully, though, the environment in which children now find themselves for the greater part of their time, at kindergarten, at school, has had an impact. They talk with their parents only in the mornings and the evenings. As a consequence, some children of indigenous intellectuals, not only from families of mixed marriages but even those whose fathers and mothers are both Nenets, do not know their native language. My own eldest daughter and son understand but do not speak Nenets, because they have no opportunity to practise it. I am not trying to use this as a reason to excuse myself. It is our fault and nobody else's. Nevertheless, there are still children who know their native languages well and speak it fluently. When a cry of lamentation is raised that the language, the basis of the people's culture, is sinking into oblivion and that books and textbooks should be published in native languages, I do not object to this; I even support it and assist to the best of my ability. But,

after all, our parents did not teach us their native language by using books, we learned by hearing our mothers talk to us. It is first and foremost the mother who passes on the language, and a great deal depends on her because she spends more time with the children. It makes me wonder if it is right to put the blame for our children not speaking their native language on other people, for example, the Russian people, who allegedly impose their language on us. First and foremost, we must have strong desire to pass on the language. Our children ought to speak their native language.

This quote illustrates what can be considered to be the situation of minority languages in the Russian North, where, just as in many other parts of the world, the local languages are increasingly dominated and threatened by the official state languages, such as Russian in the case above.

At the 31st Session of the UNESCO General Conference (October 2001), the unanimously adopted *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity* recognized a relationship between biodiversity, cultural diversity, and linguistic diversity. UNESCO's action plan recommends that Member States, in conjunction with speaker communities, undertake steps to ensure:

- sustaining the linguistic diversity of humanity and giving support to expression, creation, and dissemination of the greatest possible number of languages;
- encouraging linguistic diversity at all levels of education, wherever possible, and fostering the learning of several languages from the youngest age;
- incorporating, where appropriate, traditional pedagogies into the education process with a view to preserving and making full use of culturally-appropriate methods of communication and transmission of knowledge; and where permitted by speaker communities, encouraging universal access to information in the public domain through the global network, including promoting linguistic diversity in cyberspace.

2. Language Endangerment and Endangered Languages

A language is in danger when its speakers no longer pass it onto the next generation. Today, many speech communities of minority languages are shrinking and their languages will ultimately vanish, if these developments are not reversed. Children may no longer acquire languages even when they are still spoken by many thousands of elderly speakers.

2.1 Types and Extent of Language Endangerment

Language endangerment may be caused primarily by *external* forces such as military, economic, religious, cultural, or educational subjugation. It may also be caused by *internal* forces, such as a community's negative attitude towards its own language or by a general decline of group identity. Internal pressures always derive from external factors. Together, they halt the intergenerational transmission of linguistic and cultural traditions. Many

minority communities associate their disadvantaged social and economic position with their ancestral culture and language. They have come to believe that their languages are of no use anymore and not worth retaining. Speakers of minority languages abandon their languages and cultures in the hope of overcoming discrimination, to secure a livelihood and enhance social mobility for themselves and their children.

Endangered languages are not necessarily languages with few speakers. Even though small communities are more vulnerable to external threats, the size of a group not always matters. The viability of a language is determined first and foremost by the general attitude of its speakers towards their heritage culture, of which their language may be considered the most important component. In this respect, the intergenerational transmission of the language, i.e. teaching the children the heritage language, is the most important feature of language vitality.

The Suruaha, for instance, a small Indian community that lives in a remote area of Amazonia in Brazil, consists of approximately 150 members and all of them – including the children – were monolingual in Suruaha at the time of first contact with linguists. Despite the small size of the population, the community holds on to its language and traditional way of life in all domains. Natural or other disasters, such as epidemics or violent attacks, may threaten the physical survival of this small community. Leaving aside such external threats to the physical survival, the Suruaha culture and language seem to be “safe”. In contrast, many members of numerically large speech communities no longer pass their heritage languages onto the young generation. Such languages may still be spoken by thousands of elders, but nevertheless must obviously be considered as being endangered.

Language endangerment may arise when communities with different linguistic traditions live side by side. Such contacts involve an exchange of products as well as an exchange of cultural elements. Very often, the communities do not enjoy the same prestige in contact situations: a dominant vs. an inferior status may arise for specific reasons, such as numerical, economic, socio-historical or political strengths of each community. The communities with a lower status commonly acquire proficiency in the language of the dominant group. They may be inclined to relinquish their culture, including their language and may decide to adopt the language and culture of the dominant community.

Statistical data related to language use may illustrate the extent of the problem of language endangerment. About 97% of the world’s people speak about 4% of the world’s languages; and conversely, about 96% of the world’s languages are spoken by about 3% of the world’s people. Approximately 85% of the almost 7,000 languages of the world are spoken in only 22 countries. Some of these countries are home to large numbers of different languages: Papua New Guinea (almost 900 languages), Indonesia (up to 700), Nigeria (more than 500), India (almost 400), Cameroon (almost 300), Mexico (almost 250), Zaire (more than 200) and Brazil (more than 200). In these linguistically highly heterogeneous countries only few languages have significant numbers of speakers and very few languages are assigned an official status within these states. Large numbers of these languages are threatened by extinction. On a global scale, statistically less relevant are the threats to

languages in linguistically more homogeneous parts of the world. In Europe, for instance, Sorbian is replaced by German, and the Saami languages in Sweden and Finland are threatened by the respective state languages, as Breton is in France.

The loss of speakers in one language is the gain of speakers of another language, except for the cases of genocide. Languages are generally replaced when an entire speech community shifts to another language. Replacing languages are very often official state languages. For instance, on the African continent, several small communities replaced their heritage languages by Swahili in Tanzania, Somali in Somalia, or Arabic in the states of the Maghreb region. In other language shift situations, languages of wider communication have benefited, for example as trade languages or as a consequence of urbanization. Amharic in Ethiopia, Bambara in Mali, Hausa in Nigeria and Niger, and Wolof in Senegal are among those languages that have gained speakers at the expense of smaller languages. On the African continent, languages of very small speech communities, however, are predominantly threatened by languages of other minorities. In Southern Ethiopia, for example, 'Ongota is replaced by Ts'amakko (Tsamay), Kwegu (Koegu) by Mursi, Shabo by Majang and Harro by Bayso. Thus on the African continent the loss of speakers in one African language is typically the gain of speakers in another African language. English and French, the languages of the former colonial powers, are not replacing African languages, at least not for the time being.

In Europe most languages belong to the *Indo-European* language family, which represents the world's largest group of languages with nearly 2 billion speakers. Within the *Celtic* subgroup Breton and Scottish Gaelic are endangered, while Irish Gaelic, despite the official support within the Irish Republic, is not safe. Within the *Germanic* subgroup, the East and North Frisian dialects in Germany are endangered as well as many dialects of Low Saxon (Nedersaksisch) in the Netherlands and Germany, the Mennonite Low German language 'Plautdietsch' and Yiddish. Rheto-Romanic, the *Romance* language spoken in Switzerland is endangered. While Corsican, Occitan and Sardinian are still widely spoken, influence from the dominant official languages, i.e. French and Italian, respectively, is very strong. In the Western branch of the *Slavic* languages, Kashubian (Poland) and Sorbian (Germany) have only limited numbers of young speakers. The *Indo-Iranian* subgroup is represented in various countries by the Romani languages, which are endangered. Within the *Uralic languages*, the *Saami* languages are all endangered to various degrees. In the Scandinavian countries maintenance measures are undertaken for Inari Saami and Northern Saami. The Saami language forms in Russia, however, are almost extinct.

Language endangerment is a widespread phenomenon also in the northern part of Asia. The *Altaic languages* are spoken over a vast territory that extends from Turkey (Turkish) across Central Asia and Siberia to the Pacific Ocean (Yakut). Within the *Turkic*, *Tungusic* and *Mongolic* subgroups, most of the minor languages are endangered. In the northern regions of Yakutia in the Russian Federation, people who live in multi-ethnic communities experience pressure to abandon their heritage languages in favour of one of the two official languages, Russian and Yakut. As a result, many representatives of Evenki, Even (Tungus

group), Chukchi and Yukagir (Paleo-Asiatic group) no longer speak their former languages.

According to Michael Krauss (1992), only 20 of the 175 Native American languages in the United States belong to the category of non-endangered languages, i.e. languages that are acquired by children informally at home. The extent of language disappearance in the Americas in pre-documented times has resulted in a large number of language isolates and distinct families with relatively few languages per family. Some scholars distinguish more than 100 language families and in addition leave a large number of individual languages unclassified.

The decline of native languages of North America was set off by the European conquests in the 16th and 17th centuries. Languages disappeared in large numbers because speech communities physically became the victims of warfare, new diseases, and forceful resettlement. Diseases, such as smallpox, were transmitted both unintentionally and intentionally; the deliberate transmission of some diseases was done with the clear objective of genocide. Forceful resettlement also included slavery. The authorities set up language policies directed at eliminating heritage cultures and languages: native children were separated from their families in special boarding schools where the use of their language was forbidden. New value systems were forced upon the children and they were made to deny their own heritage and identity. This cultural and linguistic deprivation through formal education, as took place in many other colonial settings, such as in African countries, in Russia and in New Zealand, formed an essential part of colonial strategies to assimilate colonized peoples.

Native American languages have generally been replaced by the languages of the former colonial powers, i.e. Spanish, Portuguese, and English or local *linguae francae*. Colonial invaders considered multilingual settings as obstacles to evangelization and effective domination. Through this policy, Quechua and Tupí Guaraní have gained speakers at the expense of smaller languages. After independence, indigenous languages by and large ceased to be taken into account within government policies.

In North America, at least 300 languages (estimates range from 300 ~ 600) are known to have been spoken by the indigenous populations. Many of these languages have become extinct, while many more are seriously endangered. Thus, Potawatomi and Onondaga have at most 100 speakers, and estimates place the numbers of speakers for languages such as Cayuga, Oneida, and Hare at 200-600. Salishan languages, though spoken in a large area in the northwest Pacific, are severely endangered. Wakashan constitutes a seriously endangered small family on Vancouver Island. Language maintenance programmes have been established for many of these languages.

Names of ethnic communities and place names are the only traces left of a large number of South American languages that have disappeared undocumented. In eastern Brazil and most of Argentina, as in many other parts of South America, the native population was eliminated and obviously their languages vanished in these genocides. The number of

indigenous languages spoken in Brazil at the end of the 15th century, for example, has been estimated at approximately 1175. Efforts are being made to document the remaining approximately 180 languages.

In Australia over 250 languages were still spoken when Europeans arrived about 200 years ago. The majority of these languages has disappeared since then and speech communities of most of the remaining languages count fewer than 100 members. Bilingualism is widespread: seldom in other Australian languages, but predominately in English. With the exception of very few cases, the Australian languages are on the verge of extinction.

The extreme language diversity found in Oceania is illustrated well by the over 800 languages referred to as *Papuan*. The extent of language endangerment is not yet transparent, since less than 10% of the Papuan languages have been documented in any greater detail.

In the Andaman Islands of India a dozen languages form a distinct language family. The Northern and Central languages are already extinct, and the three severely endangered languages of the *Southern Andamanese* group are spoken by between 50-250 speakers.

The *Sino-Tibetan* family includes Chinese, making it the second largest language family in the world in terms of total number of speakers. Less well-known is the fact that the *Tibeto-Burman* branch constitutes - with approximately 350 languages - 95% of all Sino-Tibetan languages. At least 20% of these languages are unclassified within the branch, and for many not even the numbers of speakers are known. Most of these languages are poorly documented and severely endangered. Extreme linguistic heterogeneity, together with a geographical spread over relatively inaccessible areas of northeastern India, Nepal, Bhutan, and Myanmar challenges attempts to present an overview of these languages.

2.2 Selected Case Studies of Endangered Languages

Any overview of the extent of language endangerment is incomplete. The main reason for this is a lack of information: there are territories where no language surveys have been conducted. Obviously, the situation of possible language endangerment is unknown in such regions.

Following the general overview selected case studies will highlight some of the key issues central to language documentation and maintenance, such as the role of education, language policies, archives and records of endangered and extinct languages, and also the introduction of a writing system. The first case study deals with /Xam, an extinct language only known through language documents. As a second example, there is the Ainu language, with still a few speakers left. A few hundred, mainly older people, speak the Nivkh language, and for this language documentation and revitalization efforts are being undertaken. Two of the three Frisian languages are endangered, and language policies vary considerably in the Netherlands and Germany, where these languages are spoken. The last case study discusses aspects of the Amazigh language situation. Some of the Amazigh

languages have disappeared without documentation, while others are on the verge of extinction and will most probably disappear. There is, however, hope for some of the Amazigh languages with a larger number of speakers to survive, as they receive official support in some of the Maghreb countries.

2.2.1 /Xam, a Case of Physical and Cultural Genocide in South Africa

!Ke e: /xarra //ke is the motto of the state emblem of the new coat of arms, which was launched in post-apartheid South Africa in April 2000. This sentence from /Xam, a Southern Khoisan language spoken by one of the hunter-gatherer communities of Southern Africa, commonly referred to as San, is translated as “diverse people unite”. There are no speakers of /Xam left today. The phrase was coined on the basis of language documents, collected more than 90 years ago, and nobody knows, if native speakers of /Xam ever used these words in such a meaning. Nevertheless, the documents of the /Xam language form an important testimony of the autochthonous peoples of Southern Africa.

What happened to these people, their culture and language? A brief historical outline in answering this question follows Nigel Penn’s reconstruction. The colonial war against the /Xam, which finally led to the extinction of /Xam identity and their language, is one of the cruelest events in African history. The ‘trekboers’ were the first colonialists to push into the interior of South Africa and to enter into a ruthless competition for natural resources. These frontier farmers appropriated the watering places for their cattle and killed large numbers of game with their guns. The San hunter-gatherer communities responded to this invasion into their land and to the massive destruction of their subsistence basis with guerrilla tactics. San attacked kraals at night, frequently killed the guards and stole the cattle or sheep. When possible, they drove the livestock into hidden places to consume the meat, or they simply killed the animals to destroy the farmers’ properties.

In the 1750s, the colonists decided to respond to the resistance with the aid of commandos. First, commandos were introduced to subjugate the Khoekhoe, pastoral communities speaking Central Khoisan languages, in the Western Cape. The Dutch intruders took their land and cattle and made the Khoekhoe unfree laborers. In the early missions against San, the commandos, which now consisted of Boers, Bastards, Xhosa and Korana, had twin objectives: to crush the resistance and to capture women and children for use as laborers. The official policy at that time allowed the ‘trekboers’ to either chase San out of their areas or to force them into unfree labor. In 1774, a General Commando was set up to destroy any San resistance on a large scale. Usually, the various sections of the General Commando took off in surprise attacks at dawn, against individual kraals of sleeping San. The numerically small San communities had no chance to strike back against guns and horse-mounted enemies. The number of casualties among members of the commandos was very small if at all, Khoekhoe fighting in the first lines were killed or injured. Very few Boers were wounded or killed, while thousands of male San lost their lives. Instead of capturing them, the commandos usually shot male San, because they considered them as being of no economic value. More than 70 years after the General Commando, commandos in Bushmanland again killed large numbers of /Xam. The frontier farmers had given up

attempts to ‘civilize’ the San and to change their ‘predatory existence’ into the life of pastoralists. The last remnants of the Cape San were hunted to extinction by the Boer and ‘Bastard’ usurpers of Bushmanland in the 1870s. At that time, in addition to the commandos, also ‘hunting parties’ went out for the sole reason of killing San people. Thus, the war in the 19th century changed its objectives, as the farmers no longer aimed at merely breaking San resistance but completely eradicating San society.

The first words and some phrases of /Xam were recorded by Hinrich Lichtenstein during his travels between 1803 and 1806. In 1870, Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd began to document the /Xam language. Their collection of extensive texts reveals that /Xam at that time was a widely-spoken, viable language. Bleek and Lloyd worked in the Cape Town prison with /Xam, who served sentences of imprisonment mainly for stock theft. In 1910-11, Dorothea Bleek visited remnant groups of /Xam, and found some were bilingual in /Xam and Afrikaans, while most others were already monolingual in Afrikaans. In the following decade, /Xam identity and the language disappeared altogether.

2.2.2 Ainu in Japan

Ainu used to live in an area between the northern part of the Japanese main island Honshu and the southern tip of Kamchatka. The distribution of former Ainu settlements on Honshu can be reconstructed through present-day place names. In the 16th century, Japanese started to immigrate to Hokkaido and established a Japanese region in the southern part of the island (Matsumae). At that time, Ainu lived in the areas called Ezochi, i.e., the rest of Hokkaido, Karafuto (Sakhalin) and Chishima (Kurile islands). Forced resettlements of the Ainu people followed and Ainu settlements have disappeared from Sakhalin and the Kurile islands. Today most people who identify themselves as Ainu live on the island of Hokkaido.

In the Meiji era (from 1868), with the government policy of assimilation, Ainu were oppressed and exploited by the Japanese intruders. The Hokkaido Settlement Mission (Kaitakushi) was established as an administrative organization to rule the region, and a large number of former samurai and farmers migrated from the Japanese mainland to Hokkaido. *Ainu moshir* (“the people’s land”), the traditional hunting and gathering grounds of the Ainu people, was declared as Japanese territory and was given to Japanese immigrants. With the introduction of a Japanese way of life and compulsory, special education for Ainu children, the oral transmission of traditional knowledge was interrupted. As a consequence, the Ainu language, together with most aspects of traditional Ainu life, disappeared within a couple of generations.

When the Hokkaido Aborigine Protection Act was passed in 1899, Ainu were declared "former aborigines" and this gave rise to further discrimination. In 1946, the Ainu Association of Hokkaido was established with the aim to provide better education for Ainu and to create social welfare facilities for them. In 1984, this Association proposed to the Japanese government that the Hokkaido Aborigine Protection Act should be replaced by a new law, the so-called *Ainu Shinpo* (New Ainu Law). In the “Law on the Promotion of Ainu Culture and Facilitation of Popular Understanding of Ainu Tradition” the government

for the first time recognized the existence of a separate ethnic group inside Japan and calls for respect of its culture and traditions. This marks a significant change to previous policies. In the year 1986, for instance, Prime Minister Nakasone still stated that “Japan is a racially homogeneous nation and there is no discrimination against ethnic minorities with Japanese citizenship”.

This new act is intended to help “to realize a society in which the ethnic pride of the Ainu people is respected and to contribute to the development of diverse cultures in the country, by the implementation of measures for the promotion of Ainu culture, the spread of knowledge related to Ainu traditions, and the education of the nation, referring to the situation of Ainu traditions and culture from which the Ainu people find their ethnic pride”.

In 1997, the Hokkaido Government, the Hokkaido Development Agency and the Ministry of Education of Japan approved the establishment of the Foundation for Research and Promotion of Ainu Culture (FRPAC). One of the Foundation's tasks is to further the development of diverse national cultures through the preservation and promotion of the Ainu language and traditional culture, as well as the dissemination of knowledge on Ainu traditions. For the improvement of Ainu language education, the Foundation provides training opportunities for Ainu language instructors through intensive courses on effective instruction methods. They are based on the grammatical characteristics of the Ainu language and prepared in cooperation with Ainu language researchers. These and other activities of the Foundation should promote the Ainu language and culture.

According to a survey conducted by the Hokkaido Government in 1999, 23,767 persons identified themselves as Ainu. To the present day, many Japanese citizens fear discrimination for being Ainu and for that reason deny their origin. Despite the recent positive developments and the enthusiasm of younger people to learn Ainu, the language must be regarded as being nearly extinct. Most scholars working on the Ainu language assume that less than ten speakers are proficient in that language.

2.2.3 Nivkh in the Russian Federation

Nivkh (also called Gilyak) is an isolated language spoken on the island of Sakhalin and in the lower reaches of the Amur River in the Russian Far East. Since the middle of the 19th century, Nivkh has been classified as Paleosiberian (or Paleoasiatic) together with languages such as Ket, Yukaghir, Itelmen, Chukchi and Koryak. The Nivkh language is genetically not related to geographically neighboring languages such as Japanese, Ainu or any of the Tungusic languages (Uilta, Nanai etc.).

Of the total population of 4,902 in the original home country of the Nivkh (2,452 in the Amur region, 2,450 on Sakhalin), the number of speakers has been reported to be 477 (2002 census). Most of these speakers are over the age of 60 and they are all bilingual in Nivkh and Russian. On special occasions Nivkh is still used among the representatives of the older generation. The younger generation (age 40-60) still has some passive competence of the language, whereas the youngest generation has practically no

knowledge. The *UNESCO Red Book on Endangered Languages* describes the sociolinguistic situation of Nivkh to be “nearly extinct” in the Amur area and “seriously endangered” on Sakhalin.

Nivkh has two major dialect groups, the Amur dialects and the Sakhalin dialects. Within each group, there are numerous sub-dialects, some of which have not yet been described. The best-documented dialects are those spoken on the lower reaches of the Amur River as well as the dialects on the east coast of Sakhalin. The first Nivkh-Russian and Russian-Nivkh dictionaries are also based on the dialects spoken in this area, and contain lexical items of the Sakhalin dialects as sub-entries. The well-described dialects of the Sakhalin are those spoken in and around the village of Nogliki and the dialect of Poronaisk.

Access to speakers was very limited before the Perestroika period and the first fieldtrip to Sakhalin by a team of international scholars took place in 1990. For this reason, most of the available linguistic material is provided by linguists from Russia. Some non-Russian linguists managed to record data of the Southeastern dialect in South Sakhalin under the Japanese regime (1905-1945) or from Nivkh refugees who settled in Hokkaido (Japan) after WWII.

Before the invention of CDs, the publication of audio material was not easy. Portable DAT recorders were not available and because of the lack of infrastructure it was difficult to reach communities in the Far East. Nevertheless, the Russian ethnologist Lev Shternberg was able to record the Nivkh almost one hundred years ago. His material consists of recordings of songs and shaman performances on phonograph cylinders. Currently, this audio material is archived in the sound archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Pushkinskii Dom) in St.Petersburg. In the 1920's, Erumin Kreinovich recorded Nivkh speakers on Sakhalin. This material has been transferred from St.Petersburg to the Sakhalin Museum of Regional Studies in Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk. Takeshi Hattori produced sound tapes of the Poronaisk dialect in 1930's and 1940's, which nowadays are archived in the Hokkaido Museum of Northern Peoples in Abashiri, Japan. In the 1950's and 1960's, Robert Austerlitz worked with speakers of the Poronaisk dialect. The resulting sound recording and field notes are stored in London. Galina Otaina, the first linguist of Nivkh origin, produced a number of cassette tapes during her fieldwork. Her material is archived in Far East Branch of the Russian Academy of Science in Vladivostok. In addition, there are audio and other materials made by numerous individuals and institutions, including by the Nivkh people themselves (e.g. the Nivkh author Vladimir Sangi). Unfortunately, very few of these data are at the moment available to the students of the Nivkh language.

The audio data that were recently published on the Internet by Hidetoshi Shiraishi are a small contribution to compensate for this unfortunate situation (see <http://ext-web.edu.sgu.ac.jp/hidetos/>). Institutions and researchers should feel an obligation to make all the above-mentioned materials generally available for further scientific studies and for the use by community members.

2.2.4 North Frisian in Germany

North Frisian is a member of the coastal West Germanic subgroup together with English, whereas High German and Dutch belong to the continental West Germanic subgroup. Over the centuries North Frisian has been heavily influenced by Danish and Low German, at a later stage also by High German. Frisian languages are spoken in three areas: West Frisian in the province of Friesland in the Netherlands, and in Germany East Frisian in a small area (Saterland) of Lower Saxony and North Frisian in the Northwest of Schleswig-Holstein. West Frisian has more than 300,000 speakers and is not endangered, whereas both East Frisian (less than 2,000 speakers) and North Frisian (less than 10,000 speakers) are endangered. The three Frisian languages also differ strongly regarding the proportion of the number of speakers related to the total populations of their respective areas: more than half of the population of Dutch Friesland are speakers of Frisian, compared to 18% in the German Saterland and a only 7% in North Friesland.

North Frisian has no official status in Germany. The total population of the district of North Friesland amounts to about 155,000. Of these inhabitants, some 8-10,000 speak North Frisian (5-7%) and about 60,000 (40%) consider themselves to be Frisians. The other languages spoken in the area are High and Low German, Danish and Jutish. At present the dominant language is High German.

Linguistically, West Frisian appears much more unified and standardized than either East or North Frisian. These latter are both smaller and show more dialect variation, especially Island North Frisian. For West Frisian, the regional government has authorized an official orthography. North Frisian has several dialects and no accepted standard spelling, whereas the East Frisians have adopted the orthography of West Frisian. In public usage and visibility, Frisian in the Netherlands has a stronger position than both German Frisian languages. In Dutch Friesland, Frisian is a compulsory subject at primary and junior high school level; in Germany it is merely a marginal subject in primary schools.

Official recognition and support appears to be small for North Frisian, whereas the Dutch government has authorized the use of Frisian in courts. The provincial government of Friesland uses the orthography, and individual municipalities have official policies favouring Frisian (e.g. for place names). For North Frisian there is at least a special council at the State ministerial level, while East Frisian is merely recognized (side-by-side with Low German) as a minority language by the state government, with no further specific provisions.

On the islands of Sylt, Föhr and Amrum many parents still use North Frisian with their children. In the rest of the area the shift to Low or High German is progressing. On Föhr, Amrum and around Risum-Lindholm on the mainland younger speakers still form social bonds through North Frisian, but elsewhere this takes place through High German. The young generation still uses North Frisian, though representatives of the older generation are critical of the “quality” of their language.

The North Frisian language consists of nine main dialects, each of which has its own more or less standardized orthography, grammar and vocabulary. North Frisian is used informally in various domains of society, such as in the family, community activities, etc. It is also introduced to some domains on a more formal level, e.g. education and the church. There the above-mentioned diversity in dialectal standards creates serious practical problems.

The 1990 constitution of the State of Schleswig-Holstein has made provisions for the protection and support of North Frisian, whereas the German Federal Republic has no official policy regarding North Frisian. In 1988, a Council for Frisian Affairs in Schleswig-Holstein was formed and a special counselor for border affairs in charge of North Frisian was appointed at the governor's office.

In 1991 North Frisian was introduced in two kindergartens as a pilot project which was to run until 1996. This has motivated similar projects on the islands of Sylt and Amrum. At the primary level North Frisian is an optional medium of instruction in a few schools and some pupils are taught through North Frisian. The basic problems, however, are a lack of a firm legal foundation, of bilingual teaching methodology, and of material and curriculum development. The Mercator Education Project at the Frisian Academy deals with these problems and provides material for the education of North Frisian and other lesser-used languages in Europe (see the web site www.mercator-education.org).

2.2.5 Amazigh (Berber) Languages in Northern Africa

Little is known about pre-historic times in Northern Africa, but nobody seems to question that Amazigh are the indigenous inhabitants of the area before the “Islamic Conquest” of the Arabs. The entire northern part of the African continent may well have been a vast contiguous area of an Amazigh dialectal continuum in which neighboring varieties were mutually intelligible. In the 7th and 8th centuries, Arabic started to spread along with Islam among former Amazigh-speaking communities. The spread of Arab took several hundred years, and it was not the high prestigious Arabic varieties that replaced the ethnic tongues of Amazigh, but rather the colloquial varieties. These have developed into the new mother tongues of most of the former Amazigh speakers. These mainly oral Arabic varieties - not Standard Arabic - remain the main threat to the ancestral languages of the indigenous populations of Northern Africa, right until today.

Figures provided for the number of Amazigh languages range from ‘one’ to more than a ‘one hundred’ and some even mention as many as 5,000 local forms. The status of most Amazigh varieties with regard to their linguistic distance needs further investigation and a coherent linguistic atlas of the Amazigh languages is still lacking. Amazigh languages are spoken between Mauritania at the Atlantic coast and Egypt in the East, Tunisia in the North and Burkina Faso and Niger in the South. The westernmost Amazigh language is Zenaga, with only a few hundred speakers in an isolated pocket in the coastal border region of Mauritania and Senegal. The oasis of Siwa in Egypt is the most eastern Amazigh settlement. The language used there, named Siwi is spoken by about 10,000 people.

However, since it became part of Egypt in 1920, Arabic vocabulary has entered the language through formal education and military service.

Spanish has replaced the Amazigh language of the Guanche in the Canary Islands after a final defeat in 1496. Several other Amazigh languages, such as Sened in Tunisia or Ghomara and Sanhaja of Srair in Algeria have become extinct since then. Zenaga in Mauritania and Sawkna in Libya, along with many others, are under serious threat. Kabyle, Tamasheq and Tamazight are among those languages that are spoken by large communities and therefore seem to be rather safe, at least for the time being. However, to call oneself Amazigh no longer requires any Amazigh language competence. The majority of those who currently claim Amazigh identity do not speak Amazigh. This is the most threatening fact for the vitality of the Amazigh languages and a serious indicator of their endangerment, despite the fact, that some Amazigh languages still have large speech communities.

The sociopolitical environment for Amazigh speech communities differs considerably in the North African States. Libya's "Leader of the Revolution", Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, neglects any distinct Amazigh identity and does not accept any promotion of Amazigh languages in his country. Their existence is widely ignored in Tunisia and Mauritania, because the Amazigh are few in number in these two countries. The most positive prospects for the future, it seems, are exhibited by the Amazigh languages spoken in Morocco, and not only because their speakers are the most numerous. King Mohammed VI of Morocco established "The Royal Institute of the Amazigh Culture" (IRCAM) with the Dahir of Ajdir on October 17th, 2001. This Royal Institute in Rabat has been created to promote Amazigh culture and language.

The most challenging task assigned to IRCAM by the king seems to be the establishment of a standard Amazigh orthography. With regard to a writing system for Amazigh, there are basically two opposing positions. The Moroccan government, like the Algerian Islamic government, has advocated the use of an Arabic-based script for Amazigh and the use of the Latin alphabet to them means the rejection of Islam through Western secularism. Most Amazigh, however, use and promote the Latin script for their language.

IRCAM, i.e. the King of Morocco, came up with a rather unexpected third alternative, a "politically neutral", invented script called Neo-Tifinagh. Characters from rock inscriptions, some of which date back as far as 2,000 years, and a few manuscripts formed the basis for the development of this Neo-Tifinagh script. The Moroccan government decided that each language should be written in its own script: Arabic in Arabic script, French, Spanish and English in Latin script and Amazigh in Neo-Tifinagh. Educational materials for primary education have been developed and printed in this new script in the last few years. Outside Morocco, Tifinagh characters, however, are used merely as symbols in letterheads and logos.

Despite the official support for their language, many Amazigh feel that the Neo-Tifinagh script will ultimately segregate the Amazigh people and will also have a negative effect on

the use of the language. This script is considered to be cumbersome in its use by most Amazigh and even experts, who themselves developed the script, are not yet at ease with this “artificial” writing system. The step to written media in most cases is an important factor in the promotion of previously unwritten, oral languages. However, decisions on writing conventions such as alphabets, orthographies and writing systems for languages should always consider the requests and needs of the members of the speech communities. They obviously need to identify with these decisions, in order to use the written forms of their languages.

3. Language Documentation and Maintenance

There is a pressing need to document endangered languages, as many of them will disappear within the next few decades. These languages may play important roles in the future of the speech communities, for example, with regard to human rights issues and questions related to cultural identity and survival. Language loss leads to the irrevocable loss of human cultural heritage. Thus, endangerment of languages raises concerns among linguists, as languages are important sources for speakers’ identity as well as for scientific research. The loss of each language reduces the linguistic diversity of the world, regardless of the reasons why people abandon their language and regardless of whether they adopt another local language, an official state language or an international language.

3.1 Why Study Endangered Languages?

The knowledge acquired in the study of indigenous languages is also of prime interest to other disciplines, such as anthropology, archaeology, history and prehistory. For regions in which no written historical accounts exist, languages become a source of eminent importance for the reconstruction of cultural history. Language comparison and reconstruction may provide insights into certain aspects of the history and prehistory of a region. For example, close linguistic relationships are frequently discovered between languages and language families that at present are located at great distances from each other. Such findings may help to identify geographical origins of speech communities and may even allow a reconstruction of possible migration routes.

Historical information can also be obtained by analyzing the traces of language contact. Speech communities that live side by side exchange words of their languages, as well as subsystems or sentence constructions. So-called ‘areal features’ are shared properties in genetically unrelated languages of a certain geographic region. The spread of such areal features through borrowing very often enables researchers to reconstruct the contact history.

The reconstructed proto-lexicon of a language family or a language branch provides a unique source for historical anthropology. Proto-vocabularies contain not only information on the way of life but also on the way of thinking of speakers in the past. For instance, names of plants may tell us whether the speakers were nomadic or sedentary. Combined with results from the (paleo)zoology and (paleo)botany of the area, the historical

comparative method can make invaluable contributions when it comes to answering questions that are related to the geographic origin of a culture. Languages spoken by small speech communities very often play crucial roles in language classifications and historical reconstruction.

The study of endangered languages can be considered against a background related to the general value of preserving existing cultural diversity. Every culture represents an experiment in the survival of a unique and alternative way of life, of solving or evading problems. Loss of cultural diversity is therefore a loss of experience and knowledge that has proven its potential usefulness for mankind in general. Languages, besides being part of a people's cultural heritage, constitute a complete and complex reflection of it. The loss of a language entails the loss of cultural heritage. The documentation of languages is thus also central to ethnobotany, ethnomedicine, and to the study of ritual and oral traditions.

Several aspects may be considered in order to determine the urgency of the need for language research and documentation. It should be noted that particularly urgent are (i) cases where language isolates are endangered; (ii) cases where an entire sub-family of languages is under threat of extinction; (iii) cases where special languages are endangered, including contact varieties, initiation languages or ritual languages. The urgency for language maintenance efforts expressed by the community, however, should be given high priority.

The loss of a language isolate means the loss of a language the properties of which cannot be reconstructed by research into related languages (as such languages do not exist). Linguistic isolates are also the most likely to provide new evidence for solving problems related to language classification. In addition to this, it is also important to look at language variation within languages. The study of initiation languages, other ritual languages or registers, as well as languages of "castes" and those of communities that live in client-patron relationships may well be of utmost importance. Case studies of such language variation may allow for a better understanding of language change processes. The potential, which the heritage languages and cultures offer to their speech communities, however, is enormous and of eminent importance.

3.2 Documenting Endangered Languages

In most parts of the world, speech communities of endangered languages have no or only restricted access to formal education. Even in the other parts very few members of ethnolinguistic minorities are trained linguists. For that reason, the documentation of endangered languages involves the speakers of such languages together with the documenting linguists. Furthermore, various aspects of the research setting need to be taken into consideration. Different types and possible levels of language documentation are often determined by non-linguistic considerations. These conditions include, among other things, the availability of funding for equipment, the logistics of the fieldwork situation (accessibility, security), and the familiarity of field workers with audiovisual technology, etc.

The number of speakers and their level of competence may impose severe limits on the linguistic work. Nancy Dorian has analyzed the language use and competence of “semi-speakers” in the receding language in language shift situations. ‘Severely endangered’ or ‘moribund’ languages can no longer be fully recorded, because terminal speakers or “rusty speakers” are no longer truly fluent in the language, which had been abandoned by all other members of their community. “Rememberers” may be able to recall bits and pieces of a language which was spoken around them during their childhood. Obviously, even less reliable language data can be collected in such cases, in which a language is no longer spoken, but only remembered.

In a few cases, historical recordings and descriptions exist which allow researchers to go back in time and study extinct or moribund languages. Many extinct languages are only known through archeological findings, in the form of cuneiform tablets etc. The sources vary in quality, contents and size. For many Native American languages, for example, only catechisms or religious primers (*Doctrinas*) exist, which date back to the colonial era. If these are the only sources, then the restricted subject matter of these *Doctrinas*, which often take the form of literal translations from Spanish or Portuguese, does not provide sufficient data for an analysis of the language.

In the spirit of gathering encyclopedic knowledge, as was one of the characteristics of 18th century enlightenment, short word lists of unwritten languages were compiled all over the world during that era. These wordlists are often the sole sources of any information about the language, and are therefore very valuable, despite the inconsistencies in spelling, the lack of analysis of the language's sound system and, of course, the absence of knowledge of its grammatical structure. Some long word lists and grammatical sketches of vanishing languages, collected by travelers and interested amateur philologists, exist in various archives, in Europe and elsewhere. These important sources call for being evaluated and the language data should be made publicly available by putting them onto the World Wide Web.

The Witsen project could serve as an example for such a dissemination effort of linguistic data from historic sources. The project investigates the minor communities of Northeast Asia, their history, natural environment, culture, language and their way of life. It has been triggered mainly by the book ‘Noord en Oost Tartarije’ of the Amsterdam Mayor Nicolaas Witsen. He traveled to Russia in the 17th century and collected data on the morphology of the landscape, as well as on the fauna and flora. His main interest, however, was in the people of Siberia and the Far East; along with ethnographic data, he also published wordlists of the various Siberian languages.

Only during the 19th and 20th centuries, did reliable and complete grammatical descriptions become available, often combined with dictionaries and text collections. At present these descriptive grammars are the main source of our knowledge of endangered and extinct languages. Much current work is a direct continuation of the tradition which originated in the 19th century, and it produces grammars, dictionaries, as well as more theoretical

analyses. Fieldwork is considered the essential part in documenting endangered languages. The 20th century has brought the technological innovation of sound carriers, complemented by video. Languages can be recorded in better quality and the communicative interactions can be captured on film. The possibility of recording interactions has not only enriched our knowledge of grammar, morphology, lexicon, etc., but it also allows for a systematic description of patterns of interactive language use. Materials locked up in sound archives, museum collections and libraries, such as for Nivkh mentioned above, need to be made publicly available, as they can be employed not only to study extinct languages, but also to possibly revive them.

New technologies can also help preserve language documents and make old materials accessible on new data carriers. Sound archives based on different kinds of carriers dating back to the early 20th century exist for quite a few extinct languages. For example, recordings of various expeditions among the peoples of Siberia are archived in the Pushkinsky Dom in St. Petersburg. A few years ago, an international team copied the materials onto modern sound carriers and made selected parts accessible on the Internet. In this way sources which are hidden in archives can be made available for further research (see www.speech.nw.ru/phonetics/homepage.html).

Information technology allows for combining different types of information (texts, recordings, visual material) into integrated documentation systems. One of the initiatives which utilizes modern technologies for language documentation is the DOBES project (DOkumentation BEdrohter Sprachen), carried out at the Max Planck Institute in Nijmegen (the Netherlands). This project aims at documenting selected endangered languages according to current scientific standards, but also in a way which allows the analysis of the data. The project attempts to define linguistic and technological standards for the documentation of so far unrecorded language that may also be applied by other scholars working in this field.

The DOBES project is one of several current worldwide initiatives that support the documentation of endangered languages and - in doing so - help to safeguard an essential part of human cultural heritage. Other programs are the Hans Rausing Endangered Languages Project at the London School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), the Japanese project on the Endangered Languages of the Pacific Rim (ELPR) and the special programme of the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research NWO.

Established in 1995, the Foundation for Endangered Languages (FEL) supports, enables and assists the documentation, protection and promotion of endangered languages. The preamble of the FEL summarizes its objectives as follows: (i) to raise awareness concerning endangered languages, both inside and outside the communities where they are spoken, through all channels and media; (ii) to support the use of endangered languages in all contexts: at home, in education, in the media, and in social, cultural and economic life; (iii) to monitor linguistic policies and practices, and to seek to influence the appropriate authorities where necessary; (iv) to support the documentation of endangered languages, by offering financial assistance, training, or facilities for the publication of results; (v) to

collect and make available information of use in the preservation of endangered languages; and (vi) to disseminate information on all of the above activities as widely as possible.

Linguists generally receive funds from national science and other foundations for scholarly activities that aim at academic outcomes, such as grammatical descriptions and compilations of language corpora. Such funding agencies typically do not support, or explicitly exclude, the work which involves the speech communities themselves, despite the fact that such collaboration is fundamental to language maintenance efforts. Community members themselves rarely receive funds from such funding institutions for language documentation and maintenance activities. Ofelia Zepeda from the University of Arizona identified the lack of competence in the field of proposal writing as one main obstacle for this severe inadequacy. She initiated seminars sponsored by the National Science Foundation of the USA, in which native linguists and language workers acquire the skills needed for proposal writing. This may enable speakers of endangered languages not only to control the research conducted on their languages, but also to carry out the documentation of their languages themselves.

Many European countries of the Council of Europe have ratified the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. This Charter has been put forward not only to foster a greater unity between its member states, but also to help European minorities to develop and maintain their heritage languages. Within the European Union (EU) several initiatives have been established in accordance with the principles of this Charter. The European Bureau for Lesser-Used Languages (EBLUL) is a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) that promotes languages and language diversity in Europe. In addition to the Member State Committees (MSCs), the Mercator Network of three research and documentation centers has been set up. The Mercator-Education center at the Fryske Akademy (Ljouwert/Leeuwarden, the Netherlands), for example, conducts and publishes studies on various questions concerning education for minority speech communities and in minority languages. The Mercator centers, together with the EBLUL, support the documentation and development of endangered European languages, such as the Saami languages, Sorbian and North Frisian.

3.3 Assessing Language Vitality and Endangerment

In countries such as New Zealand, Germany and Algeria, it is obvious which languages have to be regarded as being endangered, i.e. the Maori, Sorbian and Amazigh languages, respectively. In other countries, the situation is far more complicated and insights into various factors are required in order to reach an understanding of the overall sociolinguistic situation of a language with respect to its degree of endangerment. The following summarizes UNESCO activities focusing on gathering information on the extent of language endangerment and on analysing the nature of this phenomenon.

In 1995 UNESCO launched a Clearing House for the Documentation of Endangered Languages in Tokyo. Since then many international meetings have taken place, either addressing the problem of language endangerment in general or discussing a geographic

approach (Africa, South America, the Russian Federation, etc.). Within the framework of these activities an International Expert Meeting was organized by UNESCO headquarters in Paris in March 2003. There, an UNESCO ad hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages presented a draft report entitled *Language Vitality and Endangerment* for discussion among the wider audience of linguists, language planners, representatives of NGO's, as well as members of endangered language speech communities. During the meeting, a final document was produced and among the main outcomes nine core factors were identified with the help of which the language situation of endangered languages can be assessed:

Degree of endangerment

- 1 Intergenerational language transmission
- 2 Absolute numbers of speakers
- 3 Proportion of speakers within the total population
- 4 Loss of existing language domains
- 5 Response to new domains and media
- 6 Material for language education and literacy

Language attitudes and policies

- 7 Governmental and institutional language attitudes and policies, including official language status and use
- 8 Community members' attitudes towards their own language

Urgency of documentation

- 9 Amount and quality of documentation

Factors from (1) to (6) are applied to assess a language's vitality and its state of endangerment. The most crucial single factor among them is (1), which determines the extent of language acquisition among the children within a community. It is obvious that a language without any young speakers is seriously threatened by extinction.

The dynamics of the processes of a given language shift situation is intended to be captured by (1) to (5). The proportion of speakers within a community (3) reveals an important aspect of language vitality: is the minority language still an essential indicator for being regarded a member of the community or not? Can a person be a member of the community without speaking the heritage language?

The introduction of formal education or new job opportunities for the members of a minority group may result in the loss of domains in which the heritage language has been used up to then (factor 4). A shift in religious affiliation of a community might also result in the shift to another mother tongue, a language that is associated with the new religion (5). Hausa and Dyula, for example, spread as first languages in West Africa along with Islam.

Factor (6) relates to the stage of development of a given language (“Ausbau”). Is there a community’s orthography? Have the community members agreed on a common standard form for writing the language? Are teaching and learning materials for the language available? Is there literature, such as newsletters, stories, religious texts, etc. published in that language? A factor (7) deals with the government’s policies towards that language and (8) assesses the speakers' attitudes towards their ethnic language. Finally, factor 9 attempts to evaluate the urgency for documentation by focusing on the quantity and quality of already existing and analysed language data.

Speech communities are complex and patterns of language use within these communities are difficult to explore. The evaluation of the state of vitality of any language is therefore a challenging task. Members of an ethnolinguistic minority or external evaluators can use the factors introduced above in order to describe a language shift situation and to analyse the kind and state of endangerment of a language. These factors incorporate a 5 to 0 grading system. With factor 1, for instance, grade 5 stands for the use of the language by all members of the community, whereas grade 0 states that there are no longer any speakers of this language. In applying all the factors to the language situation, a table of numbers is obtained, which characterizes the kind and state of endangerment for a language. The information in such tables can serve as a useful instrument not only for the assessment of the situation of a community’s language, but also for the formulation of appropriate support measures for language documentation, maintenance, or revitalization.

3.4 Language Maintenance and Revitalization

Maintaining language diversity requires not only the speakers themselves, but also the involvement of linguists, language planners and policy makers. Akira Yamamoto (one of the leading scholars and a committed promoter of fostering the use of endangered languages in the United States) has quite rightly been demanding for many years that "research in endangered language communities must be reciprocal and collaborative". Only in working together with the communities are linguists able to contribute to the safeguarding of endangered languages.

Many members of minority communities no longer care for their heritage languages and linguists often find it difficult to accept this fact. Nevertheless, it is only at the request of the speakers that linguists can assist ethno-linguistic minorities in fostering their threatened languages in meaningful ways. As a first step oral languages need to be analyzed and documented. For this purpose a practical orthography is one of the basic requirements for language documentation and maintenance activities. Linguists may support communities in the development of teaching and learning materials, as well as in teacher training. And finally, members of the speech community might even be trained to become researchers and linguists themselves.

Discussions on the future of their ancestral languages are far more complicated, and quite diverse opinions are expressed by members of ethno-linguistic communities. Those speaking endangered languages often consider their own language to be backward and not functional either for themselves or for future generations. Other communities, however,

experience threats to their languages as a crisis and commit themselves to language revitalization activities. They establish environments, such as kindergartens, in which their languages are spoken exclusively in order to stabilize their mother languages among the young generation. Still, an increasing number of ethno-linguistic minorities want more. Many of their members demand control over the terms and conditions which govern research. Also, they further claim rights on research outcomes, and they wish to have a say on how research results should be used and disseminated.

In the educational sector, quite a number of linguists are engaged in implementing mother tongue education programmes to safeguard ancestral languages. Mother tongue education has become more popular in most parts of the world over the past 15 years, and since 1953 UNESCO has been instrumental in this development through its policy statements and related activities. Looking at endangered languages, however, we find that in many Asian and African countries, so-called "mother tongue education" does not refer to the ancestral languages of ethno-linguistic minorities, but to the use of - local, provincial, and national - dominant languages as the media of instruction. Less than 10% of the approximately 2,000 African languages are currently employed as the medium of instruction in the educational sector, without a single endangered language among them. "Mother tongue education" in many cases further cements the position of languages which spread at the expense of endangered languages. As linguists, we are obliged to support any attempt to use African languages in formal education, but with that we may involuntarily help to threaten the languages of ethno-linguistic minorities, which are not included among the media employed in "mother tongue education". Further discussion on the use of endangered languages in formal education will follow below, with examples from the Russian Federation and California.

In a joint effort researchers from Russia and the Netherlands analyze data from audio archives and at the same time apply modern fieldwork techniques in studying endangered languages such as Nivkh, Nenets and Yukagir. The results are language descriptions, grammars, dictionaries and edited collections of oral and written literature on and in these languages. In seminars, the use of these learning and teaching materials within the modern facilities of information technology is passed on to local teachers. Formal language teaching of former mother tongues is directed to those younger members of the communities who have not learned their native language informally at home. Special methods for teaching the former mother tongue as a foreign language have to be applied. Selected parts of the acoustic databases used for these projects are available on the Internet and provide an opportunity for the exchange of information on these languages with institutions from other parts of the world.

Over the last decades several ambitious language revival initiatives have been established in the United States. The *Breath of Life / Silent No More* workshops at the University of California in Berkeley, for example, use linguistic databases to help native communities of California to study and acquire their ancestral languages. Half of the approximately 100 languages still spoken in California at the beginning of the 19th century have disappeared, and most of the other half are on the brink of extinction. There is not a single California

Indian language that is learned by children at home as the primary language. The few elders, who still speak their heritage languages, hardly use them as they have nobody to talk to. The above mentioned workshops assist Native American communities in reconstructing their ancestral language from language documents, such as publications, field notes, and audiotapes. Where elders still speak the language, the workshops support the participants in their attempts to acquire and use the former ethnic languages.

4 Concluding Remarks

Proficiency in nationally and internationally dominant languages will gain importance throughout the world and, for that reason, will continue to spread. This development does not necessarily require the sacrifice of other languages, i.e. mother tongues of ethno-linguistic minorities, since most societies have always been multilingual. However, speakers might decide to abandon their low prestige ethnic tongue for the benefit of social mobility and career opportunities. In these situations, ancestral languages can only survive in the long run if meaningful roles for them can be established in the lives of the community members. Ultimately, in order to maintain and perpetuate the world's language diversity, these speakers have to find good reasons for keeping their ancestral language alive in natural everyday communication with their offspring.

The world faces new challenges in keeping its languages alive and well. It is time for the peoples of the world to pool their resources and build on the strengths of their linguistic and cultural diversity. This entails pooling the resources at all levels: individual language specialists, local speaker community, NGOs, and governmental and institutional organizations.

At the local community level and over the past several decades, for example, many people have been working to develop language education programmes, usually with extremely limited technical resources. Unlike teachers of major languages of the world, they lack not only formal training in language teaching, now often required by local governments, but also language curricula and, even more crucially, usable basic language descriptions.

Similarly, speech communities of endangered languages, linguists, language activists, and policy makers have a long-term task to accomplish in order to develop effective and viable strategies for sustaining the world's endangered languages. A Navajo elder expressed the importance of language maintenance for his community in the following way:

**If you don't breathe,
there is no air.**

**If you don't walk,
there is no earth.**

**If you don't speak,
there is no world.**

(Paraphrased by Yamamoto from a Navajo elder's words, PBS-TV Millennium Series *Tribal Wisdom and the Modern World*)

Acknowledgements

First of all, we are indebted to our host institutions in Japan for providing excellent facilities and research conditions that allowed us to work on this article.

Two sources on Language Endangerment have been consulted extensively, and therefore require to be specially mentioned. One is *Language Vitality and Endangerment* published by UNESCO (2005) and the other is a report entitled *Endangered Languages Research in the Netherlands*, produced by the Advisory Committee on Endangered Language Research of the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research NWO (2000).

We gratefully acknowledge the crucial contributions and valuable comments by several scholars to earlier versions of this paper: Joan Argenter, Lenore Grenoble, David Hough, Christopher Mosley, Hiroshi Nakagawa, Nicholas Ostler, Akira Yamamoto, Hidetoshi Shiraishi and Tasaku Tsunoda.

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