Endangered Languages
prof. Nicole Nau, UAM 2015

Twelfth lecture (18/05/2015)

Language revitalization

Topic and questions

- What is language revitalization?
- What can be done to keep a language alive?
- Your third task
- Assessing the state of a language with revitalization in mind
- Summary of your presentations
- Your documentation projects

Language Revitalization

In the broader sense: a cover term for activities aimed at keeping a language alive or bringing it back to life.

- Language **maintenance**: keep a strong but threatened language alive, don't let it get endangered
- Language **revitalization** (narrower sense): strengthen an endangered language
- Language **revival**: bring a forgotten language back into use
- Language **reclamation**: don't accept a language's extinction

Life and death of a language

When is a language „dead"?

- When nobody speaks it?
- When nobody knows it?
- When nobody remembers it?
- When nobody cares about it?

Alternative to the death metaphor:

sleeping (dormant) language = a language that is not used at the moment but can be brought back into use

What can be done?

When is a language alive (awake)?
- When people use it.
- When people know it.
- When people care about it.

What can be done to ensure this?

How to cut down the big goal into manageable activities?

Plan for the next three lectures

Case studies of revitalization activities, concerning:

- **Acquisition** and knowledge of a language (25.05.)

- Use of a language in speech and writing in different **domains** and in different **media** (01.06.)

- Speakers' **attitudes** towards a language and the prestige of a language (08.06.)

Task 3 for credits

(recall: you can choose between Task 2 and Task 3)

- Report about three revitalization activities, either
  - for one language, regarding 2-3 different fields, OR
  - For one field, regarding 2-3 different languages
- Fields: acquisition (education), domains, media, attitudes
- Languages: an endangered language (grade 1-4 according to the UNESCO scale)
- Bring information about at least one activity into the discussion in classes.
- Hand in a written report of about 2 pages by June 15.

# Assessing the state of endangerment as a prerequisite for revitalization

- UNESCO factors and scales
- Ethnologue Vitality Categories
- Fishman's GIDS (*Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale*)
- Lewis & Simon's EGIDS (Extended GIDS)

Fishman, Joshua A. 1991. *Reversing language shift*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Lewis, Paul & Simon, Gary. 2010. Assessing endangerment: Expanding Fishman's GIDS. *Revue Roumaine de Linguistique* 55(2):103–120.

Factors that determine language vitality (UNESCO Atlas)
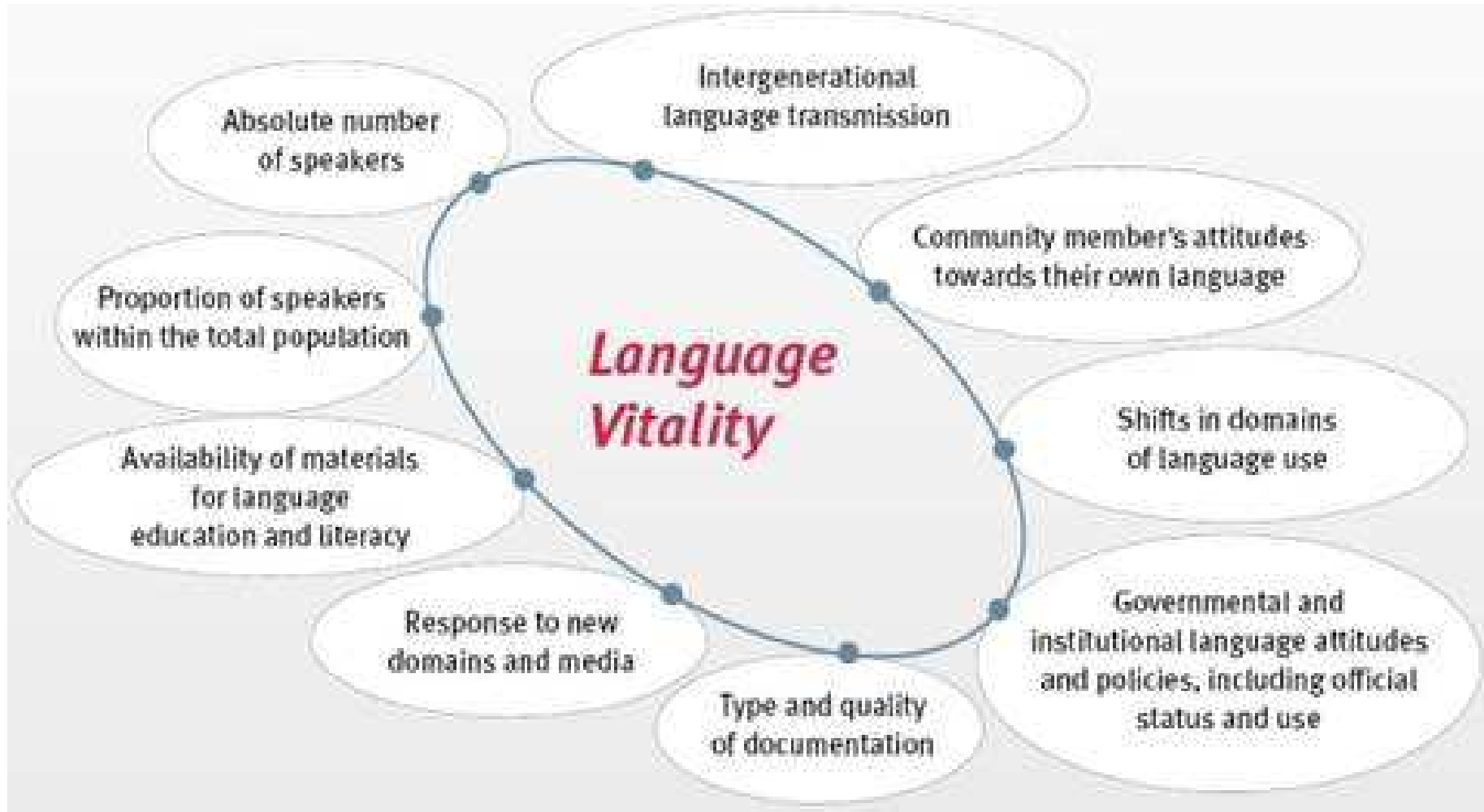
UNESCO grades of vitality / endangerment

5	safe
4	unsafe / vulnerable
3	definitely endangered
2	severely endangered
1	critically endangered
0	extinct

Example: Mpi (Thailand; Tehan & Nahhas 2008)

Table 6. Evaluation of Mpi and central Thai according to UNESCO's nine factors

Factor	Ban Sakoen	Ban Dong	Standard Thai
1. Intergenerational language transmission scale	2 points: Severely endangered: used by a few grandparents	3 points: Definitely endangered: used by parental generation plus	5 points: Safe: used by all ages from children up
2. Absolute number of speakers	0 points: ca. 240 people	1 point: ca. 1250 people	6 points: millions of people
3. Proportion of speakers within the total reference group (the Mpi)	1 point: Critically endangered: Very few speak the language	3 points: Definitely endangered: a majority, but not all, speak the language	5 points: Safe: all speak the language
4. Loss of existing language domains	1 point: Highly limited domains: very few domains and functions	3 points: Dwindling domains: even the home is threatened	5 points: Universal use: all domains and functions
5. Response to new domains and media	0 points: Inactive: not used in any new domains	0 points: Inactive: not used in any new domains	4 points: Robust and active: most new domains[4]

Factor	Ban Sakoen	Ban Dong	Standard Thai
6. Materials for language education and literacy	0 points: No orthography	0 points: No orthography	5 points: Educational and governmental use
7. Governmental and institutional language attitudes and policies	3 points: Passive Assimilation: no explicit policy	3 points: Passive Assimilation: no explicit policy	5 points: Passive Assimilation (3 points)+Standard Thai is the assimilation goal (2 points)[5]
8. Community members' attitudes toward their own language	2 points: Some support, but some indifference	3 points: Many support, but some indifference	5 points: All members value the language
9. Type and quality of documentation	2 points: Fragmentary but present	2 points: Fragmentary but present	5 points: Superlative: Comprehensive
Total	11	18	45

Category	Description
Living	Significant population of first-language speakers
Second Language Only	Used as second-language only. No first-language users, but may include emerging users
Nearly Extinct	Fewer than 50 speakers or a very small and decreasing fraction of an ethnic population
Dormant	No known remaining speakers, but a population links its ethnic identity to the language
Extinct	No remaining speakers and no population links its ethnic identity to the language

Table 3 - Ethnologue Vitality Categories (Lewis 2009)

From Lewis & Simon 2010)

Table 3. Crystal's (2000) six prerequisites for language revitalization

Prerequisite	Description
1	Increased prestige within the dominant community.
2	Increased wealth relative to the dominant community.
3	Increased relative power in the eyes of the dominant community.
4	A strong presence in the educational system.
5	A writing system for the language.
6	Access to electronic technology.
Documentation	Documentation is also suggested as a factor although it is not listed as a prerequisite.

From Tehan & Nahhas 2008

Tehan, Thomas M. & Nahhas, Ramzi W. 2008. Mpi present and future: Reversing Language Shift. Mon Khmer Studies 38, 87-104.

Crystal, David. 2000. *Language death*. Cambridge University Press.

For GIDS and EGIDS see handout

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Languages presented in this class

Arvanitic (Olga), Assyrian (Ilyas), Basque (Amaia), Chipaya (Maria Luisa), Jejuo (Paulina), Kalmyk (Jaime), Kikai Ryukyuan (Keita), Krymchak (Emre), Livonian (Zuzanna), Mohawk (Bernard), Sorbian (Jan), Thao (Karol), Wayuunaiki (Laura), Western Armenian (Mesut)