

Endangered Language Alliance

Town Meeting

June 5, 2010 – Bowery Poetry Club

More Info on Endangered Languages

A language is endangered when its speakers stop using it, or use it in fewer and fewer situations, or fewer of its genres, and severely endangered when they stop passing the language on to the next generation. Some people think that if a language has thousands of speakers, it's not endangered, but there are many factors that determine endangered language status. Here are some of the factors used in deciding if a language is endangered or not.

In a 2007 paper, linguist Michael Krauss defines languages as “safe” if children will probably be speaking them in 100 years, and “endangered” if children will probably not be speaking them in 100 years (60-80% of all languages!). A language is “moribund” if children no longer speak it.

Status of speaker community	Grade of endangerment
Sizeable population of first-language speakers	A+ “safe”
All speak, children & up (smaller population)	A “stable”
Some children speak; all speak in some places	A- “unstable, eroded”
Spoken only by parent generation and up	B “definitely endangered”
Spoken only by grandparent generation and up	C “severely endangered”
Spoken only by few of gr-grandparent generation	D “critically endangered”
No speakers	E “extinct”

Nine factors used by UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage: Endangered Languages

- Intergenerational language transmission
- Absolute number of speakers
- Proportion of speakers within the total population
- Loss of existing language domains
- Response to new domains and media
- Material for language education and literacy
- Governmental and institutional language attitudes and policies, including official language status and use
- Community members’ attitudes towards their own language
- Amount and quality of documentation

Want to learn more?

Websites, Books, Articles: GENERAL

Ethnologue: <http://www.ethnologue.com/web.asp>

UNESCO: <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/>

Enduring Voices Project *National Geographic*: <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/mission/enduringvoices/about-the-project.html>

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