



Endangered
Languages
Project

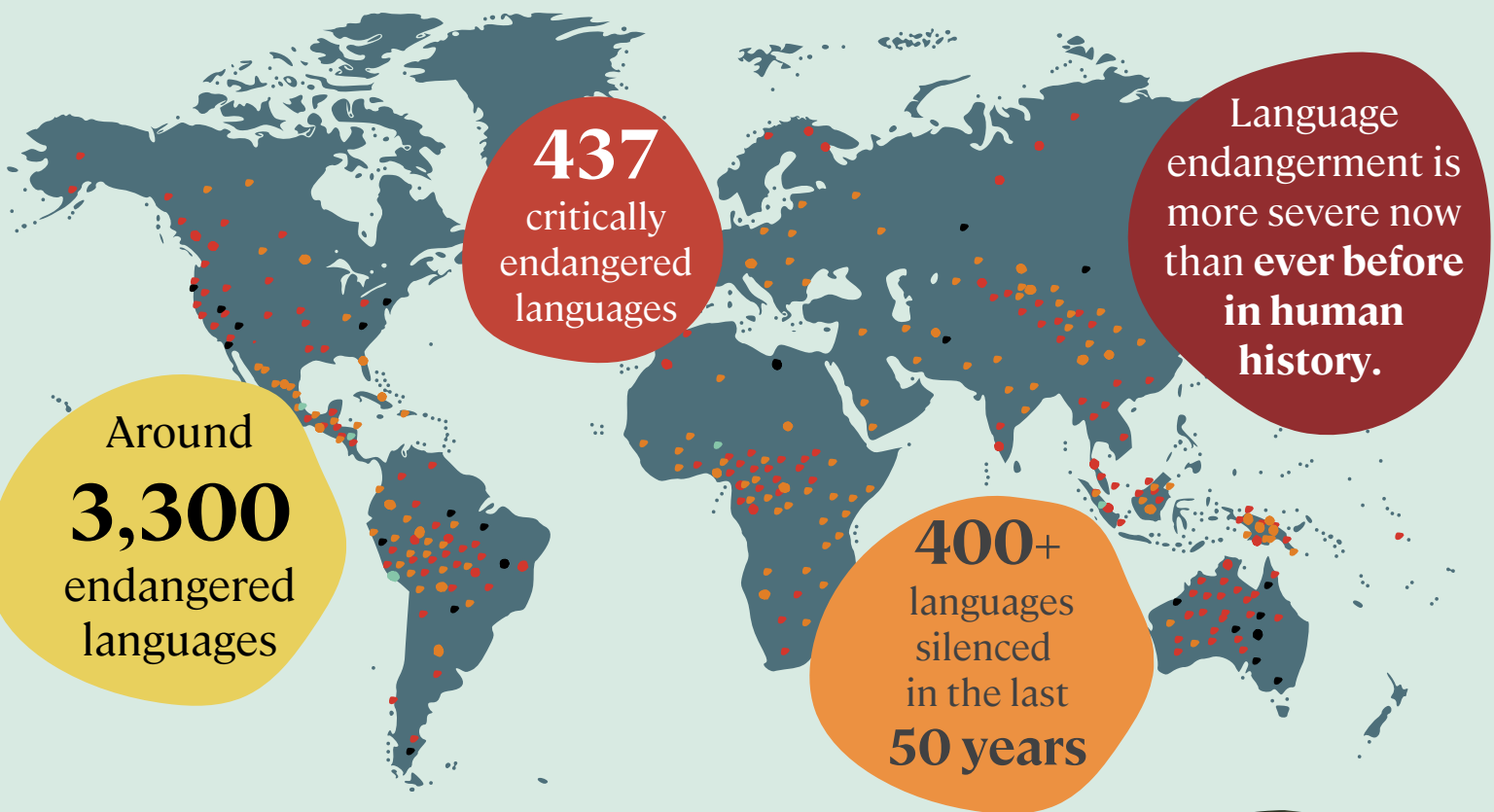
Endangered Languages: A Fact Sheet



FACT: Almost half of the world's 7,000 languages are endangered.

What's an endangered language?

An endangered language is a language that's at risk of not being spoken or signed by future generations.



"Language is a stream of voices, which the living must keep flowing. If this stream dries out, the voices of generations and generations of people go silent."



Dr. Emmanuel Ngué Um
Basaa language, Cameroon

Why do languages become endangered?

Language endangerment reflects other **pressures, injustices, struggles, or traumas** a community is facing.

A language rarely becomes endangered when its community is stable and thriving.

Sometimes, people are forced to stop using their language through laws or violence.

Sometimes, people are pressured to shift to another language so they can earn enough money to survive, or live a good life.

Colonialism, discrimination, and racism are also common factors.

For most endangered languages, there are many interwoven causes.



Dr. Maung Nyeu
Marma language, Bangladesh

"Languages do not simply die away - they are driven to extinction by identifiable forces."

MYTH:

Language endangerment is normal, natural, and unstoppable.



FACT:

Language endangerment isn't "natural" - it's caused by human forces, and it can be **stopped by humans.**

Why does language endangerment matter?



Language is much more than just a collection of words or a tool for communication: languages reflect all our different **ways of being human**.

Indigenous languages, in particular, carry **irreplaceable knowledge systems and cultural practices** that are critical to their communities' ways of knowing and being, worlds and worldviews. **Language is at the heart of identity and culture.**

"Our languages are the voices of each of our lands, the lands of which they were born. They tell those stories. They keep our connection to our ancestors. They keep our connection to the ecology, to everything and everyone that grows on that land."



Dr. Lorna Wanosts'a7 Williams
Ucwalmícwts language, Canada

Language endangerment is about injustice.

Language endangerment reflects violations of human rights, disruptions to lives and communities, and the destruction of knowledge and cultures.

Put simply: the things that cause language endangerment make the world worse for everyone.

But there is hope.



FACT: People and communities around the world are revitalizing their languages.

**Teaching and learning
their languages**

**Renewing the networks of
relationships that their
languages carry**

**Making space for their
languages to be used
in all parts of life**

**Reclaiming their right to use
and pass on their languages**



Language revitalization is possible – and growing worldwide.

What are some ways people are revitalizing their languages?

**Language learning and
teaching** in language nests,
immersion schools, classes,
mentor-apprentice programs,
and language camps



**Toroga Denver teaches Khoikhoi
language at an early childhood center in
Klappmuts, South Africa**

**Activism and policy
work** for language rights,
recognition, and support

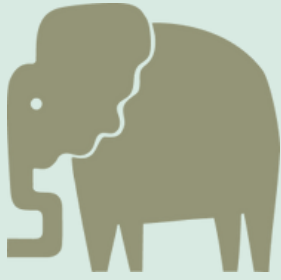


**Promotion, awareness, and
visibility** through public signage
and place names, social media,
TV, film, music, and more



**Reclaiming and renewing connections to lands,
lifeways, and knowledge systems** – language is woven
in with all parts of life, and restoring other ways of living
can support language revitalization

Why is language revitalization so important?



Particularly for Indigenous Peoples, **language revitalization is about connections:**

(re)establishing and renewing intergenerational relationships to lands, ancestors, human and beyond-human relatives, lifeways, worldviews, and social, cultural, and spiritual ways of knowing and being.

Language revitalization supports wellness:

it's linked to better mental, physical, and emotional health in Indigenous, endangered, and minoritized language communities.



Dr. Larry Kimura

Hawaiian language, Hawai'i (US)

"Where our language needs to go is way beyond just schools – it's about making sure that we're healthy."

Making everybody healthy: not just who we are as Hawaiian people, but the whole world."



Language revitalization upholds human rights and the self-determination of Indigenous Peoples, as affirmed in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Sustaining language diversity means sustaining a world with a greater **diversity of knowledge**, ways of **living sustainably**, and understandings of **what it means to be human**.



A better world for languages is a better world for all.

How can I get involved?



The Endangered Languages Project provides an online gathering place for language champions to connect, learn, and share about their work.

- Join ELP's network of volunteers
- Talk with a Language Revitalization Mentor
- Learn from our resource library
- Participate in online classes and gatherings
- Connect with people around the world

All for free, always.

"ELP offers an opportunity to meet other people around the world doing different things in revitalization, which I love."

It feels nice to have this community to share things with."



Tzintia Montaño
Da'an Davi language, Mexico

Learn, connect, and get involved at
endangeredlanguages.com

Further Learning

Justyna Olko and Julia Sallabank (eds.) 2022. *Revitalizing Endangered Languages: A Practical Guide*.

Leanne Hinton, Matt Vera, and Nancy Steele. 2002. *How to Keep Your Language Alive*.

Gabriela Pérez Báez, Rachel Vogel, and Uia Patolo. 2019. “Global Survey of Revitalization Efforts: A mixed methods approach to understanding language revitalization practices.”

Anton Treuer. 2020. *The Language Warrior’s Manifesto: How to Keep Our Languages Alive No Matter the Odds*.

D.H. Whalen, Margaret Moss, and Daryl Baldwin. 2016. “Healing Through Language: Positive Physical Health Effects of Indigenous Language Use.”

Leda Sivak et al. 2019. “‘Language Breathes Life’: Barngarla Community Perspectives on the Wellbeing Impacts of Reclaiming a Dormant Australian Aboriginal Language.”

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. 2007.

Festival of Indigenous Languages. 2022. *Talks by Global Language Revitalization Leaders*.

Lyle Campbell and Anna Belew (eds.) 2018. *Cataloguing the World’s Endangered Languages*.

Find thousands of additional learning resources about language endangerment and revitalization at endangeredlanguages.com

