



Language Endangerment, Language Death and its Factors

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Abstract

Linguists predict that if the current bad crises continue to exist, half of the existing languages will die by the end of this century and only the rest will remain as the living languages. They consider the mentioned issue of languages as the most important language tragedy in the area of thoughts and culture. America, Brazil, Mexico, Cameroon, Nigeria, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, India, and Australia are the regions where most languages will lose their lives. Many contemporary languages, which are endangered, are the ones whose speakers are careless in preserving and using these languages and have failed to teach and convey them to their new generations. Why languages die, to what extent the endangered languages exist, what are need and ways of preventing a language from dying, these and other similar questions make the discussion of this small research paper.

Keywords: *Ongoing Century; Current Situations of Languages; Language Speakers and Transfer ... Broad Changes and Academic Variations; Danger of Language Death; Factors and Its Ways of Prevention; And Problems of Saving It; Value of Languages and Carelessness of Speakers; Language Rights; And Problems in the Implementation of Rules.*

Introduction

Currently, linguists believe that languages like other living beings have the chronological stages of birth, childhood, and youth and later, they gradually have oldness, collapse and death. On the other hand, contemporary process is the process of broad changes and varieties that is accompanied by the enriching technological development, facilities, and material culture. This matter has made thousands of languages encounter with the danger of death.

According to the trustworthy sources which appear to be most believable, we can say that currently, there are 6912 living languages and linguists predict if the current bad situations continue to exist, half of the existing languages will either finish or die by the end of this century and we will only have half of them as the living languages. So many professional people consider the mentioned issue of languages as the most important language tragedy in the area of thoughts and culture.

During the human history, many languages have died, but we have never faced the loss or death of such huge number of languages during the life and history of human beings. At the current time, we are

in such a stage of human history, where three thousands of languages are on the brink of disappearing permanently in less than hundred years. In addition to the disappearance of languages, cultural and civilizational heritages pertaining to these languages are also going to vanish without being recorded. The poems, spoken folkloric literature, proverbs, wise sayings, narrations, traditions, beliefs, folk principles, trends; social and literary heritages will also be permanently lost along with them.

If a language dies, the history, thoughts, ideas, culture, and heritage of its people also finish with it and most importantly, humans and the speakers of the mentioned languages also lose their origin and identity. The question arises, being the human generation living in such period of human life, are we ready to answer the questions of future generation and accept the responsibility of such huge unreturnable destruction or death of languages. There are so many political, educational, academic and cultural reasons, according to which, it is required to save endangered languages from weaknesses and death.

Research Background

In Afghanistan, there is limited work in the realm of general and comparative historical linguistics between Pashto and Dari Languages and is considered to be a lot weaker than it is in other countries. Particularly, there are no regular academic and research works and materials about the mentioned issues in Dari and Pashto Languages.

Research Method

The research method is library. The works of world linguists particularly English new and trustworthy works from regular sources and original references have been used in it which are directly related to it. Also, other relevant academic materials have been closely studied. In addition to libraries, academic materials and works have been taken and collected from world great universities, academic centers, websites, and publications via internet.

Languages in Danger of Death

According to the UNESCO definitions, endangered languages are the ones whose speakers are reducing. There is a reduction in its use and transfer from one human to another human, the number of its speakers are decreasing. These languages have no new speakers or in other words, young children do not learn these languages, because they are considered endangered languages.

Based on the information of Ethnologue which is a broad and most trustworthy source in this realm and publishes table of contexts regarding the state of contemporary living languages, there are totally 6912 languages in the current world. Among them, each of 389 languages (5.6 % of all living languages) are spoken by almost one million people and cover the 94.15 of use of the people of the entire world. The remaining 94.4% languages are spoken only by 5.9 % people of the world.

Based on the information of the mentioned source regarding the contemporary small and weak languages, 1619 languages from world languages which make 23%, are spoken by fewer than half million people. 548 languages, which are equal to 8%, are spoken by fewer than 100 people. 204 languages (3%), which are about to become extinct, has fewer than 10 speakers.

Studies show that among the language which will face extinction during the current century, 516 languages are severely endangered and according to linguists' estimations, 210 languages among them are related to Pacific Ocean, 170 to the Continent of America, 78 to Asia, 46 to Africa and remaining 12 to European Countries (1:68).

Many scholars have worked on the classification and estimation of the amount of the harm of weak or endangered world languages and have similar opinions regarding it, but most accepted classification is as follows:

- Vulnerable: Many children speak these languages, however, this affair may be limited to some groups such as family.
- Definitely endangered: Children no longer learn this language as mother language.
- Severely endangered: Only grandparents or older generations speak this language, however, their children or parents understand it, but they do not speak it with their children.
- Critically endangered: They are the languages whose youngest speakers are grandparents and the elderly, and are used very limitedly.
- Extinct: it is a dead language and has no speakers or users at all.

Is It Necessary to Save Languages from Death?

One of the reasons for saving languages from weaknesses and death is the legal right of minorities, because the powerful ones are always in an attempt to impose their languages on the minorities. They do not recognize their languages officially and have limited their chances of use. With the recognition of languages, they walk toward the strength and may find fair relationship with various speakers of languages. Perhaps, due to some necessity, the related speakers of a language have to shift to another language.

Another reason is that every language has history, literature, knowledge, traditions and etc. Therefore, the loss of a language can gradually weaken the general culture and civilization of human. And we will have no satisfactory answer for the coming generations in conveying and delivering cultural, civilizational and historical trust.

Moreover, another psychological reason behind it, is languages and culture strengthen the social sense of people. Most groups or immigrants, that are away from their languages and cultures, feel kind of strangeness and in conclusion, it gets accompanied by psychological distress and astray (9:10).

On the other hand, children, who learn in their own language, have more facilities and achievements in education. However, governments are fully engaged in the publicity of similarity and unity and have deprived the people or children from this right. The students who learn in school via second language, do not have these questions, my language is very sweet, does not have any defect, why is not my language there in school? Is the language that I use for learning is better than my language? Is it not possible for me to get education via my native language? If it is not possible, why not and who has prevented it? In conclusion, it can affect their social personality, bravery, and ability.

Ways of Preventing Language Death

Saving languages and giving them their legal rights and for the strength of weak languages we can first mention Quebec International Linguistics Declaration in 1992 have declared. In the mentioned seminar, the participants have emphasized, “The loss of any language is considered uncompensated loss for the entire humanity and it is the duty of UNESCO to react against such situations with their urgent programs.”

They were asked to consider the weakness of language an international problem like water shortages, saving environment, and other international crises and emergencies which are common and cross-border profits and UNESCO should have important programs for the mentioned issue in this regard. Also, countries and international foundations should take steps in this area. After the seminar, various foundations in various countries of the world have shown commitment to the said issues and have

approved considerable academic and financial support for preserving and survival of local dialects and small languages.

After the seminar mentioned above, in 1995, for the sake of saving endangered languages and strength of weak languages, three international foundations considering that English and Japanese Languages are not endangered, were established in Japan, England and the United States of America. They started their missions under the title of “Endangered Languages”. The mentioned foundations internationally notice and consider the phenomenon of Language death and consider all languages human heritage rather than a language related to a single country, nation or race. After that, many other foundations and organizations were established in recent decades which provide assist for the strength of weak languages and preventing language death and have been implementing a number of saving and recording projects.

Thus, UNESCO published atlas of endangered languages for the first time in 1969, and warned the countries and nations of the world about the future of their languages.

For the honor of mother’s tongue, UNECSCO decided in 1999 to name February 21st as the international mother’s tongue day. Currently, this day is celebrated as mother’s tongue day in most countries of the world (122:3).

As a result of the mentioned activities and efforts, a number of countries have made progress through a combined balance in the area of protecting small languages and giving them legal freedom. Some facilities have been provided in it for the survival, growth, development, identity, and unity of small languages and culture. From the list of these countries, we can mention the names of Canada, Swiss, Belgium, Norway, and India which have behaved the intellectual value as an academic fact. Now, many language problems have been solved in these countries.

The politics of these countries is to grant local freedom in the political and legal structure of the country with national commitment. In a region of Switzerland, for example, for Italian, German, French and Romanian speaking people schools and learning centers with territorial rights have been set up in their native languages, and thus they support the language rights and the inhabitants from small minorities. On the other hand, there are some other countries like Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan which do not pay attention to this problem and people are not granted their language rights based on human and humanitarian law.

Moreover, there are other countries and regions in the world where attention has been paid to the survival and strengthening of indigenous or small local languages. As a result of the arbitrary efforts and demands of the governments or of the speakers, there has been an improvement in the official and social situation.

Why Do Languages Die?

According to the linguists, danger to languages and language death has three causes, two of which are very important, the first is the number of speakers of the language and the second one is the transfer or teaching it from one generation to the next. The most important form of language extinction is gradual extinction. The gradual disappearance of a language begins when the people of a community begin to learn a second language. If the second language is considered strong and important, then the second language prevails over their mother’s tongue. Over the time, they gradually forget their mother’s tongue, or because the second language has a better position, more opportunities and facilities, so people forget their mother’s tongue and resort to the use of strong language. Thus fathers do not teach their children mother’s tongue. This type of language extinction occurs over the course of several generations, with most extinct languages being the result of gradual extinction.

Languages also die suddenly. If all members of a community die in a natural disaster, such as a storm, earthquake, landslide, flood, or war, their language also disappears. In such a case the language ends abruptly. Because there is no one left to speak this language. This type of language extinction can happen in a very short time, but sudden extinction of the language is very rare.

In addition, many languages fall prey to politics. Politically, languages become extinct when the state puts pressure on people in the community to refrain from speaking their mother's tongue, for example, sometimes the state enacts laws that puts the ban on certain languages or grants preferences to some special languages, as a result of which the neglected languages become weaker and gets on the verge of extinction. In this case the citizens of the community are forced to give up their language and language end up on the verge of disappearing. (10: 6)

- **Natural Disasters, Famines, Diseases**, for example the Malol and Papua New Guinea earthquakes, or the Andaman tsunami.
- **War and Genocide**, for example the genocide of Tasmania by the colonialists, land disputes between the natives of Brazil and the civil war in El Salvador ...
- **Obvious Rebuttals**, restrictions on a private worker or new resident in the name of national unity, for example, we can mention the conditions of the Kurdish language and, in the case of the Native American languages.
- **Cultural, Political and Economic Dominance**. This section is further divided into the following sections:
 - **Economic needs**: For example, rural poverty leads to migration to cities and other areas. If their local economy strengthens, it may attract more tourists and the number of their speakers may increase.
 - **Cultural Dominance**: Cultural Dominance by Multicultural Communities: For example, education and literature are taught in the language of the majority or in the official language. If a minority language is given a chance, the indigenous or local culture may become a popular culture.
 - **Political Conditions**: For example, education policy, i.e. the elimination of indigenous languages, non-recognition and ban on the use of minority languages in public life, etc.
 - **Historical Changes**: For example, colonialism, border disputes, the emergence of a group and the renewal of their language to political and cultural domination.
 - **Writing Opportunities**: For example, the languages of minority groups are associated with poverty, illiteracy and hardship, while strong (dominant) languages are associated with progress and they develop quickly. (18: 2)

Can We Rescue Languages from Extinction?

Although death of languages is a natural affair and its proper prevention is impossible, efforts and activities can change its speed. Or the languages, that face the threat of serious extinction, can be recorded and their materials can be saved. However, the disappointments of survival and strength of many languages still exist. In the contemporary world, due to various excuses 40 % societies are still deprived of education in their native language. According to the Statistics of UNESCO, 370 million native or local people are facing prejudice in the area of native language. To solve job and life problems, they are forced to leave their regions. The biggest danger they face is not supporting their native language or carelessness or injustice for their native language. In these societies, there are hundreds of native languages which are not recognized as educational and official languages by the states. Therefore, they face extinction. By presenting various programs, United Nation's Educational Scientific Cultural Organization (UNESCO) calls on people of countries to support mother tongue and teach education in native language in educational and academic centers. (343:5)

In the world, despite of established foundations, centers and programs for the purpose of protecting endangered languages, which are engaged in working in many parts of the world, language problems are properly not free of disappointments and problems. In the realm of protecting languages, international, regional and national activities are not in an extent to deal with huge cultural crises, however, it can definitely help in reducing the speed of extinction to some extent.

At present, considering the scientific and technological development, modernization, globalization, governments, and their political policies, we should accept this as a bitter fact that it is impossible to prevent the upcoming cultural and intellectual tragedy. In this area, the biggest problem and disappointment are that contemporary, political, economic, social, cultural force are managed by the language speakers from majorities. However, thousands of languages from minorities are restricted in various sections and due to various pressures, their speakers are forced to use strong and dominant languages.

Human, political and religious principles and policies emphasize on giving language rights to people and getting education in native language, however, states and investment systems are not willing to give children these rights. (18:3)

Findings

- If the ongoing bad situations continue, half of the present languages will be either extinct or dead by the end of the century.
- In the current world, 370 million native or local people are facing prejudice in the area of native language.
- we should accept this as a bitter fact that the current international, regional and racial efforts are not effective enough to protect languages.
- Human, political and religious principles and policies emphasize on giving language rights to people and getting education in native language, however, states and investment systems are not willing to give children these rights.
- Many contemporary languages of the world which face the danger of death are the languages whose speakers are careless in preserving and using their languages and have failed in transferring and teaching them to their coming generations.

Result

For the above mentioned phenomenon (Language Death), world linguists have used a variety of terms such as, language change, language death, linguicide and language extinction. The series of language death in which the world nations and races will lose a huge number of their languages in the ongoing century, is named “The biggest language tragedy of the century” by the linguists. It is to draw the attention of the international foundations, countries, and nations to the mentioned phenomenon.

Based on the predictions of linguists, almost half of the seven thousand languages will be extinct and permanently dead by the end of the century. In addition to the disappearance of languages, cultural and civilizational heritages pertaining to these languages are also going to vanish without being recorded. The poems, spoken folkloric literature, proverbs, wise sayings, narrations, traditions, beliefs, folk principles, trends; social and literary heritages will also be permanently lost along with them.

Many contemporary languages in the world which face the danger of death are the languages whose speakers are careless in preserving and using their languages and have failed in transferring and

teaching them to their coming generations. It is worth mentioning that all languages including Pashto are faced with the threat and danger of extinction except Dari.

United Nation's Educational Scientific Cultural Organization (UNESCO) calls on people of countries to support mother tongue of people and teach education in native language in educational and academic centers.

Now various foundations in various countries of the world show commitment to the mentioned issues and have approved considerable academic and financial support for preserving and survival of local dialects and small languages. However, the prevention of this intellectual and cultural tragedy seems to be impossible. The reason is, on one hand, contemporary stage is the process of broad changes and varieties that is accompanied by the enriching technological development, facilities, and materialistic culture. On the other hand, contemporary, political, economic, social, cultural force are managed by the language speakers from majorities, and thousands of languages from minorities are restricted in various sections and due to various pressures, their speakers are forced to use strong and dominant languages.

However, a number of countries have made progress through a combined balance in the area of protecting small languages and giving them legal freedom. Some facilities have been considered in it for the survival, growth, development, identity, and proper atmosphere for unity of small languages and culture.

From the list of these countries, we can mention the names of Canada, Swiss, Belgium, Norway, and India which have behaved the intellectual value as an academic fact. Now, many language problems have been solved in these countries. However, Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan are not committed to this problem and people are not granted their language rights based on human and humanitarian law. If the governments do not make useful programs for the protection of the local endangered languages, they will probably become extinct a few years later. In the protection of endangered languages, the groups of speakers of the language, countries, regional movements are so effective and the prior responsibility is also on their shoulders. We should work consciously for the protection and conveying our mother language to the future generations. Although we cannot fully prevent languages from death and endangerment, bringing about a change in the rapidness of this series to some extent is definitely possible.

Many contemporary languages of the world which face the danger of death are the languages whose speakers are careless in preserving and using their languages and have failed in transferring and teaching them to their coming generations. Their children and young generations have started learning and using other languages and have ignored the identity, intellectual, and cultural value of their mother tongue. Therefore, it is important for the language speakers to fulfil their responsibility and pave the way for using their language at the time of doing daily tasks, relations and doing other activities.

Conclusion

From the discussion above, we can conclude that taking cultural rights and social justice into consideration is an important principle of building nation and government, and staying united with the international community. As the international, Islamic, and human laws give everyone the right to lean knowledge in their mother tongue, we strongly believe that the implementation of this law is beneficial to all the countries, nations, races of the world. So, the UNESCO is supposed to keep the promise and avoid the harmful care in this regard and take practical steps towards achieving this goal. In addition to it, the native speakers' psychological vision, knowledge, their commitment and attitude to their language and culture has a very high value. As the most endangered languages of world are the ones, whose speakers has high age and their fathers are careless in teaching their languages to their children and adolescents do not speak them. In brief, we can say that with the loss of a language, the general culture and civilization of human gradually weakens.

Suggestions

- UNESCO should enhance the quality of the ways of saving languages and should further increase the pressure on states to have full commitment to the human, civil and constitutional laws.
- Countries and states should avoid the harmful care in the implementation of human civil and constitutional law.
- All the people of the world must have the right to get education in their native language.
- Wrong and evil politics should be avoided which hinders in the way of language rights.
- The first responsibility of saving a language is on the shoulders of its speakers, therefore, they should not be careless and should search ways to save their language as an intellectual value and identity.
- Languages which do not have written system or there is more disappointment in saving it, should be recorded and their relevant materials should be saved using the modern technology.

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