
UNIT 3 DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL PRESERVATION

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Concept / definition of language death
- 3.3 The language decadence
 - 3.3.1 The nature of language death
 - 3.3.2 Classifications
 - 3.3.3 Market assessment of language
- 3.4 Causes of language death
 - 3.4.1 Why do languages die?
 - 3.4.2 Sociolinguistic Causes
 - 3.4.3 Consequences on grammar
 - 3.4.4 Factors which change the people's culture
 - 3.4.5 Listing out
- 3.5 Some other categories of endangered languages
 - 3.5.1 Restricted languages
 - 3.5.2 Formal languages
 - 3.5.3 Programming languages
 - 3.5.4 Types of language death
- 3.6 Consequences of language shift and language death
- 3.7 Remedy/language preservation
 - 3.7.1 Creating awareness
 - 3.7.2 Governmental policies
 - 3.7.3 Role of linguists/teachers
 - 3.7.4 Role of software developers
 - 3.7.5 Documentation/archiving
 - 3.7.6 Language revitalization
 - 3.7.7 Factors which help an endangered tongue for revival
 - 3.7.8 Language: the consciousness of a people
- 3.8 Language and culture
- 3.9 Let us sum up
- 3.10 Activity
- 3.11 References and further readings
- 3.12 Glossary
- 3.13 Check your progress: possible answers

3.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will be able to:

- describe the nature of language death;

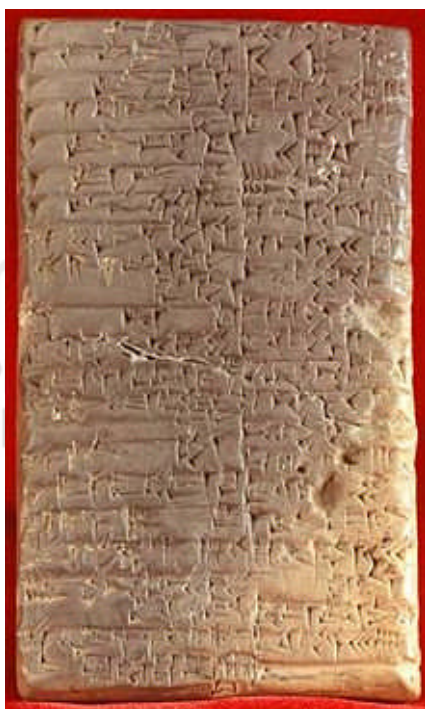
- classify the types of language death;
- discuss the market value of language;
- analyze the causes of language death;
- examine the consequences of language death;
- list out the methods of language preservation; and
- identify the close association between language and culture.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

We all speak language to communicate with other members of the society. Along with changes in the society language also undergoes changes. In the process some languages die, some survive and flourish. You must have read in your previous classes about language and its importance in maintaining culture. In this Unit we will discuss language death, causes of language death, the endangered languages, language shift, the need and mechanism for language preservation. We shall further discuss about the relationship between language and culture in this Unit.

Let us define language. A language is a scheme of illustration, aural, or perceptible symbol of communication. Language is considered to be an absolutely individual mode of communication, although animals make use of quite urbane communicative organisms, none of these are known to craft the use of all of the assets that linguists use to describe speech or written communication. Cuneiform was the first known form of written language, even though spoken language is believed to have existed for tens of thousands of years. The written version of Cuneiform is illustrated for your understanding.

The origin of language:



Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/image:Cuneiform_script2.jpg.

Human languages are usually referred to as accepted languages, and the discipline of learning them is known as linguistics. Languages breathe, expire, shift from place to place, and alter with time. Any language that stops growing and changing, initiates the process of dying, and any active language is in a condition of constant transformation.

Some languages are intended exclusively for communication between people of diverse nationalities or language groups as a subsequent language. Quite a few of these languages have been created by individuals or groups. Natural and accessible languages may also be used by archiving and they can standardize their vocabulary and identify their syntactical rules which are preferably called 'naturalistic'.

3.2 CONCEPT AND DEFINITION OF LANGUAGE DEATH

Language death is the process by which a language stops being used by the people who previously spoke it. The phrase 'language death' sounds severe and ultimate with its unwelcome appearance. And it has similar connotations and overtones. To say that a language is dead is like saying that a human being is deceased. Because languages have no existence without people, a language dies when nobody speaks it anymore. When a representative of a language is survived by one who can only comprehend the language but cannot speak it, it has to die. Once I reached a village to interview a famous last speaker of a language, only to find out that he had died just a couple of days earlier. He was buried the same day even without an archive, which would have continued to stay alive long after the archivist is dead. But the moment the last speaker of an oral or spoken language (which has never been documented) dies, the archive vanishes for ever. When a language dies, it is as though it never existed.

Check your progress 1

Note: 1) Your answers should be about 30 words each;

2) You may check your answers with the possible answers given at the end of the Unit.

1) What do you understand by language?

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2) How do languages die?

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3.3 THE LANGUAGE DECADENCE

Do you know how many languages are at the verge of demise? How many languages are at the summit of death? How many are endangered? Before you can arrive at an estimate of the range of the crisis, you require a standpoint from which to view it. Commonly estimated statistics about the proportion of languages dying only begin to make sense if they can be correlated to a consistent figure about the total number of languages alive in the world today. But how many languages are there? Most reference books published since the 1980s give a figure of between 6,000 and 7,000, but estimates have varied in recent decades between 3,000 and 10,000.

3.3.1 The nature of language death

A language is supposed to be dead when no one speaks it any more. It may continue to have its survival in an archive, of course — traditionally in writing, and lately as part of a video archive — but unless it has confident speakers one would not talk of it as a living language. And as speakers cannot express their fluency if they have no one to talk to, a language is on the verge of death when there is only one speaker left, with no member of the younger age group interested in carrying it forward. Also, place matters a lot. In some conditions like a remote rural area, 100 speakers could authorize a convincingly hopeful calculation; whereas in marginal populations spread about the suburbs of a fast emergent metropolis, the probability of 1000 people keeping the custody of their cultural language breathing is least.

It is of significance to recall that the languages we have at present are only a portion of all the languages that were alive in the past. There are too many estimates to be tentative, but you can make some presumption using two standards. First, you have some authentication from the acknowledged extent of documentation within history about the number of languages and cultures that have died; and from chronological linguistics you know something about the pace at which languages died. You also have a blurred scheme about the time of the language faculty in humans, which probably arose between 10,000 and 20,000 years ago. Coalescing these variables is an audacious undertaking, but some people have endeavored. Pagel (1995:6) wraps up that there may have been as many as 600,000 languages spoken on earth, or as few as 31,000; his 'middle of the road' estimate is 140,000. Even if we take his lowest estimate, it is plain that far more languages have expired in the history of civilization than now continue to be spoken.

Language shift is the conservative term for the steady or unexpected progress from the use of one language to a different one, either by an individual or by a group. Other terms that are normally used here talking about endangered languages are:

- language loss, for a position where a person or group is no longer competent to use a language beforehand spoken;
- language maintenance, where people prolong before the use of a language, often through implementation of explicit procedures;
- language loyalty, which articulates the apprehension to safeguard a language when a danger is apparent.

3.3.2 Classifications

Let us classify the endangerment or otherwise of languages according to their categories:

- i) Doable languages: have speakers that are adequately large in number and flourishing, this means that no peril to durable and continued existence is probable.
- ii) Workable but diminutive languages: have more than 1,000 speakers, and are spoken in societies that are inaccessible or with a strong in-house association, and sentient to the fact that their language is a symbol of distinctiveness.
- iii) Endangered languages: are spoken by a sufficient number of people to make survival a prospect, but only in complementary conditions and with an augmentation of the civic conservation.
- iv) Virtually vanished languages: are contemplated to be ahead of the prospect of endurance, typically because they are spoken by just a few aged citizens;
- v) Extinct languages: are those where the final assured spokesperson has died, and there is no sign of any recovery, resumption.

Also you may have a look at the five-level classification used by Stephen Wurm, focusing on the weaker languages :

- Potentially endangered languages: are socially and economically disadvantaged, under heavy pressure from a larger language, and beginning to lose child speakers;
- Endangered languages: have few or no children learning the language, and the youngest good speakers are young adults;
- Seriously endangered languages have the youngest good speakers of age 50 or older; and
- Moribund languages: have only a handful of good speakers left, mostly very old; and
- Extinct languages: have no speakers left.

An additional way of introducing array into endangerment is through the exploiting of a linguistic standard, flickering the variety of utilities for which languages are used and the categories of structural amendment which they exhibit. Rare languages come to be used increasingly less all through the society, with some of the tasks they initially executed either disappearing or steadily being superseded by new languages. There are many cases all over the globe where an aboriginal language has come to be used much less in educational, political, and other civic situations, because its roles have been taken over by English, or some other lingua franca. In a way such languages have been identified as 'deprived'.

How can we figure out such a vast concept as language death? Mari Rhydwen provides a relevant perspective: "Loss of language is not the loss of a concept, an abstraction, but rather it is what happens when people change their behaviour and stop transmitting their languages intergenerationally. It is intimately connected with people and it cannot be treated simply as an intellectual puzzle to be solved."

Why is the issue of language death so important? Why should we care about language preservation?

Check your progress 2

Note: 1) Your answers should be about 30 words each;

2) You may check your answers with the possible answers given at the end of the Unit.

3) What is the significant difference between the two classifications given above?

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3.3.3 Market assessment of language

The most frequently heard dispute is the financial one, which may argue that having so many languages in the globe is a misuse of funds, because we may have to spend time and energy on converting and understanding languages. If there could be only one language, everyone could catch up with the transactions without having to fret about these obstacles. There is a constituent of legitimacy in this - it does indeed cost a lot to cope with the miscellany of the world's languages. Indeed, the view that foreign languages get in the way of business transactions has been recurrently opposed of late by substantiation from the commercial world itself, where acquaintance of a foreign language is so often seen to be a competitive benefit. Languages can be called as the lubricant of commerce.

But to encourage language safeguarding, the linguists as well as the common mass must show great interest, because language is inevitably a part and parcel of culture, which we shall discuss towards the last part of this unit. We must be willing to devote large sums of money to having our identity promoted through the preservation of language and culture.

3.4 CAUSES OF LANGUAGE DEATH:

Let us classify some important causes of language death.

3.4.1 Why do languages die?

Languages have all the time expired as cultures ascend and descend and languages have materialized and disappeared. We can get a good judgment of this by following the manifestation of written languages, because we now have reports in various forms like messages, clay tablets, credentials of dozens of extinct languages from classical times.

A common categorization distinguishes three levels: languages are safe, endangered, or extinct. To this, Michael Krauss adds a notion which has been widely taken up: languages which are no longer being learned as a mother tongue

by children are said to be moribund (for example, Sanskrit language in India), a term originating in the field of medicine. Evaluating the levels of endangerment is very difficult, in view of the multiplicity of language conditions around the world, and the lack of theoretical models to weigh the causes and remedies to language death. The question is -how should we advance the kind of question raised - which is the more endangered - a language where 300 people out of community of 500 speak it, or one which has 1500 speakers out of 2,000? Plainly, in such cases, the only answer is "It all depends' - on such issues as the speed of accomplishment by the offspring, the approach of the whole society to the language, and the level of contact of other languages which may be threatening it. Language attrition, which is another way of attributing language death, is the loss of a language or portion of a language, by either a speech community or an individual.

3.4.2 Sociolinguistic causes

Sociolinguistics may have a responsibility in language death if the consciousness of the society does not succeed in maintaining linguistic variety. Language guidelines may be used to guard languages from annihilation. Terms such as "linguistic human rights" have hailed an escalating wakefulness of the socio-strategic dichotomy of innate privileges and linguistic sovereignty. The need to be conscious is perhaps a major basis of language death, when native speakers of the prevailing language are unsuccessful in distinguishing the causative phases of a multi-lingual society, and in turn, the language methods hamper rather than shelter the marginal language. When the assets for linguistic protection lessen and socio-economic steadiness depends profoundly on adeptness in the principal language, an extermination of the minority language is conceivable.

3.4.3 Consequences on grammar

At some point, language death is referred to as a big loss in linguistic literature. Changes caused by language shift often result in the following in grammar:

- oversimplification;
- below simplification;
- loss of phonological contrast;
- changeableness;
- principal language authority, such as transformation in expression ;
- morphological failure;
- imitation ;
- systematic loss;
- syntactic beating ;
- death of word-formation efficiency;
- style loss ;
- morphological point ;
- analogical altitude.

Linguists distinguish between language death and the route where a language becomes a dead language all the way through normal language change which is

a linguistic experience analogous to pseudo destruction. This takes place when a language in the path of its customary enlargement steadily morphs into a thing that is then documented as a disconnected, dissimilar language, departing from the old variety with no local speakers. Old English may be considered as a dead language with no national speakers, but it never died, instead it has been purely distorted and developed into current English. The progression of language alteration may also absorb the crack of a language into a family of quite a few descendant languages, labeling the regular mother language dead. Such a practice in general may not be described as language death, because it engages an endless chain of average conduction of the language from one age group to the next, with only microscopic amendments at every distinct spot in the sequence.

Check your progress 3

Note: 1) Your answers should be about 30 words each;

2) You may check your answers with the possible answers given at the end of the Unit.

4) How do you evaluate the endangerment of a language?

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3.4.4 Factors which change the people's culture

A people may exist, but the language may silently pass on. The bunch of dynamics causing language death has nothing directly to do with the objective wellbeing of a community. The members of the society stay put and are well, habitually surviving to occupy their established region, but their language nevertheless goes refute refuse, and sooner or later vanishes, to be restored by some other language.

The term that most often one comes across in this link is cultural absorption which means one culture is predisposed by a more prevailing culture, and begins to mislay its disposition as a consequence of its members implementing new conduct and customs. This can happen in numerous ways. The supremacy may be the consequence of territorial problems when large numbers turn up in the country's terrain, and inundate the aboriginal community -- as it happened over and over again in the path of colonialism of which Australia and North America are typical cases. On the other hand, one culture may implement its domination over another without a massive wave of resettlement, possibly through its preliminary martial supremacy or for financial motives. Anyway, language fast becomes a symbol of that authority, characteristically taking the shape of a regular or official language connected with the arriving populace. Population bulk is not always very decisive, because a minor group can take over a superior one if the culture is prominent.

When one culture merges into a different one, the succession of events indicating the dying out language seems to be the same universally. There are three broad

stages : the first is massive stress on the people to articulate the governing language. The pressure usually comes from political, communal, or financial sources. It might be top down in the form of motivation, suggestion, or laws initiated by a government or general body. It might even be bottom up, in the form of a movement from within the people of which they form a component. Otherwise, it might have no clear bearing, budding as the consequence of an interface between socio-political and socio-economic causes that are partly acknowledged. But wherever the force has come from, the result is a period of rising bilingualism, as people become progressively more proficient in their new language while still preserving proficiency in their previously used language. Then this bilingualism starts to take a rain check, with the aged language giving way to the fresh. This may lead to the final stage, in which the younger age band becomes all the time more skilled in the new language, identify itself more with it, and discover that the first language is less significant to their latest requirements.

Those are in fact the tendencies of 'language slaughter' even if this jargon is not always fitting, because there are situations where people make a cognizant assessment to stop using their original language, even not to pass it on to their offspring, seeing it as an insufferable weight. For this situation, a better term might be 'language suicide'. This undoubtedly seems to be the case in Indian settings where English is the attractive goal for many of us, which is one reason why we may speak of English as a killer language. When a new language is apparently so advantageous and valuable, it is almost not unforeseen that people want to become skilled at it, and if it helps them get a hold on opportunities in life, this is visibly a good thing. Many aspects lead to the occurrence of language death, so the termination of a pathological condition is intricate. Sociolinguists, critics, archivists have tried to discover a particular key issue to elucidate why people reallocate from one language to an additional one, but all their attempts have been conflict-ridden. Because languages are not like human beings, so it is not typically feasible to pinpoint a distinct reason for the death record for a tongue.

A society does not usually comprehend that its language is in jeopardy until it is too late, and the causes might be many--demographic, sociological, linguistic, psychosomatic, chronological, opinionated, geological, educational, spiritual, financial, and technical. Still there are many matters to do with language sensitivity which do not involve such elementary issues. Usually people are totally unconscious of the stages through which a language passes as it becomes completely endangered. They just do not know how swiftly a multilingual society can turn into a monolingual one. They even refuse to believe that their language is 'endangered', 'vanishing', 'dying'. Sometimes they may deny having such tags used about them at all, thinking them to be a refutation of their traditions.

Check your progress 4

- Note:** 1) Your answers should be about 30 words each;
2) You may check your answers with the possible answers given at the end of the Unit.
5) What do you understand by cultural absorption?

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3.4.5 Listing out

Let us list the above mentioned causes of language death:

- i) Language milieu: when a language has much more contact with other languages, it has the least chances of continued existence although there are plenty of examples of multilingual societies .
- ii) Need of language transmission to children in such cases where children are not using it anyway.
- iii) Interethnic marriages, if a woman is married outside her language society, then it implies the woman switches over to her husband's language .
- iv) The elder age group may hold a language in high regard and be proud of it, but if youth judge it less important than another language, they will be less likely to use it. This is not an autonomous or inconsistent factor, it is associated with the social, economic and political factors of a society.
- v) Lack of writing traditions and following only the oral tradition may be listed out for language shift.
- vi) Most importantly, the death of the last speaker of a language without anyone inheriting it.

3.5 SOME OTHER CATEGORIES OF ENDANGERED LANGUAGES

3.5.1 Restricted languages

Restricted innate languages are subsets of natural languages whose grammars and lexicon have been limited in order to condense or eradicate both indistinctness and intricacy. The rationale following the improvement and accomplishment of a restricted language characteristically is to support non-native speakers by providing a natural language and accepting it, or sometimes to alleviate computer privilege of a natural language. An example of a comprehensively used controlled natural language is simplified English, which was originally developed for aerospace commerce preservation manuals.

3.5.2 Formal languages

Mathematics and computer science use simulated articles called formal languages, together with programming languages and markup languages, and some languages that are more theoretical in nature. These often take the form of character strings, produced by a combination of formal grammar and semantics of arbitrary complexity.

3.5.3 Programming languages

A programming language is an acute case of a formal language that can be used to organize the performance of a machine. Programming languages are used to assist messages about the task of systematizing and maneuvering information, and to articulate algorithms accurately. Some confine the term "programming language" to those languages that can express all possible algorithms; sometimes the term "computer language" is used for artificial languages that are more limited.

3.5.4 Types of language death

Language death may manifest itself in one of the following ways:

- steady language death
- bottom-to-top language death
- top-to-bottom language death
- fundamental language death
- linguicide which means unexpected language death
- physical language death
- organic language death

The most general method primary to language death is one in which a group of speakers of one language becomes bilingual, and increasingly shifts adherence to the second language until they close down to their use of the heritage language. This is a process of absorption which may be deliberate or it may even be mandatory for a people. Speakers of some regional or minority languages may choose to dispose of them based on fiscal or other valuable grounds, in support of languages considered as having superior usefulness or status. Languages can also pass on when their speakers all wiped out by genocide, malady or a natural disaster. A language is often confirmed to be dead much ahead of the last local speaker of the language has died. If there are only a few aged users of a language left behind, and they do not use that language for everyday communication, then the language is in effect dead. A language that has accomplished such an abridged stage of use is generally measured as moribund. The process of erosion crops up when generation to generation spread of a heritage language or mother tongue or local language has successfully been checked.

Check your progress 5

- Note:** 1) Your answers should be about 30 words each;
2) You may check your answers with the possible answers given at the end of the Unit.
- 6) Define how bilingualism leads to the death of one's own language.

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3.6 CONSEQUENCES OF LANGUAGE SHIFT AND LANGUAGE DEATH

You cannot clearly differentiate between circumstances, methods and cost of language shift. These academic and diagnostic assemblies are attached to social practices which are too interrelated for easy explanation. Linguists, archivists and particularly ethnographers, while recounting the state of affairs of thorough linguistic and cultural contact, often confuse between two things: language or

cultural death and language or cultural revolution. Language death is a challenging axiom and an allegory since 'life' and 'death' of languages and socio-cultural systems do not make sense in physical conditions. Language can live on with condensed or diverse functions. For example, a language can partially lose its meaning, for example, discontinue being used as a language of religious ritual, but at the same time it can persist to be used for all other functions. It means that a language omitted its task of individuality and became a lingua franca after it lost one of its functions. It doesn't mean that it is dead. However, it seems that we benefit the communicative function of language, but communication is far away from the most important function of language. Natural language in reality is not very good for communication in a resourceful, unmistakable method. Simulated languages are much better suited for that. Other much more vital utilities of language are its creative function as an initiator of new ideas and the purpose of memory, as the codifiers of history of a nation. For us it is not central to declare what is the most imperative function, but it is significant that the loss of the communicative function, when the language is no longer used as a resource for socializing, does involuntarily denote the loss of the language itself. A language which only accomplishes the function of group or national identity may be significantly reduced - simplified in phonetics, glossary, and syntax, but it still needs to exist, still needs to be used. In fact the loss of a language is the death of a culture, because language is instrumental in bringing home a culture.

3.7 REMEDY/LANGUAGE PRESERVATION

Keeping in view the seriousness of language death and the death of culture along with it, language preservation is most important for academia as well as the Government of a region. Let us discuss some factors which may lead to language preservation:

3.7.1 Creating awareness

Awareness and apprehension must be cultivated about the crisis as it exists worldwide, because all marginal and dying out languages could be promoted from a common awareness raising about linguistic multiplicity. Language groups ubiquitously are on the same side - but they need to comprehend this, and create ways of screening it and capitalizing on it. Inside a country, citizens do not transform their minds, or build up positive attitudes about endangered/rare languages, just by being given information; the opinions need to arrest their sentiments. Particularly, art forms, poems, plays, novels, and other genres need to be brought to the point of concern. Also painting, sculpture, dance, and other forms of artistic expression should be the points of contemplation.

3.7.2 Governmental policies

Bottom-up initiatives are a top precedence for they assist in forming the bulk of public judgment which can make governments active. A substantial quantity of top-down act are taking place at least in those areas all over the globe where marginal language groups have been most dynamic. But in several parts of the world, enthusiastic activism on behalf of marginal languages is deficient or censored. Governments remain unresponsive or hostile to the issue, which does not help the issue.

For real evolution of a dying out language, it is apparent that numerous essentials need in place. There needs to be an original population concerned in getting hold of help, and with a constructive approach towards language reservation. There should be an encouraging political environment, unswerving to the conservation of cultural identity and civilizing rights, prepared to spend some money wherever necessary, and where the political connotations of language preservation have been thought about. And there need to be experts accessible to assist with the tasks of language compilation, recording, study, research and training.

3.7.3 Role of linguists/teachers

Linguists working with endangered languages accordingly have a very daunting assignment in front of them, especially when they come across pessimistic attitudes towards an ancestral language amongst the members of an original society, for the preservation of whose language they have to strive. A primary way of involvement may be to generate openings, opportunities for the people to boost self-confidence so that they come to think of their language with feelings of self-reliance, self-esteem, and pride. Only in this way will the society widen a facility from within to deal with the anxiety of constant change. A group of researchers are of the view that the decision to abandon one's own language always derives from a change in the self-esteem of a speech community. In the context of language preservation, no teaching programme can be successful without good materials, and good materials are of no worth without skilled teachers to use them. Teacher-training is a significant need, in most endangered locations. Ideally, these teachers may come from the residents of confident speakers left in the original community, and their preparation would train them to deal with the non-speakers who will shape the bulk of the subsequent age group. The requisite training must be quite composite, because the language-learning condition is so diverse.

3.7.4 Role of software developers

This is an age of information technology. There is a great deal to be done by the software developers to make the picture look convincing. Software developers need to become more multilingual and partial to the preservation of endangered languages and may attempt the following:

- Create a strong sense of ethnic identity within the endangered community and spread it through IT;
- Promotion of technical educational programmes about the endangered language and culture;
- Creation of bilingual/bicultural school programmes;
- Technical training of native speakers as teachers to preserve languages through documentation as soft copies;
- Creation of language materials that are user friendly for the younger generation, for example videos, interactive CDs, interesting audio programmes;
- Development of written literature, both traditional and modern;
- Design and amplification of the milieu in which the dying language must be used as the language of IT, and thus, can be easily accessed by the modern, young generation.

3.7.5 Documentation/archiving

Documentation is the best way of language preservation. But no language resources have ever been accumulated immediately by being archived or documented, rather an appraisal of the citations status of a language is a before-time precedence in all conditions, and is a main concern in those cases where there is a real risk of approaching language death. Archiving can do the following:

- the public and remote researchers, linguists may meet, search out for each other, and form an operational team for language preservation;
- the character of the crisis needs to be established - that the language is without a doubt endangered, (because most communities recognize the problem only after it is too late) and that it is the conscientiousness of this group of people to fight for it, and that something must be done about it;
- measures for data collection and storage must be agreed upon;
- model speakers of the language could be recognized and procured as consultants for training the younger generation;
- a course of evenness may be introduced, for both oral communication and letters, and a widely utilizable alphabet may be formulated;
- strategies have to be pioneered for highlighting the use of the language in professional as well as domestic settings;
- policies are to be established for increasing the use of the printed word in the public realm;
- the local state of affairs may be given a universal review, considering the sociopolitical or spiritual sensitivities to be cherished,
- issues to do with legitimacy, homogeneity , possession, and management of the language must be thought about and discussed;
- manuscripts in the language of general public interest such as stories, poems, newspaper articles etc. may be printed and made available; and
- ethics need to be recognized to get the language documented as an official regional language.

Check your progress 6

Note: 1) Your answers should be about 30 words each;

2) You may check your answers with the possible answers given at the end of the Unit.

7) Why is the role of the linguists, software developers and the politicians important for language preservation?

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The need to uphold demands on governments, at global, nationwide, and regional levels, to make sure that something has to be done is a challenge, albeit there are perhaps many countries in the world presently contravening or disregarding language rights rather than sustaining them. So there is no space for contentment.

3.7.6 Language revitalization

Language revitalization is the attempt by concerned parties--including persons, cultural groups, governments, or political authorities--to improve the use of a language that is endangered, moribund, or no longer spoken. Although the goals of language revitalization oscillate according to the people and the circumstances, a goal of many communities is to return a language that is dead or in danger of extinction to daily use.

Worldwide, in recent times, more than 750 languages have already vanished. A few others have hardly any known speakers. The UN estimates that more than half of the languages spoken today have less than 10,000 speakers and that a quarter has less than 1,000 speakers. Hence unless some efforts are made to sustain them, over the next few years most of these will be completely wiped out. The Endangered Language Fund (ELF) is a fund committed to the perpetuation and resumption of endangered languages.

3.7.7 Factors which help an endangered tongue for revival

David Crystal, in his book 'Language Death', suggests six factors which may help a language to progress. He hypothesizes that an endangered language will progress if its speakers:

- increase their prestige within the dominant community
- increase their wealth
- increase their legitimate power in the eyes of the dominant community
- have a strong presence in the education system
- can document the language in writing
- can make use of electronic technology.

3.7.8 Language: the consciousness of a people

Language is not just an additional thing we verbalize as human beings - it is the most important phenomenon we perform. Language is one's total upbringing, we breathe in the tongue as birds breathe in fresh air. It is the perceptible and detectable materialization of the character of a people. As an example of how languages force down a network upon what we perceive and what we do not, an anthropologist named Heinrich conducted tests among the Eskimo of the Canadian Northwest in 1972. The test consisted of the anthropologist showing color chips to the native informants and having them name the color in the Inuit language. There were names for all the colors except gray. There was no conceptual focus for gray or any shade of gray. When shown a chip of dark gray, the informants described it as "blackish"; when shown a chip of light gray, they described it as "whitish". None of them had ever heard of one word that described the nature of gray itself. So they did not "see" this color. (David Crystal, Language Death) When a community is defeated, the theft of the psyche of the people is possible by exterminating their language and imposing the language of the

victorious on them. A case of an essentially extinct language might be Anglo-Saxon, also called Old English, which passed out in about 1150 A.D. This language is dead as a spoken language because no Anglo-Saxon speakers survive today. A range of literary works are still there, but we do not hear it from the mouth of a first-language speaker of Anglo-Saxon. Since acquaintance with dead languages is confined solely to reading data, pronunciation is a relatively unimportant concern. This is regrettable because any language is first and foremost spoken and secondarily written, documented, thus, making the imitation of pronunciation most important.

A country's language is a structure of contemplation and expression typical to that nation and is the materialization of that nation's vision of the cosmos. It is the response to the psychology and attitude of a people, and is the lens through which the national and individual psyche may be implicit. Language is a theoretical tool. It is the grid through which the factual data of the universe gets processed. It is the way we cut up understanding. Language is a technique of total concentration, understanding and density. It is a way of looking for the scrutiny of the heart and the mind. No language is incapable of extension and growth. The worst feature of cultural genocide is the loss of identity through the loss of language which is a calamity which can come about for a people or an individual. Examples may be the taking of native children to management boarding schools away from their country, or the penalizing or punishment of children for wearing native dresses, keeping long hair or speaking their native language. But after sometime, the youth, young adults and teenagers decide to go with the language of the superior society. This can be termed as intellectual suicide and cultural genocide.

I shall give you a list of endangered languages only in Asia, and you can imagine the gravity of the problem:

- Ainu, Northern Japan, 1,000 speakers
- Aramaic, Lebanon, Syria
- Bathari, Oman
- Caviteño Chabacao, Cavite City, Philippines, less than 500 speakers
- Chintang, Nepal, 1,000 speakers or fewer
- Chong, Cambodia and Thailand, about 5500 speakers
- Chukchi, North-Eastern Siberia, circa 10,400 speakers
- Chulym, Russia, approx. 100 fluent speakers
- Harsusi, Oman
- Indian languages-especially tribal languages
- Kadazan, Sabah, Malaysia
- Ket, Krasnoyarsk Krai, Russia, the last Yeniseian language,
- Kristang (Cristão) (Portuguese creole spoken in Malacca, Malaysia)
- Laz, Georgia, Turkey

- Macanese (Patuá, Macaista) in Macau
- Manchu, northeast China, fewer than 100 speakers
- Mehri, Yemen and Oman
- languages of the Northern indigenous peoples of Russia
- Ratagnon, Mindoro, Philippines, 5 speakers or fewer; other non-Tagalog languages due to the current linguicide in the country
- Nuristani languages
- Sanskrit, India, Nepal
- Shehri, Oman
- Soqotri, Socotra, Yemen
- Tulu
- most Taiwanese aborigine languages, Taiwan
- Ulch, Russia, 1,000 speakers or fewer
- many languages in Indonesia

(Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_endangered_languages)

Check your progress 7

- Note:** 1) Your answers should be about 30 words each;
2) You may check your answers with the possible answers given at the end of the Unit.
- 8) What do you understand by intellectual suicide or cultural genocide?

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3.8 LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

Language of a country controls its culture, as we have already discussed.

The need to preserve linguistic diversity rests squarely on the shoulders of this actuality. If diversity is a requirement for a triumphant civilization, then the conservation of linguistic miscellany is indispensable, because language lies at the heart of the being. If the maturity of compound cultures is so significant, then the role of languages becomes decisive, for cultures are primarily broadcast through languages. Consequently, when linguistic communication is hindered through language death, there is a grave loss of hereditary records. For the individual, it is a momentous loss, because their personal history has disappeared, but this loss has a circumlocutory effect on everyone, because language is a

natural resource which cannot be replaced once it is removed from the earth. We need the cross-fertilization of language for its growth. Language controls our history. Through words and idioms, it provides us with evidence about the cultural contacts a nation has had.

3.9 LET US SUM UP

In summary and in conclusion, I can say that if we feel old languages are better forgotten, it is like saying our heart and soul is a leftover of a former age and hence can be safely detached from the body. Using one's own tongue along with that of the leading society is a gain, but not at the cost of the death of one's original language. A people who lose their language can no longer live on as a people, even though they can carry on as itinerant folks. You must prolong the use of the speech of your forefathers and absorb the acumen contained within, because that is the anchor of identity, meaning and culture.

Language death is an awful loss, to all who come into contact with it: 'Facing the loss of language or culture involves the same stages of grief that one experiences in the process of death and dying' (David Crystal). You need not be members of an endangered community to empathize with this grief, or address it. One has to be socially and culturally responsible as a world citizen. The linguists who are essentially doing the research and the fieldwork need support and systematic facilitation from each one of us. Creation of a public awareness is the fundamental step.

3.10 ACTIVITY

We have together, above, discussed the problem. Do you think that now you understand language death and its preservation and its cultural implications better? Try to address this issue by explaining it to another friend of yours and see how well you have understood it.

3.11 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

- i) http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Cuneiform_script2.jpg
- ii) Pagel, Mark. Contribution to the Conservation of Endangered Languages seminar; University of Bristol, 21 April 1995. Iatiku 1.6.
- iii) Wurm, Stephen A. Language Death and Disappearance: Cause and Circumstances. In Robins and Uhlenbeck (eds.). 1-18. Methods of language maintenance and revival, with selected cases of language endangerment in the world. In Matsumura (ed.). 191-211. 1991.
- iv) Rhydwen, Mari. Strategies for Doing the Impossible. In Ostler (ed.). 101-6. 1998.
- v) Crystal, David. 'Language Death' Cambridge University Press. 2000.
- vi) <http://www.endangeredlanguagefund.org/request.html>
- vii) http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_endangered_languages
- viii) Bloch, Bernard, and George Trager. Outline of linguistic analysis. Baltimore: Linguistic Society and America. 1942.

3.12 GLOSSARY

- Archiving** : process of classifying, documenting, preserving and retrieving non-current records (the term records refers to any documentary material, regardless of format) of an organization, institutions/individual or research scholar that has been selected for preservation because they have continuing value.
- Cultural genocide** : deliberate extermination of a culture
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3.13 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE ANSWERS

- 1) A language is a scheme of illustration aural, or perceptible symbol of communication. Language is considered to be on absolutely individual mode of communication between people of diverse nationalities or language groups.
- 2) A Language dies when its ceases to be used by the people who previously spoke it. Otherwise, when the last representative of a language is survived by someone who can understand the language but can't use it.
- 3) Rare languages are used less all through the society and deprived languages have stopped being used; in a way the first category is partially executed whereas the second category is completely dead.
- 4) Sometimes when people exist but their languages are extinguished, it is a sort of cultural decadence, a death of the conduct and custom of a people.
- 5) When a minor group, its culture and language are overtaken by a superior and prominent culture, it is called cultural absorption. The dominant language is a symbol of authority, consequently taking the shape of the regular and the official language of the region.
- 6) When bilingualism prevails in a country or region, the minor group slowly stops using the less important language in their personal and professional lives by which sometimes the original language faces untimely extinction.
- 7) The linguists may help language preservation by research and development (R&D), politicians may help by policy making and software developers may help by using information technology for language and cultural preservation.
- 8) Cultural genocide depends on the character and consciousness of a people. Sometimes, a group decides to use the foreign language in place of its mother-tongue due to academic, professional and material reasons, which is intellectual suicide.