Research shows that half of the languages spoken today are likely to be extinct by the end of this century. The loss of language is not merely a loss of the language itself but also a loss of entire culture of the community of the speakers. The authors focus on Latin American endangered languages, and review the efforts done both in education, printed documents and in cyber space. Free software available for native speakers will give opportunities to preserve and revive the threatened languages. The paper introduces several regional efforts in this line, such as Enlace Quinche, INALI and others.

1. Introduction

Research shows that more than 3,400 languages, almost a half of the languages spoken on the globe, will be extinct by the end of this century. According to the Worldwatch Institute between 50% and 90% of the languages in the world will disappear during this century, and half of the living languages have only 2,500 speakers, which is far less than the population size needed to pass the language on to other generations. Threshold size is said to be about 100,000 speakers. Among linguists it is commonly recognized that languages change and sometime disappear, but it has never occurred before that thousands of languages have been threatened with the massive extinction in such short period of time.

Some linguists like Ken Hale from MIT explain that the loss of a language is not only of the loss of the language itself, but constitutes a loss of whole cultural heritage.

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The fact ends with the interpretation that each single language reflects a unique vision of the world along with a complex culture. Reflecting the way in which a community sees the world, and its problems. At the same instance a language solves their internal problems and develops their philosophical minds and in which their cultural heritage lives. As a consequence the death of a language is the death of the eyes from which a whole society has seen the world for hundreds, even thousands of years.

For the same reason it is important to be aware of the efforts that have been done to give life to these moribund languages and to the institutions giving support to those languages. Since the amount of languages is too big to describe all of them in a small essay the authors will focus on the languages of Latin America and their place in the internet along with brief explanations of the complexity of the language and how these apparent weak languages have influenced the major languages in these days. It will be a brief mention of some of the most beneficial sites in the internet, with lean to helping the literacy of these languages, submitting also a small review of the contents, analyzing the concentration of learning material and software available to support the language.

By doing this, the authors try to give awareness of the constant threat of moribund languages and give a direct guide to any persons interested in learning or wanting to contribute to this hard task of maintaining these irreplaceable languages.

2. 线性语言与母语

There are around 6,800 languages spoken on the globe and half of them are concentrated in only 8 countries: Indonesia, Nigeria, India, Brazil, Cameroon, Australia and México. The language diversity in México is rich, but it is in danger. According to UNESCO’s Atlas of the World Languages in Danger of Disappearing, very well structured and condensed world atlas of endangered languages, just in México alone there are 54 death languages that cannot be classified yet and another 65 death languages have been already classified, giving a total of more than 110 extinct languages. But it is just a recent chapter of the history of language disappearing in the region. It is not known how many languages existed in the sixteenth century in the period before the conquest of Spanish, which must have had a catastrophic impact on the language situation. As almost entire population were wiped out by diseases brought by Spaniards, it making it almost impossible to know the specifics of the language used.
One of the languages suffering the threat of disappearing is the Quechua or better known as Mayan which has several versions of the native language. *Ethnologue* lists up 46 regional versions of Quechua language under Quechua language family. Although the total number of speakers of all Quechua language family is estimated to be almost ten million, number of speakers of most of its regional versions is as small as just a few thousand to a few tens of thousands. The Quechua language is spoken in a wide geographical area spreading into a large part of Latin America or Mesoamerica. It is very independent of the current political map. The area is not only a part of México, it is also a part of Belize, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador and Argentina.

2.2 Characteristics of the Quechua Language

To underline the importance of the Quechua language, it is important to underline mention that there are many English words which were derived from Quechua: coca, condor, guano, gaucho, guanaco, Inca, jerky, lagniappe, lima [bean], llama, pampa, puma, quipu, quinine, quinoa, and vicuña. Some regional Spanish words, for example the one in Peru, are also direct descendents of the Mayan language. Spanish has literally hundreds of Quechua words, from names of animals and plants (papa ‘potato’, viscacha ‘type of rodent’, cuy ‘guinea pig’, yum, a delicacy in Peru) to cooking terms (choclo ‘corn cob’, pachamanca ‘earth oven’, tocos ‘horrid dish of fermented potatoes’) to items of clothing (chompa ‘sweater’, chullu ‘knitted cap’, cushma ‘shirt’) to terms from everyday life (china ‘young woman’, calato ‘naked’, cachaco ‘cop’, chacra ‘farm’, caucho ‘rubber’, quena ‘flute’) and many more. Even some sentence structures from Quechua are used in the modern spoken Spanish.

2.3 The Legendary Popularity of the Quechua Language

The legendary popularity among historians along with the complexity of the language, not forgetting the fact that is surrounded and being constantly pressured by the Spanish language makes this language an excellent example of a language fighting for survival. In the beginning the Quechua language was written using more than 800 hieroglyphics. While most of the languages are based on phonetic signs, Quechua language is based on ideographic signs. While all of modern European words are formed from various combinations of about 26 to around 40 signs, that list of letters we call an Alphabet, all
Mayan words are formed from various combinations of nearly 800 signs, and each sign represents a full syllable so that list of signs is called a Syllabary, not an Alphabet\(^4\). Its complexity made the writing system only for the use of high sacerdotal class, in the mean while the peasant class used only the spoken language. The time of the Spaniards contact was when the language suffered the biggest damage. The damage was inflicted mainly by the destruction of virtually all the written history and written Mayan language by Spaniard who considered all the Maya civilization evil and out of order\(^6\).

3. วัฒนธรรมภาษาแมียงในยุคสมัยใหม่

There are Mayan documents written with Latin alphabets since the second half of the sixteenth century, believed to be transcribed by Spaniard monks. These documents are somehow the initiations of the Latin Mayan alphabet, and these are materials that allowed to conserve some of the cultural traditions up to our days. One example is the book of Chilam Balam. The Mayan language was never extinct, but it was close to desappear. The literary historians trace the beginning of the modern Mayan literature to the Castas wars in 1847 when military leaders communicated using letters written in Mayan. There is a compilation of these letters and it was published in one edition of the Monolingue in Mayan in 1996\(^6\). Several dictionaries and grammatical guides between the Spanish and the Mayan have been written during the past 500 years; the objective was only to promote the cultural assimilation. The language had many alphabets and each author had his own way of reproducing the phonetics of the language but not in Spanish. In 1881 the first official alphabet was adopted suffering some changes in 1884 known like the ABC alphabet\(^6\).

3. 2 วิธีการใช้ภาษา

Since 1984 there have been efforts to establish a comprehensive and absolute standard for this written language. The main question remains, what is the best for speakers and what is the best for linguistics? This generates debates among linguistics working in this language. Some of them want to standardize the language without considering the enormous task required for the speakers to forget everything they know and change for new grammatical rules\(^6\). Between the conflicts and crisis to decide what is more beneficial for the survival of the Mayan language there are many programs, some of them
government sponsored that concentrate mainly in the constant education of the people with the way that is available now. Ironically the best course of action is to use the language that is threatening Mayan language, and use it to educate people about the language and create a bilingual environment. The goal is to create an environment where the Mayan language doesn’t become an obstacle to communicate with the world, but to flow along with other languages preserving the pride and the culture for the new Mayan generations to come.

4. Revival programs can be found also in the cyber space. The first program we are going to review is the one called Enlace Quinché or Alliance Quinché (www.enlacequiche.org.gt). This program offers excellent material to learn the language. The web is written in Spanish but the layout is set up in a way not so difficult to surf even for non-Spanish speakers. Here you can find dictionaries, even the old glyphs writing system along with examples, the sounds and one by one the symbols of the new alphabet so the phonetics can be practiced. The program has its physical headquarter in Guatemala.

The Enlace Quinché program has generated software in a very basic platform using tools like html, java script, and html dynamic. By making this software freeware it transforms this program from an educative tool to a tool used to increase the knowledge of people interested. The program goes beyond just a few didactic programs but also has several connections with schools at a technical level to teach and help communities with continuous practice of the language. This program is sponsored by USAID and Guatemalan government.

4. On the Mexican side there are several programs and organizations involved in the promotion of the endangered languages, not only the Mayan, but many others which are in constant danger of disappearance. One of the programs is called INALI Instituto Nacional de Lenguas Indígenas (National Institute of the Native Languages). This program has as the main goal to promote the usage of the native language along to protect the national rights of the speakers. This institution is more focused to design
strategies that help to accredit technicians and bilingual professional. To take care of the continuous creation of new specialists at the same time to make them knowledgeable of the culture, coordinating their masters and doctors degrees along with preparation courses.

4.3 Strategies to Celebrate International Mother Language Day

Most of these organizations are partnering together to celebrate the world wide celebrated International Mother Language Day along with UNESCO, which is always concerned with helping in the reviving process of those endangered languages. One program of UNESCO in the field of languages is called the B@bel Project that helps promoting the linguistic equilibrium on the cyber space as well as sharing the knowledge. The program is specially designed to develop automatic translation tools in cyber space. By creating those tools it is intended to give a space for suppliers of information and decrease the limitation created by difference of language with multilingual access to knowledge and information.

The efforts to save the language are being contemplate as victorious towards the progress of the Mayan language. Cultivating people, encouraging the literature in their native language this little by little changing the mentality had towards the believing that only one language should be used in order to conserve the tradition and culture. Now days it is more clear to people a around the globe that speaking more than one language will not ruin the traditions or personal culture, in the contrary it will help to preserve for a future time. More and more in different parts of the world being bilingual even with the most popular languages is not enough anymore, and the importance of considering multilingualism an essential part of proper social behavior is becoming primordial in our days.

5. Other Languages

There are many more institutions and individuals fighting for the survival and revival of their native languages. The case presented above is just one of thousands of languages struggling today. Similar efforts have been done world wide for different languages, but there still many other languages that have too little or no help at all. One of the best tools that can be used is the infinite source of information contained in the cyber space, making the language promoting software a freeware easy to configure along with
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encouraging natives to not only publish writing works, but to also generate software that can be used by the new generations. The main point has never been to close the doors to the dominant languages, but to subsist together being part of daily lives as well as the traditions carried along for thousands of years. The different organizations mentioned have successfully promoted those values to the society, spreading awareness that the death of a language constitutes the death of an irreplaceable and indispensable piece of human history.

(2) Archive of indigenous languages of Latin America (AILLA) http://www.ailla.utexas.org/site/welcome.html
(3) The term Mesoamerica comes from an area occupied by a variety of ancient cultures that live in a fusion of religious believes, art, architecture, and technology that made them a unique civilization in America for three thousand years: approximately from 1500 B.C. until 1519 A.C. at the time of the European contact.
(4) Fundación para el avance de los estudios mesoamericanos (FAMSI) http://www.famsi.org/spanish/about.htm
(5) Mark Rosenfelder, Fun facts to know and tell about Quechua, http://www.zompist.com/quechua.html
(6) Universcidad Autonoma de Yucatan (Archibos)
    Note: Most of the information acquired from the original information sources used for this paper is available only in Spanish language, translation of comments and ideas where done in the best knowledgeable way known by the authors of this paper.
(9) Comisión Nacional para el desarrollo de los pueblos indígenas, http://cdi.gob.mx/