



Committee: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

Topic: Addressing Endangered Languages

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I. COMMITTEE BACKGROUND

United Nations Educational, Scientific, & Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is a committee that was founded on the 16th November 1945. It works to build and maintain cultural peace, the eradication of poverty, sustainable development, and intercultural dialogue (UN, 2022). They aim to achieve this in the global precedence areas of Africa & Sustainable Development Goal 5, Gender Equality through the use of education, science, culture, communication, and languages. UNESCO is comprised of 195 members and 8 Associate members and is regulated by the General conference and the Executive Board.

II. TOPIC INFORMATION

A. History of the topic

To maintain a stable country, the United Nation aims to respect a country's culture, traditions, and language. Protecting and saving endangered languages is important to ensure protection of cultural identity and heritage, while preserving peace and history of a country. An endangered language is defined as one that is likely to become extinct in the near future, where it is no longer spoken. There are over 2,895 languages that are endangered and on the verge of extinction, with most of the world speaking one of 20 languages. Language is an important factor in increasing a country's diversity and creates ties and communication uniting the whole country.

From less and more developed countries, languages have vanished over time, due to political, social, and cultural reasons. When a language becomes extinct, much of the culture and history is lost. The Eyak language was a language actively spoken in Alaska, until 2008 when the last remaining native speaker died, due to the spread of English and suppression of aboriginal languages. Svan is an endangered language located in Georgia and contains the most

phonemic alphabet in the world. It has been driven to endangerment due to lack of support and low prestige.

Many languages have become extinct, and only one language has ever been revived. This language is Hebrew which became extinct in the 5th century CE and was revived in late 19th century CE. Hebrew stopped being spoken after the Romans destroyed the second Jewish Temple. Roman emperor Hadrian expelled, enslaved, or killed most of Israel's remaining Jews, who were the only lasting native Hebrew speakers. On October 13th, 1881, the Hebrew language was revived by Eliezer Ben- Yehuda and his friends who agreed to only speak Hebrew when they were having conversations. This led to Hebrew becoming the national language of Israel.

B. Current Issues

Colombia: There are 68 indigenous languages spoken in Columbia, from which many are in danger of disappearing completely. The number of indigenous languages has decreased significantly over the years. In the 1500s, it was reported that at least 300 distinct languages were spoken by native people. Many of these languages survived because of the diverse topography in Columbia. The mountains and jungles allow tribes to stay isolated

from Spanish speakers. Nevertheless, indigenous groups are being pressured to merge with the mainstream Columbian culture. A main cause for the fading of indigenous languages in Columbia is the ongoing drug and guerrilla wars. Wars between indigenous groups started increasing, causing people to lose their jobs and to move to bigger cities. They then learnt Spanish in order to fit into the culture. The Spanish language also intruded on rural tribal areas as companies set up factories and farms in those areas. (Otis)

Turkey: Pontic Greek, a language spoken in Turkey's Black Sea Region, is thought to be critically endangered. It is now only spoken by 780 thousand people according to research by UNESCO. It was initially spoken by Orthodox Christian people who were sent to Greece from Turkey. Pontic Greek derived from ancient Greece and the modern Greek spoken today came from Pontic Greek. It can be argued that when those that speak Pontic Greek die, the language will die with them. Mehmet Günaydın, a language teacher, states that speaking this language caused individuals to be excluded which caused the discriminatory action of stopping people from learning and speaking their own language. Those whose mother tongue was Pontic Greek were more likely to learn Turkish in school meaning that their mother tongue became more of a second language. This also meant that younger generations were not

learning the language causing the language to become forgotten. (*Medya News*)

Egypt: Nubian is a language spoken in some tribes in southern Egypt and northern Sudan, mostly by people that live along the river Nile. According to JSTOR Nubian is only spoken by 200,000 people in the world. The Nubian language was originally spoken by a large number of people in Sudan, but due to Arabization the language is now limited to the Nile valley between Aswan, Egypt and Al Dabbah, Sudan. The current state of the Nubian language originated from Old Nubian, but as time passed the language became more modern and also more forgotten. Although the Nubians were familiar with the Egyptian hieroglyphic writing, they initially had no way of recording the Meroitic language. However not long after the rise of Meroe which was an ancient city in Sudan, they managed to discover a new way. Nevertheless, it wasn't like the hieroglyphics, which required the drawing of pictures, instead it used an alphabet of just 23 symbols.

II UN Action

The United Nations has begun a variety of projects, programmes and activities that focus on the development of endangered languages in society. For example, UNESCO has commenced the Endangered Languages Programme that actively aims to support

communities, experts, and governments. UNESCO achieves this goal by producing, coordinating, and expanding tools for assessment of language status and services for technical expertise and training. (*UNESCO's Endangered Languages Programme*).

UNESCO has also unveiled an atlas composed of the world's endangered languages viewed as an initiative to preserve and promote global linguistic diversity and multilingualism (*UNESCO launches the World Atlas of Languages to celebrate and protect linguistic diversity*). The atlas intends to raise awareness about language endangerment, including the need to safeguard linguistic diversity among political aspects (*Atlas of languages in danger: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization*).

In addition to the variety of projects that UNESCO hosts, they continue to highlight the importance of commemorating world languages through their celebrations. Celebration of World Arabic Language Day, Portuguese Language Day, and International Mother Language Day are some of the events that are hosted each year to recognize and celebrate the different mother tongues of the world.

III. CASE STUDY: WALES, UK

Wales is one of the developed countries of the world that works to protect their native language. Schools and governments aim to educate their younger generations on their linguistic history and their native language, Welsh. Welsh is a language that is mandatory for students to learn in school. In addition to this, road signs, airport signs, and any other public information boards are written in both Welsh and English. There is significant public funding by the UK government to support the strengthening and use of the Welsh language culturally and in day-to-day usage.

IV. ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

1. What is linguistic genocide?
2. What are the main causes of linguistic genocide?
3. What are some countries where linguistic genocide occurs?
4. How has the increased reach of social media affected the use of endangered languages?
5. How can OECD countries help developing countries revitalize some of their endangered languages?
6. Why has there been a decrease in linguistic education for a child's mother tongue?
7. What actions have been done to decrease the risk of language death?
8. What are some external pressures on language communities?
9. Why is it economically and culturally more beneficial to speak a language?
10. What are the negative consequences of language death?
11. What role could AI play in the survival of Indigenous languages?

V. LIST OF COUNTRIES:

UK, Ireland, Finland, India, Greece, USA, Australia, France,
Brazil, South Africa, Russia, Mexico, Colombia, Nigeria, Egypt,
Bangladesh, Iceland, Tanzania, China, Portugal, Indonesia,
Nepal, Papua New Guinea, Turkey

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