

LANGUAGE EXTINCTION AND ITS MAIN CAUSES

Qayumova Saida Tojiddin Qizi

Termiz University of Economics and Service, Field of Study: Philology and Language Teaching,
Second-Year Student

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Abstract: This article analyzes the process of language extinction around the world and its main social, political, and economic causes. It also discusses the levels of language endangerment classified by UNESCO, the impact of language loss on society and culture, and ways to preserve linguistic diversity. The article highlights the importance of protecting minority languages in the era of globalization.

Keywords: language death, linguistic assimilation, dominant languages, UNESCO classification, globalization, revitalization, linguistic diversity.

Introduction

Language is one of humanity's most important spiritual and cultural treasures. It reflects the history, culture, values, and worldview of a nation. Every language contains unique knowledge and experience. However, in today's globalized world, many languages are facing the danger of extinction.

Historical linguistics studies how languages change, develop, and sometimes disappear over time. A group of languages that come from a common ancestor is called a language family. For example, English, Russian, Spanish, and Hindi belong to the Indo-European language family. Mandarin and Cantonese belong to the Sino-Tibetan family, while Arabic and Hebrew are part of the Semitic language family.

According to linguists, 50–90 percent of the world's existing languages may disappear by the year 2100. Today, one language disappears every two weeks. In addition, nearly 81 percent of the languages used on the Internet are English, which negatively affects the position of many minority languages.

Main Causes of Language Extinction

Language loss is a complex socio-linguistic process caused by several important factors.

Linguistic Assimilation

Communities speaking minority languages are often forced to shift to dominant languages because of social and economic pressure. As a result, the native language remains only within the family environment and is no longer passed on fully to the next generation.

Economic Pragmatism

In today's labor market, knowing languages such as English, Russian, Chinese, or Spanish increases the chances of getting better-paid jobs. Therefore, some people begin to prioritize international languages over their native language.

Political Factors

In some countries, the policy of "one state — one language" causes minority languages to be marginalized. As a result, the use of small languages gradually decreases.

Demographic Factors

Wars, natural disasters, migration, and urbanization lead to the displacement of language speakers. This destroys the natural linguistic environment of the language.

Globalization and the Influence of the Internet

The dominance of certain languages in mass media and on the Internet contributes to the disappearance of smaller languages. In particular, the international status of English strongly influences the development of other languages.

Levels of Language Endangerment

UNESCO classifies language endangerment into several levels:

1.Safe Languages — spoken actively by all generations. 2.Vulnerable Languages — children speak the language, but only in limited situations. 3.Endangered Languages — children no longer learn the language as their mother tongue. 4.Severely Endangered Languages — only older generations use the language. 5.Extinct Languages — the last speaker of the language has died.

Consequences of Language Extinction

The extinction of a language means not only the loss of words and grammar but also the disappearance of an entire cultural heritage. Every language preserves unique knowledge about nature, traditional medicine, customs, and philosophical views.

When a language dies, the historical memory, cultural code, and national identity of its people also gradually disappear. Therefore, preserving linguistic diversity is one of humanity's important responsibilities.

Ways to Preserve Linguistic Diversity

To protect endangered languages, the following measures are important:

digitizing minority languages and dialects; creating electronic dictionaries and audio corpora; supporting bilingual education systems; increasing the prestige of native languages among young people; promoting national culture and folklore; expanding the use of local languages in media and on the Internet.

Conclusion

Language is the spiritual wealth and historical memory of a nation. The disappearance of a language leads to the loss of humanity's cultural and intellectual heritage. Therefore, protecting languages, passing them on to future generations, and preserving linguistic diversity are among the most important tasks of our time. The responsibility of philologists and linguists is not only to study and teach languages but also to contribute scientifically and practically to their survival.

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