

LINGUISTICS AND LANGUAGE ENDANGERMENT IN THE ERA OF GLOBALIZATION

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Several forecasts by linguists and researchers in the last few decades show that many of the world 7000 languages are endangered and would be extinct by the end of this century. This is based on the alarming and massive extinction of languages experienced today as never in human history due to several contending factors. Although, the extent of endangerment (vulnerable, definitely endangered, severely endangered, critically endangered and extinct) depends on a particular language and surrounding factors, language endangerment has become a critical issue considering the rate at which smaller languages mainly of indigenous communities are being eaten up by dominant languages since the dawn of modern globalization. Hence, Brenzinger and de Graaf (EOLSS, 2006) note that “Today, many speech communities of minority languages are shrinking and their languages will ultimately vanish, if these developments are not reversed. Children may no longer acquire languages even when they are still spoken by many thousands of elderly speakers”. Generally, the loss of any language is not only a significant loss to the community/ communities that speak the language but also to human society who could share in the cultural heritage and values embedded in the language. Since language is an embodiment of cultural values, identity, and communal heritage, Hoffman (2009) categorically states that “Endangered language communities also stand to lose valuable cultural practices, such as oral histories, traditional songs and poetry, and other art forms that are tied to language” This is an irretrievable loss to mankind as Endangered languages can be a great source of information if preserved and maintained. Despite factors adduced to contribute language endangerment; it has remained a real challenge to both linguists and the communities who speak the language. As reported after global warming, language loss is the Earth’s most acute crisis and a serious concern to which linguists and language planners have turned their attention in the last several decades. Thus, considering its phenomenal trend, the questions to answer are: what role does linguistics play and what are linguists, researchers, and language advocates currently doing to address the issue? Though, it is believed that linguists and researchers have raised the awareness and through documentation makes videotapes, audiotapes, and written records of language use in both formal and informal settings, along with translations in an effort to preserve some of the endangered languages for research and future generation. Therefore, as part of the on-going effort to explore the conference theme, this paper will explore the role of linguistics in addressing language endangerment and to highlight whether linguists and researchers have done enough in doing what they are doing faced with globalization trends and new technologies. Are there other ways of addressing language endangerment by linguists? Key words: Linguistics, language endangerment, extinction, linguists, globalization