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THE LOSS OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

How can someone lose his or her first language? How can a language disappear, leaving no speakers left who speak it? Why are indigenous languages disappearing? This paper considers the various ways that languages are lost and what it means to the native speakers. I will look at examples in Papua New Guinea and North and South America. I will also note the dilemmas of the multitude of migrants moving to new cultures and languages in the modern world.

Keywords: *first language indigenous languages, Papua New Guinea, North and South America, migrants*

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How can someone lose his or her first language? How can a language disappear, leaving no speakers left who speak it? Why are indigenous languages disappearing? Why does it matter? Why are some indigenous people organizing and working together to recover not only their cultures but their languages?

The International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022–2032), as declared by the United Nations, began January 1, 2022. “It is an opportunity to shed light on the critical state of Indigenous languages and to bring resources to Indigenous communities’ efforts to revitalize and reclaim Indigenous languages to ensure the healing, well-being and prosperity of Indigenous communities” (*Angarova* 2021: 1). *Cultural Survival* has devoted a special issue to “Securing the Future of Our Languages: Investing in New Indigenous Languages Speakers.” Indigenous people know only too well that the loss of language follows the loss of land, community, and survival opportunities that they have depended on for millennia. Colonial theft does not just take land: in the end, it also takes community, culture, language, indigenous knowledge, histories, control and futures.

This paper considers the various ways that languages are lost, what it means to the native speakers, and what actions indigenous people are taking to reverse their losses and reclaim their heritage, and their futures. I will look at examples in Papua New Guinea and North and Central America. I will also note the dilemmas of the multitude of migrants moving to new cultures and languages in the modern world.

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Papua New Guinea

In my anthropological field work in Papua New Guinea during ten visits from 1965 to 2005 I was able to see various ways that local people lost their languages[1].

Papua New Guinea was first colonized by the Germans in the north and the British in the south. A pidgin English developed which contained some German words learned from early colonizers, e. g. “raus” (get out!) and “bung” (meet). Most of the words derived from English and the grammar from Melanesian, according to linguists (*Jenkins* 2005). The purchase of land by outsiders was banned in the Trust Territory of Papua and New Guinea, which prevented the excesses of settler colonialism seen in places like the United States, Australia, and parts of Africa. In the mid-1960s, a few long-time European settlers in New Guinea, some married to local women, were allowed to purchase land to turn into plantations; including new coffee plantations. Those Europeans who stayed had to become citizens when Papua New Guinea became an independent nation in 1975.

The Europeans, as all white skinned people were called, originally came to do business and to set up coconut plantations, to which local labor was brought for 3 years at a time. They were then sent home with a trunk full of white man’s goods: clothes and tools, and the language that evolved for communication between locals and the white bosses: pidgin English, now called *tok pisin.* The English and the Australians set up schools and aid posts and some hospitals, and some of the missions also set up schools and health care facilities; and English became the language people spoke in schools, colleges, European offices, towns, and official business. Many German Catholic missions continued and spoke English, and they were joined, and sometimes replaced, by American Catholic missions. The other major missions, the Methodists, generally were started by Englishmen but led by English-speaking Australians. The Methodist Bible had been translated in the late 1800s by the first Methodist missionary, George Brown, into Kuanua; the language of the Tolai of New Britain. This is the island on which George Brown first established his mission (*Clay* 2005). George Brown was English and spoke English to his immediate assistants.

Papua New Guinea is composed of the eastern half of a large island 700 miles long east to west, the western half of which was for decades under Dutch colonial rule. Now, since 1963, it has become a reluctant part of Indonesia. There are many smaller islands north of the big island, and they are part of what became Papua New Guinea in 1975: New Britain, New Ireland, New Hanover and Manus. I did my anthropological field research in New Ireland and its smaller neighbor, New Hanover[2].

How an Individual Almost Lost His Language: Living with the Colonizers

When my colleague Nic Peterson and I first went to New Ireland in 1965, we had learned some pidgin English, now called *tok pisin,* from colleagues in Australia. When

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[1] I did field work in the islands of New Ireland and New Hanover, which are now part of Papua New Guinea. Australia was the government when this was a Trust Territory of the United Nations and continues to serve in various capacities as needed. My first trip to New Ireland was in 1965 (*Peterson and Billings* 1965; *Billings and Peterson* 1967) followed by a longer stay in 1966–67 (*Billings* 1969, 1971, 1972, 1983, 1987, 1989, 1989a, 1991a, 1991b, 1991c, 1992a, 1992b, 1996, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2007, 2015), and shorter stays in 1972, 1974, 1983, 1988, 1990, 1994, 1998, and 2005. I have not discussed or reported the loss of language in any of these publications.

[2] See note 1.

a government car took us to a village Mangai in New Ireland, where they said we could work, and left us there, we were completely unpracticed in speaking *tok pisin.* We were, therefore, very relieved and grateful when we were approached by a local man who worked in the European world and spoke English well. His name was Konda Aisoli, and he was one of five well-educated children whose parents had both died when they were young. He told us he was just home with his wife and their new baby, Rachel, for Christmas vacation, and he offered to help us. He came with us to see the local artist and to all the homes so we could make a map and take genealogies. When I apologized for taking so much of his time, Konda said that he had been away so much at educational institutions he had never had a chance to learn about his own traditions, and he was glad to have the opportunity to do so. He also told me that he was afraid he was losing his New Ireland language because he did not often speak it where he worked in the Education Department.

I found this a very unsettling revelation. If a person loses his language, who is he? Is a person the same person in a different language without the continuing foundation of his first language?

Before we left New Ireland after this first short field work experience, I lent Konda my copy of *Life in Lesu* by Hortence Powdermaker (1933), the only full monograph on New Ireland published at that time, Konda read it through and penciled in corrections in the spelling of New Ireland words; which showed, I thought, that he still had much of his native tongue.

In 2021 I got an email from Konda's baby daughter, Rachel, who had grown up to go to Australian National University and become a linguist. Konda had died when she was a teenager, but I was sure he would be very proud of her work studying languages.

Marrying Into Another Village

There are six major language groups in New Ireland, and many variations within these. All of these languages are derivations of Austronesian, a language thought to have come to the north coast of New Guinea and the islands about 3,000 years ago, along with Lapita pottery (*Bainton* 1976; *Jenkins* 2005). People in New Ireland know each other and come together for ceremonies. Marriages are often between people from different language groups.

My friend and major helper Milika had married her first husband, Gage, in the Notsi linguistic area and their children were born in that area. When Gage died, Milika and her children moved 3 language groups north to the Tigak and Kara language groups where her mother lived with her husband from that area. Milika then married Kasino, the local teacher who took over the care and teaching of the children. When Nicolas and I arrived in 1965, Kas also led the education of the anthropologists. As it turned out, Milika had been good friends with an anthropological couple (*Lewis* 1969) that had worked in the Notsi linguistic area when she lived there. She spoke *tok pisin* well and not only to me but to local women with whom she worked. She explained to me that she could not speak the local language correctly and people would laugh at her if she tried; so it was better for her to just speak *tok pisin.* It was not just language that she could not master locally: she said: her shoulder had not learned to carry heavy food bundles at the ends of a pole over the shoulder, as women did in the Tigak/Kara language area. In the Notsi language area women carried food in baskets hung on their heads. Milika said she also could not point

her toes as the women in the Tigak/Kara villages did, so she preferred to stay out of most of the dances and help sing or play the drums. She had effectively lost her first language, except for simple communications, without acquiring confidence in another indigenous language; but she was very competent in *tok pisin.*

This is one of the situations that has led Papua New Guinea to gradually lose all its languages and move to *tok pisin:* when the Territory of Papua New Guinea became independent of Australia and the United Nations Trust Territories in 1975, the language that was adopted as the national language, to be spoken in Parliament, was *tok pisin.* In 1967 when I was attending a ceremony which lasted for nearly a month, the memai or "big man" leading the ceremony announced that he would speak *tok pisin* because I was there and he wanted me to understand. I was very embarrassed as well as grateful, but I soon realized that I was not the only one there who would benefit by his speaking *tok pisin:* there were people there, as many as 200, from five language areas; and when the memai once forgot and started to speak in his own language, someone called out "speak *tok pisin!"*

The linguist who has most recently studied the languages of New Ireland and of Papua New Guinea has found that *tok pisin* is gradually becoming the language that people speak, and indigenous languages are disappearing (*Jenkins* 2005). Jenkins sites Wurm, the linguist who has most completely covered the languages of New Guinea: "Wurm calls the New Guinea area one of the 'linguistically most complex and diverse areas in the world'" (*Wurm* 1975: 3; cited in *Jenkins* 2005: 4). He estimated 700 distinct languages, spoken by a population of only four million. There are two major categories of languages: the non--Austronesian, or Papuan, languages, spoken mainly in the interior of the big island of New Guinea. All the rest speak Austronesian languages, which were brought to the islands and along the coast by the travelers coming from Southeast Asia who started arriving in the New Guinea islands and the north coast about 3,000 years ago, along with Lapita pottery. They continued on to populate all of Polynesia with Austronesian languages. Austronesian languages are spoken throughout New Ireland, except for the Papuan languages still spoken by some in three villages that remain in the mountain area (*Derlon* 1997; *Jenkins* 2005; *Lithgow* and *Claassen* 1968). Unlike the Austronesian languages, the Papuan languages which are found throughout the big island of New Guinea "show no common grammar, and very little common vocabulary" and have "no affiliation outside the islands" (*Capell* 1969: 21; cited in *Jenkins* 2005: 5).

Jenkins distinguishes between "traditional Tigak," the name she uses for the languages of northern New Ireland, and "modern Tigak," Tigak as it is spoken now by the young people learning it when they are in contact with other languages, especially *tok pisin.* When they finish school, where English is spoken, they often move to the port town of Kavieng, New Ireland, or live near enough to visit there and meet other people who speak *tok pisin.* Their speaking of Tigak continues, but it is modified by the structure and vocabulary of *tok pisin* (*Jenkins* 2005: 190).

I saw that changing situation even in the primary school in Mangai village, where I lived, 50 years ago. Some students came from 1 or 2 villages away where a different language was spoken. *Tok pisin* was often a necessary supplement for communication even at this early level.

In the high schools, students came from different islands, and while English was taught and encouraged, *tok pisin* was the usual form of communication outside the classroom. In neighboring New Hanover, I saw an Australian Methodist school teacher swat, gently,

a child who was speaking her native tongue to a classmate and language-mate over the noon hour as they ate lunch. They were supposed to speak English.

This was a common practice in the United States, Canada and elsewhere in schools where it was decided that indigenous people should speak the language of the colonial conquerors.

How a Village in the Rainforest is Losing Its Language

Anthropologist Don Kulick has written the story of his fieldwork, which most of us would call heroic, in an isolated swampy village in Highland New Guinea; which began in the 1980s and continued on until 2014. He had malaria five times and every possible parasite, and the food the people ate, which they shared with him, was not something he was happy to eat. He could not go back again because of local violence, which had driven him away on two previous stays in Gapun. The return of intergroup violence has been a problem in the Highlands of New Guinea.

Kulick wanted to go to Gapun village because, alone in this world, people there spoke a language called Tayap; which turned out to be, he found, a language "as fully formed as English, Russian, Navaho or Zulu" (p. 29) When he got to the village he soon found that while many of the adults spoke Tayap to each other, the children could understand it but were not learning it. They were, instead, learning *tok pisin.* Men who had gone away to work on European-owned plantations had come home speaking *tok pisin.* It became clear that it was the language of whiteskinned people who had money and power, and it was necessary to communicate with them and with other plantations laborers from other places. When the men returned to their home villages, the women of the village soon learned it. The children soon followed. Kulick wanted to find out exactly how this happened.

Kulick was himself only able to communicate with villagers through *tok pisin,* which suggests that it was already well known in the village (p. 52). He spent many hours taping and making lists of words in Tayap; mostly with one old man who was the last remaining master of the language, people said. At the time of his first visit in the mid-1980s Kulick thinks about 90 people spoke Tayap; but by his last visit, only 45. He thinks the language will be dead in 50 years (p. 260).

Papua New Guinea has many languages, sometimes estimated at 500, most with fewer than 3000, many with only 500 or fewer speakers (Ibid.: 26). Tayap had only 90 speakers, in a population of 130. There were 45 out of 200 residents of Gapun 39 years later want change.

They want to become "modern". They want "modern living" like the white people have, with money and things (*Kulick*: 69–70). This is the sentiment that has fueled the cargo cults of Papua New Guinea, including "The Johnson Cult" of New Hanover (*Billings* 1969, 1983, 2002).

Why were the children learning *tok pisin* and not Tayap? Kulick observed that when a mother told her child to do something in Tayap, it was ignored — or as the response is called in *tok pisin,* the child would *bighed,* Big headed is the word used throughout Papua New Guinea to identify responses that show people doing as they want to do, and not as requested. If mothers followed with the same request to the child in *tok pisin,* accompanied by a threat of "pain"— hitting them — in *tok pisin,* the child showed "savie" or knowledge, which was a desired characteristic: the child did as told. The parents saw this chain of

events as showing that the child was choosing *tok pisin* over Tayap, that the child preferred *tok pisin* (Ibid.: 114–5).

Why Maintain Indigenous Languages?

A language is created over time and, like the other arts of a culture, is a thing of beauty, complexity, historical information and clarity; a creation to be valued. But it may not be seen that way by people who are trying to acquire another language.

Our final goal as anthropologists must be, as Malinowski pointed out (*Malinowski* 1922: 25), to "grasp the native's point of view." Why do indigenous people want to learn or relearn or maintain their indigenous languages? Like their arts, languages contain much more knowledge than is ordinarily discussed, such as the meaning of the details (*Billings* 2007) and the values and social structure conveyed in style (*Billings* 2015). There has been a large body of research accumulated since 1980 on a societal contrast originally proposed by Tonnies in 1918: gemeinschaft und geselleschaft. Now this contrast is referred to as Individualism and Collectivism (*Hsu* 953, 1973, 1983; *Bernstein* 1964; *Lomax* 1968; *Hofstede* 1980, 1990 1991; *Billings* 1987; 1989; 1991a, 1991b; 1992; *Triandis* 1990; *Hemer* 2015). Understanding the importance of both language and style, the Maori and Pakeha people of New Zealand are using Maori ways of communicating in their joint conservation project which is restoring an area of Maori land (*Harms* 2015).

The disappearance of languages in the modern world is not of central interest to linguists who study the major languages of Europe and Asia. In the past anthropological linguists have wanted to record languages before they disappear, and they knew that someday indigenous people might want these records. Anthropologists have needed to know something of indigenous languages so that they can accurately carry out their work. Anthropologists who are linguists have made major records. But it is to the Summer Institute of Linguistics[1], which educates mission workers in learning and recording indigenous languages, that future generations of anthropologists and indigenous people will be grateful for the records they have made and kept.

Migration

People all over the world today have left their home countries and cultures and languages because they could not survive, or could not survive well, at home. War, poverty, conflict over resources, drought, climate change and local gang wars have contributed to making life so difficult and dangerous that people find it worth the risk, and the loss, to move to a place that they think will be better for them.

Moscow: When people from the same group move to the same place, they may be able to bring aspects of their cultures, their celebrations, their foods, their arts, and even their languages with them (*Martynova* 2015). Their children, however, are educated in a different language and culture and, while they may be bicultural and bilingual for a while among the older generation, but they will pass less and less of this on to their own children.

[1] The Summer Institute of Linguistics is an educational organization in Texas that grains people who want to be missionaries in linguistics — they learn to speak indigenous languages. (I met 2 of these in New Ireland and they are amazing.) Anthropologists can study there too if they wish — it is a very good education in linguistics.

Martynova has studied the changing life and culture of migrants into the megalopolos: specifically, into Moscow (*Martynova* 2016). Migrants in the megalopolis show their meals preferences in a multicultural community. New folk cultures and traditions have been introduced into the Moscow community, especially the introduction of new meals in new restaurants, decorated in traditional ways.

Martynova also pays attention to the evolution of traditional culture in the modern world in Russia as elsewhere, requiring of migrants a process of social and cultural integration from the point of view of the major Moscow indigenous population. Martynova does not discuss language, but presumably, as elsewhere, languages are learned and retained as long as the old folks live and speak it; but gradually, as young people are integrated into the schools and cultures of the new place, they learn and rely on the language and culture.

Chinese: Chinese people everywhere have made a particular impact on the cultures of the world while retaining, in many cases, their language. When I first went to Papua New Guinea, arriving at the small Port Town of Kavieng, I was very surprised to see that 3 of the 4 streets in the center of town were lined with Chinese shops, all of which had food for sale. Local people of all backgrounds sought out this very good and affordable food. The Chinese are not the only mobile populations to start restaurants making their meals available to all, but they must surely be the most universally known[1]. They usually come as communities and retain their language, at least.

Heritage Languages in Canada: Canada, three decades ago, had a program where adults taught "Heritage Language" classes on Saturday morning to young people, who did not learn their heritage language or customs in school. It is unclear whether or not this effort continues. The Wichita Asia Festival (below) has had some of the same objectives: to give the young people an opportunity to learn their heritage.

Siberian Peasants: Elena Fursova (2015) has studied the movement of whole groups of people who, for whatever reasons, leave their homelands and settle in new paces. She focuses on the traditional knowledge of local people throughout their changing history. Her work has been with peasants of Siberia who rename the new places they come to with the familiar names of places from which they have come[2]. They maintain important aspects of their culture by reapplying their knowledge of agriculture and maintaining their respect for nature (*Fursova* 215: 171–5).

Asians in Wichita, Kansas USA: When 75,000 Vietnamese came as refugees from war to Wichita, Kansas in 1975, a few Asian professors at the local university, Wichita State University, were concerned that they were likely to become an "Asian proletariat;" and, in order to bring some understanding to the local American population, they started the Asian Association. This organization, which continues nearly 50 years later, annually presents performances of the dances, arts and cultures of Asian groups, along with opportunities

[1] When I came to Wichita in 1969, there were few restaurants and nearly all were standard American. Most were not restaurants but fast food drive-throughs; except for 2 Chinese restaurants and one long established Mexican restaurant. Now there are several Vietnamese restaurants, two Thai, two Indian, a Pakistani, a Japanese, Malaysian, Iraqi, one from El Salvador, many Hispanic, and several Lebanese.

[2] This is probably a common, if little noted, practice. Wisconsin in the United States was settled by German populations, and the largest city, Milwaukee, has three beer breweries with German names; Schlitz, Pabst and Blatz. Milwaukee is a Native American name, but Berlin, Wisconsin tells of its German migrants. An area of the state of Kansas settled by people from Pennsylvania has several names from western Pennsylvania: Erie, Girard, Crawford County and others.

to buy the foods and art objects which are characteristic of the various cultures. Today at least as many local Wichitans of European heritage as local descendants of Asian immigrants attend the festival, to which the whole city looks forward. Many young people still speak their parents' first languages, but mostly to the grandparents in the home. The Asian community has generated grocery stores, restaurants and five Buddhist temples which are cared for by Buddhist monks who come to Wichita for a year or two at a time. There are also Vietnamese services at a local Catholic church. Many immigrant Vietnamese, including the temporary immigrant Buddhist monks, attend the Wichita Indochinese Center to learn English as a Second Language. The Director of the Indochinese Center, who is from India, has been active in maintaining the Asian Association and the annual Asian Festival for many years.

Displacement of Indigenous Communities by Political and Economic Powers

The Decade of Indigenous Languages, designated by the United Nations, that has begun in 2022 will continue until 2032. Cultural Survival has devoted an issue of the journal to the loss of indigenous languages: it is "dedicated to uplifting the voices and work of Indigenous educators, practitioners, linguists, activists, journalists, and communicators, who, against all odds, with limited to no resources, are strengthening their mother tongues and creating new language speakers through various media platforms and tools." (Cultural Survival 2022: 1)

Australia: Vanessa Ngala Farrelly grew up in Canberra, Australia with no contact with the Pertame, the group of indigenous people south of Alice Springs from whom she descended. At the age of 20 she went to visit them for the first time, and found some of the elders already engaged in a project to save the language. One of her grandparents, Christobal Swan, had made a list of Pertame words in the 1990s. She had worked for 30 years with police and hospitals and courts to translate for Aboriginal people, but the language was still not recognized or taught. She and other elders organized weekend language camps to pass the language on to young people, and Farrelly moved to Alice Springs and joined them. In 2019 Farrelly and Swan were invited to New York to the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. There they learned about methods of reviving indigenous languages, which they took back to Australia. They started classes in some local primary schools, to which some elders came as teachers, but they realized that the languages could only be revived by passing it from the elders to the young people at home, in everyday settings, the way children in non-colonial situations learn languages.

Veronica Aguilar grew up in Mexican communities but not where they spoke her grandparents' first language, Mixtec. Her parents never spoke it at home: fear of shame, where Spanish was the language of education, led them to speak the colonial language. When she grew up Aguillar tried to learn Mixtec at a distance by video call once a week with a teacher from her community, but she realized she could not learn Mixtec in this way. She went back to a community where it was still spoken by many to learn it "in an immersion environment" (*Aguillar*: 8).

All those who struggle to learn their heritage languages eventually reach this conclusion: that they need to learn by immersion in a community where the language is spoken. They also often state that they have had identity problems, which learning their heritage language helps them overcome: "I had the opportunity to ask myself many questions

during my 20s about who I was and the language I did not speak. Now, in my 30s, I know who I am and define my identity on my own terms … I'm Mixtec but I don't speak Mixtec. But I am going to regain my language…" (ibid.: 9).

Traditional Ecological Knowledge

Adriana Chos, citing Farrelly, writes that "The language is the voice of the land. When we talk about the connection of Indigenous Peoples and the land, we talk about a whole living system that is interconnected and interdependent. This reciprocal relationship has a regenerative component. There needs to be a respectful way to interact with the land because the land feeds us and gives us life" (*Chos* 2021: 11).

Chos points out that "Traditional Ecological Knowledge contains valuable techniques and solutions to address, adapt, and mitigate climate change and biodiversity loss such as wildfires, floods, droughts, changes in animal behavior, and other alterations experienced on our lands and territories. This knowledge is intrinsically embedded and transmitted through the language and, "When the knowledge is lost the consequences are irreversible" (Ibid.).

Folk Wisdom and Ecological Knowledge

Russian Peasants and Soil Conservation: Rudnev (*Rudnev* 2009) underscores the folk wisdom he finds that supports sustainability for nature in our industrial age. Indigenous people always mention the precariousness of the supply of water on earth, which is part of what folk wisdom has found at least temporary solutions for (*Rudnev* 2009: 6) "The meaning and value of Folk Heritage in exploiting the environmental traditions in small--scale, non-industrialized societies, has been based … on the perception that soil (earth) is the source of all life." Rudnev makes clear his view that it is the modern human outlook that has to change. He describes the contributions to knowledge of a sustainable environment made by Russian peasant communities that have lived and survived for long periods of time in the same place, and as communities. They have learned how to practice soil conservation.

Rudnev's argument reinforces the view of all the indigenous people who are trying to revitalize their languages, languages that sustained their communities and their knowledge and their ways of thinking and knowing, and their knowledge especially of the Natural world and its requirements. These have been notoriously ignored in the modern industrialized world, and we are all now seeing the consequences in what is called "climate change."

New Hanover, Papua New Guinea Tukul Kaiku writes of the special knowledge used in sustaining the lives of the people of her home island, New Hanover, Papua New Guinea. This knowledge is contained and identified in the local language, Tungak. This language is still the main one spoken in New Hanover, probably because it is spoken on an island and it has no indigenous competition. Many speak pidgin English, but the elders do not speak it to each other.

Knowledge of how to organize a large feast is held by the "custodian of complete nourishment", *mateng-masung.* The use of plants and herbs must always be reinforced with the appropriate body of rituals or procedural rites that summon the specialist spirit (anit)

in that particular art" (*Kaiko* 2009: 97). These procedures show and produce respect for mother nature.

Sardine farming must be accompanied by a series of rituals and a particular plant species used. *Inavu* is a person who nurtures sardines or any fish species and uses "physical rituals in carrying out his art" (Ibid.: 101). He strengthens his own resolve through these rituals, which show pernatural fulfillment *(kanang)* and also reinforces community belief that his actions will benefit the community.

Birth control methods are kept by a keeper of the knowledge of the use of a certain bark. Women are helped by this knowledge when it is needed.

Myths and legends reinforce knowledge for young Lavongais of the supernatural creation (*pukpukis*) of their island. Myths and legends in the local language that show respect for animals, plants and people are told to young people when they come together in the evening (Ibid.:103).

"This oral transmission of knowledge has a role as they give effect to the sacredness of certain areas of the island. Or they serve as taboo areas where mortals dare not trespass for fear of being cursed. Therefore the use of the natural environment and the Lavongai exercise in sustainable development were contextualized into their spiritual and material coexistence with supernatural beings. Myths about caring and respect for animals, plants and people are told to young ones in the evenings when there are no disruptions and the child's mind is allowed to recreate scenes and settings for such." (*Kaiko*: 103–4).

Kaiku argues for the contributions made to a sustainable environment by communities that have maintained residence in places they know well; but she adds the importance of the indigenous language in identifying social roles, divisions of survival knowledge and designation of those responsible for knowing as named in the local Tungak language. Myths and rituals in the local language are part of the process that sustains this knowledge.

Lost Languages

Language as an essential container of indigenous knowledge about the natural world as well as about the ethics of respect for the environment and ways of revitalizing indigenous languages taught by those who had been carrying out this work, were discussed at a three-day virtual conference held by Cultural Survival Oct 5–7, 2021 (*Chos* 2021).

UNESCO has estimated that 230 languages became extinct between 1950 and 2010. UNESCO also estimates that "The world's remaining languages are predicted to disappear by the next century unless action is taken now. The world's remaining biodiversity hotspots are home to 70 percent of all languages spoken on Earth, showing strong geographic co-occurrence of Indigenous language speakers and biodiversity (Editorial comment, Cultural Survival: 9).

The work of Rudnev and Kaiku reinforce the assertions of indigenous people that the loss of their lands and resources and communities has led to their loss of their indigenous languages; and that this makes a difference to the conservation of the environment and the survival of life on earth. When the language is lost, the wisdom contained in it is lost; and the pride in speaking it is replaced by the shame assigned to it by ignorant colonial foreigners who have power without knowledge. This is why the loss of indigenous languages is not just of concern to indigenous people, but to all of life on earth; the two-leggeds but also the four-leggeds and the winged people and the plants which sustain us all.

Native Americans, like many people who did not grow up with writing and recording, were eloquent orators. Much if their recorded wisdom contrasts their ways with that of the white men who have taken over their lands.

"We know that the white man does not understand our ways. One portion of the land is the same to him as the next, for he is a stranger who comes in the night and takes from the land whatever he needs. The earth is not his brother but his enemy — and when he has conquered it, he moves on. He leaves his fathers' graves, and his children's birthright is forgotten." Chief Seattle, Suqwamish and Duwamish (*Nerburn* and *Mengelkoch* 1991: 5).

Native Americans feel very much a part of Nature as is often the case for people who live directly on the resources of the land. They see the land and all its inhabitants as their brothers and they do not take or kill what they do not need for their own survival.

"What is man without the beasts? If all the beasts were gone, men would die from a great loneliness of spirit, for whatever happens to the beasts also happens to man. All things are connected. Whatever befalls the earth befalls the children of the earth." Chief Seattle, Suqwamish and Duwamish. (*Nerburn* and *Mengelkoch* 1991: 2).

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