

Curse of Dialects: Crisis for Lingoes

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As we begin with the question of 'identity', we need to understand that individuals or groups form their identities as they communicate with those around and be in conflict with them.

Recall Erik Erikson (1968) who, in his Identity: Youth and Crisis (New York: Norton), talks about how one's identity is formed through a series of what he called the 'Dichotomies of Crises'.

Individuals go through eight stages of these conflicts to emerge with a distinct identity of her own. At each stage, she learns from both positive and negative aspects of these conflicts, and emerge from each stage with a favorable ratio of positive over negative.

These eight stages - take a person from 'Infancy' to 'maturity':

Trust v. Mistrust – *Infancy*

Autonomy v. Shame and Doubt – *Toddlerhood*

Initiative v. Guilt – *Preschoolers*

Industry v. Inferiority – *School Aged*

Identity v. Role Confusion – *Adolescence*

Intimacy v. Isolation – *Early Adulthood*

Generativity v. Stagnation – *Middle Aged*

Integrity v. Despair – *Maturity*

For groups – esp. Speech Groups, we need to think of social development.

**Formation
of Identity**

FOUR STATUSES OF IDENTITY

Let's add to that the framework of James Marcia (1980) for understanding how problems faced during these conflicts, esp. those of *Identity v. Role Confusion* and *Intimacy v. Isolation* determine one's identity – where there are four different statuses of identity, each corresponding to a stage in the process of exploring and committing to an ideology ('Ego Identity Development', in J. Adelson, ed. Handbook of Adolescent Psychology. New York: John Wiley).

Who am I?

Is this me?

| | No exploration | Exploration |
|---------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| No commitment | Identity Diffusion | Moratorium |
| Commitment | Foreclosure | Identity Achievement |

What are my goals?

- ⌚ **Foreclosed groups** commit to an identity that has been usually handed to them, by some authority or by the dominant majority. For individuals, it happens naturally with many at a young age, but they rid themselves of it later. However, children of wealthy parents often accept, in young adulthood, the predetermined roles identities that their parents assign to them or 'give' them.
- ⌚ Groups in the **Moratorium** status explore their identities, without any commitment to any certain ideology. These are characterized by anxiety, high self-esteem, internally oriented behavior, cultural sophistication, a need for both rebellion & acceptance.
- ⌚ Groups that are at the **Identity Achieved** stage have explored their options and have committed to a certain ideology that fits them with a set of values and beliefs. This makes them independent, smart, and confident, with high self-esteem, even in unfamiliar situations.

DIFFERENT PROBLEMS FOR DIALECTAL IDENTITY

DIALECTS & THEIR DIFFUSED IDENTITY

As Kroger & Marcia say: “**Identity diffusions**... come in a variety of styles, all having in common a weak or non-existent exploratory period and an inability to make definite commitments. At their best, diffusions can appear extremely flexible...and ... adaptable. They can be whatever current influences shape them to be. But, in the absence of an internal sense of self-definition, they must constantly look externally to define who they are and will be. At their worst, diffusions are lost and isolated, beset by feelings of emptiness and meaninglessness”.

*[Jane Kroger and James E. Marcia: 'The Identity Statuses: Origins, Meanings, and Interpretations', in S.J. Schwartz et al. (eds.), *Handbook of Identity Theory and Research*]*

If Dialects suffer from the Foreclosure or Identity diffusion problems, their crisis of identity would begin from there.

Is Disappearance their Destiny?

- Many dialect speakers perhaps want to know from their more fortunate brethren then – Is it a curse to be speaking a dialect? Must they be ashamed of themselves, and try to be someone else?
- For a long time, the alarm bell had been ringing on the fate of world's languages. Disappearance of languages is happening at an alarming pace.
- Death of a lingo speaker is of course understandable. But wiping off of an entire culture is painful.
- Our Mother-tongues are thus losing out in the number game. upon where you are.



**LOSING
OUT IN
THE
NUMBER
GAME**

The RED ALERT

- The **IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources in www.iucnredlist.org)** – announced a ‘**red list of threatened species**’ : For example, they say - 21% of Mammals, 12% birds & 4% of the fishes are nearly extinct.
- Sounding the same red alert in the area of language & ethnicity, **M.P.Lewis (2009) from *Ethnologue*** had pointed out that 516 of the world’s languages, i.e 8.6% are nearly extinct – where 170 of them are located in the two Americas – North and South, 210 are in the Pacific, 78 in Asia, 46 in Africa and 12 in Europe.
- For extinct/nearly extinct languages – e.g. **Kusunda in Nepal, one can only prepare a documentation before they disappear.**
- **But what do we need to do for those facing the threat of extinction or facing the Crisis of Identity?**
- **One answer comes from David Crystal (2000 *Language Death*, Cambridge: CUP, Canto edn 2002, Ch 4) who argued that we must take urgent pro-active action to retain our decaying linguistic heritage.**
- **How?**

WHY HELP SAVE OUR SPEECHES?

- 1. Just as retaining ecological **diversity** is essential so that all living organisms, including animals (and of course, human beings and their types), plants and herbs as well as bacteria survive with their **complex network of relationships**, where harming any one species could create irreparable damage to the whole system, one must accept that biological and cultural diversities are inseparable.
- For example, deforestation on a large scale – in Central India has dislodged many tribal hamlets uprooting them from the forests and turning them into a mere labor-force with dispersion and identity crisis of unprecedented kind. Diversity contains potential for adaptation, and this helps in the long run.
- 2. The **shared memory and history** as well as **shared cultural practices** give an Identity to the ethnic group, including their linguistic identity, and all these provide them a natural security cover.
- Language is thus an **index, symbol** and **marker** of this identity.

More Arguments

- 3. **Languages are a link to the past – to the archive of knowledge bases, and to the history of the region.** Nettle and Romaine (2000: 14) say that “every language is a living museum, a monument to every culture it has been vehicle to.” When a speech dies, the range, richness and wealth of its cultural history also dies out. Colin Baker (‘Foundations of Bilingual Education & Bilingualism’, Multilingual Matters, 2001: 194) claims that “this limits the choice of the ‘pasts’ to preserve, and the value of life – past and present. It is analogous to humanity losing one of its whole libraries built over years.”
- 4. **All human languages contribute to the totality of human knowledge as it exists at any given point of time.** Therefore with the loss of a language, that part of the vision dies. The expressions of social relationship, traditional knowledge base, organizational models, strategies of community living and friendship – all get lost.
- **In short, all its creativity including art, poetry, music, science, technology, and ideas about life, death and even language will be gone.**

Ground Reality

- **5. Speech Varieties are interesting objects of investigation in themselves with a complex network of sounds, word-formation rules, mechanisms of borrowing and innovation as well as given and new mechanisms of sentence formations.**
- **Our understanding of this rare faculty of man that separates humans from all other animals, namely, Language and its Structure would be enriched if there are more varieties.**

Christopher Moosely (2007. *Encyclo. of the World's Endangered Languages*) says: “Language has always been a powerful weapon in the subjugation of peoples and nations. Empires have come and gone by the sword, but their true staying power, their lasting influence over many generations, long after the trappings of government and formal administration have disappeared, lies in the power of language.”

It is not surprising that Ofelia Zepeda and Jane A. Hill 1991: 136 ('The condition of Native American languages in the United States') lament: “The loss of the hundreds of languages that have already passed into history is an intellectual catastrophe in every way comparable in magnitude to the ecological catastrophe we face today”.

- **The concern for Vanishing Cultures and Endangered languages began with UNESCO's major International Project of the World Atlas of Endangered Languages - accessed at :**
<http://www.unesco.org/culture/languages-atlas/>
- **As the lone expert for all SAARC Countries along with the Himalayan Chain put together in this massive project, I am aware that the methodology of calculation of Endangered Languages (where India topped with 196) had its limitation as it depended mainly on secondary data.**
- **Now we need to identify the extent of this crisis on the basis of surveys and then suggest remedies. I am hopeful that between CIIL, MHA (RGI) and PLSI, something concrete will emerge soon.**
- **After the 2007-UNESCO Report, there was a lot of hue & cry.**
- **Some thought - since 'Language Attrition' was inevitable, given our weakness for a more fashionable life – what is it that we can do?**

UNESCO WORLD ATLAS

<http://www.unesco.org/culture/languages-atlas/>

Taking David Crystal's (2000)

suggestions Further

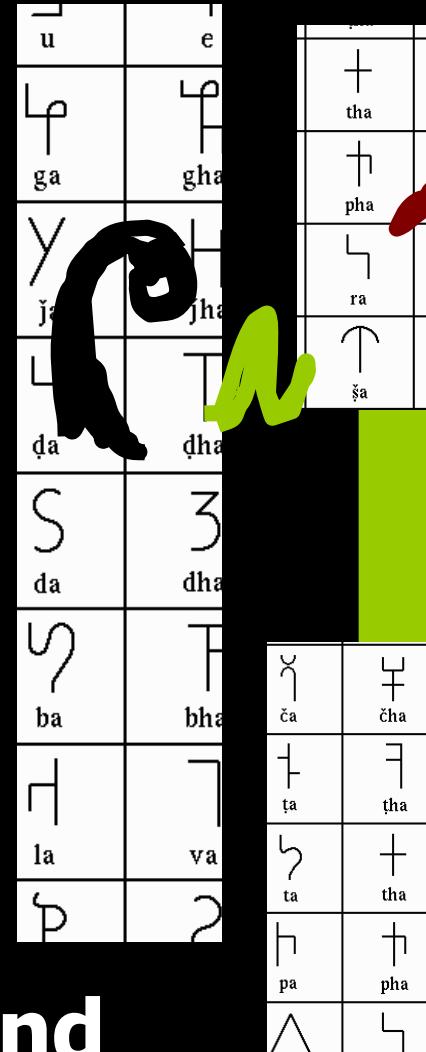


- **Awareness Program:** Increase the prestige of these lingoes among their dominant neighbors
- **Economic Prosperity:** Increase their chance of becoming economically better off
- Give them **constitutional-political rights** and a training to understand their value
- **Increase their domains of use** – introduce them to radio (also FM) & television network or create more platforms
- Have a **critical mass** in community membership and fellow feeling – even if they do not live contiguously
- Have **stable literacy program** in that language, and introduce it in the school system
- **Promote intra-ethnic identity** /better bonding
- Create internal/external **recognition & reward system**
- **Help resisting** the dominant culture and ensure that they are refrained from becoming a prey of “killer” languages

All smaller and threatened Speech groups need:

- Grammars for documentation, including Social grammars for registers & contexts
- Primers & Language games to introduce them in elementary education
- Graded teaching/learning materials to participate in next level of education
- Writing Systems reflecting their phonetics
- Literacy books for adult learners
- General Purpose Dictionaries (linking up with English, Hindi & Regional languages)
- Thesauri or WordNet linking up synonymy
- Specialized Glossary for domains & knowledge translation
- Cultural & visual documentation
- Style Manuals leading to standardization
- Encouragements for literary activities

What is doable !

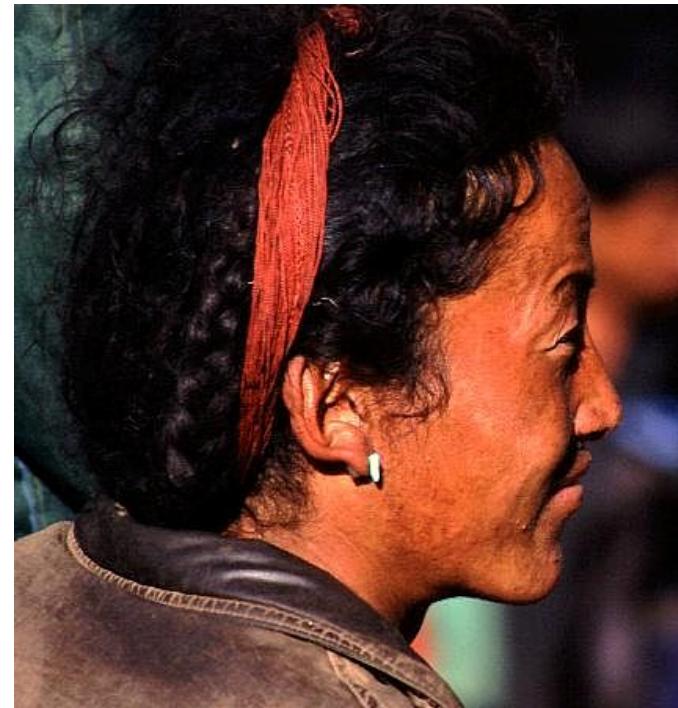


Includes both
endangered and
potentially endangered

Possible Outcome and Output

- The program should eventually lead to integrated language development & growth of multilingual competence.
- Our national system should be such that the speech groups striving for equal rights & opportunities will have a forum to address to their developmental issues.
- These activities will hopefully lead to empowerment of marginalized groups.
- Nurturing diversity will help minimize socio-economic disparity across groups.
- Further, it will provide job opportunities for native speakers of endangered languages and reduce threat to their survival.
- Specialists from within the community may emerge out of these activities.

- I am sure some of you are aware but still let's look at the big picture of our Linguistic Landscape:



What is the Big Picture like?

- **1576 rationalized mother-tongues (MTs) & 1796 other MTs**
- **114 languages with 10,000 plus speakers;**
- **Variation : Hindi with 337 million to Maram (Manipur): 10,144;**
- **22 Constitutional languages : 14 major writing systems**
- **Large non-scheduled lgs Bhili with 5.57 million speakers;**
- **Many minor & minority languages seem to be facing a threat.**

| Gut. | DEV | GUJ | PUN | BEN | ORI | TEL | KAN | TAM | MAL | SINH | URD | SIND |
|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|-----|------|
| k | କ | ક | ਕ | କ | କ | କ | କେ | କ | କୁ | କୁ | କ | କୁ |
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- **146 speech varieties used in radio network now, although before 1939 it used only English, Hindustani and Bangla after which Telugu, Tamil, Marathi and Gujarati were added**
- **From 3954 newspapers in 35 languages as in 1971 (with 2507 Hindi, 534 Urdu, 407 English, 395 Marathi & 395 Tamil), we now have 82,237 newspapers with 4853 new entrants alone: Hindi (7910), followed by English (1406), Urdu (938), Gujarati (761), Telugu (603), Marathi (521), Bengali (472), Tamil (272), Oriya (245), Kannada (200) and Malayalam (192)**
- **Highest literary prizes are awarded in 24 languages**
- **96% speak only 20-odd IA & Dravidian languages**

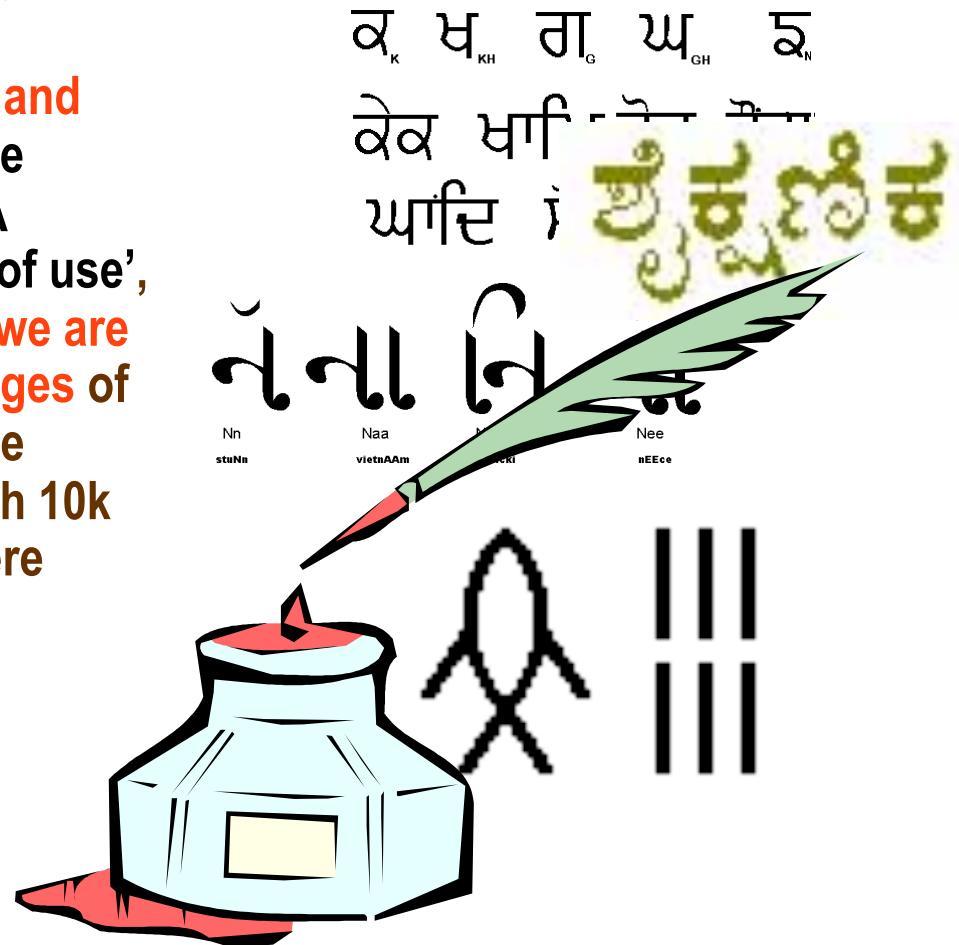
1 Angami 2 Ao 3 Arabic 4 Assamese 5 Bengali 6 Bhoti 7 Bhutia 8 Bodhi
9 Bodo 10 Dogri 11 English 12 French 13 Garo 14 Gujarati 15 German
16 Hindi 17 Kakbarak 18 Kannada 19 Kashmiri 20 Khasi 21 Konkani
22 Konyak 23 Laddakhi 24 Lepcha 25 Limboo 26 Lotha 27 Malayalam
28 Manipuri 29 Marathi 30 Maithili 31 Mizo 32 Nepali 33 Nicobaree 34
Oriya 35 Persian 36 Portuguese 37 Punjabi 38 Rajasthani 39 Sanskrit
40 Sema 41 Sindhi 42 Tamil 43 Telugu 44 Tibetan 45 Urdu 46 Zeliang

Languages Taught in Indian Schools



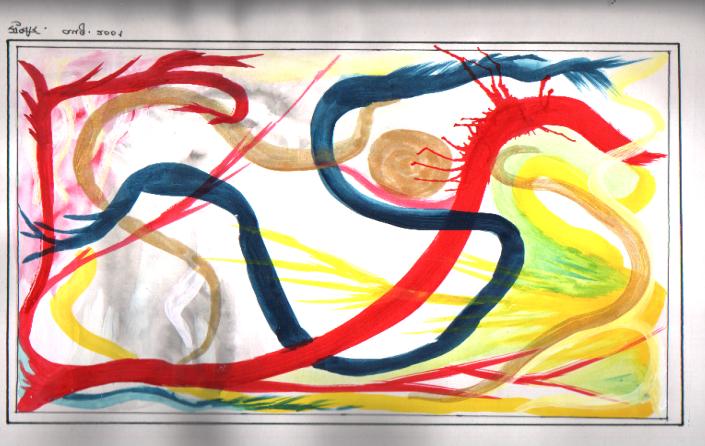
Plurality in Written Languages

- Written Languages: In a survey on language vitality conducted by **Padmanabha, Mahapatra, Verma and McConnel** way back in 1989, ('The written languages of the world: A Survey of the degree and mode of use', ORGI & Laval University Press), we are told that out of the 96/114 languages of Census 1981 surveyed among the populous languages of India (with 10k plus speakers), only about 50 were found to have written modes of expression.



Power to Dislodge or Displace

- **There is thus a tremendous pressure on smaller language groups.**
- **Every year, a significant number of people are forced to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, and look for a space in an alien land.**
- **But there is a still larger number who become displaced within their own geo-space, a trend that is growing world-wide.**
- **In general, they leave to avoid armed conflict, or a possible violence, because of natural or man-made disasters, and because of violation of their rights.**



What if we don't make any such attempts?

- **The result of long years of negligence could lead to large-scale dislocation of many speech groups.**
- **Demographers, Economists and Social Engineers will perhaps tell us that 'displacement' of human aggregates cannot be avoided.**
- **It is perhaps in the nature of man and his products (=‘social formations’) to face this constant predicament of being ‘displaced’, or it is natural for them to wander around.**
- **However, an unplanned and unbalanced displacement can also kill a literature, culture and their medium – that is, language, with all its world of wonder. Consequently, the social agglomeration that is responsible for maintenance of this language as a social contract will also disappear.**
- **Today, forced displacement is on the rise for various reasons.**

‘Displacement’ will be the result

Net Effects of Displacement

- **Marginalization of the Speech Group**

PLUS

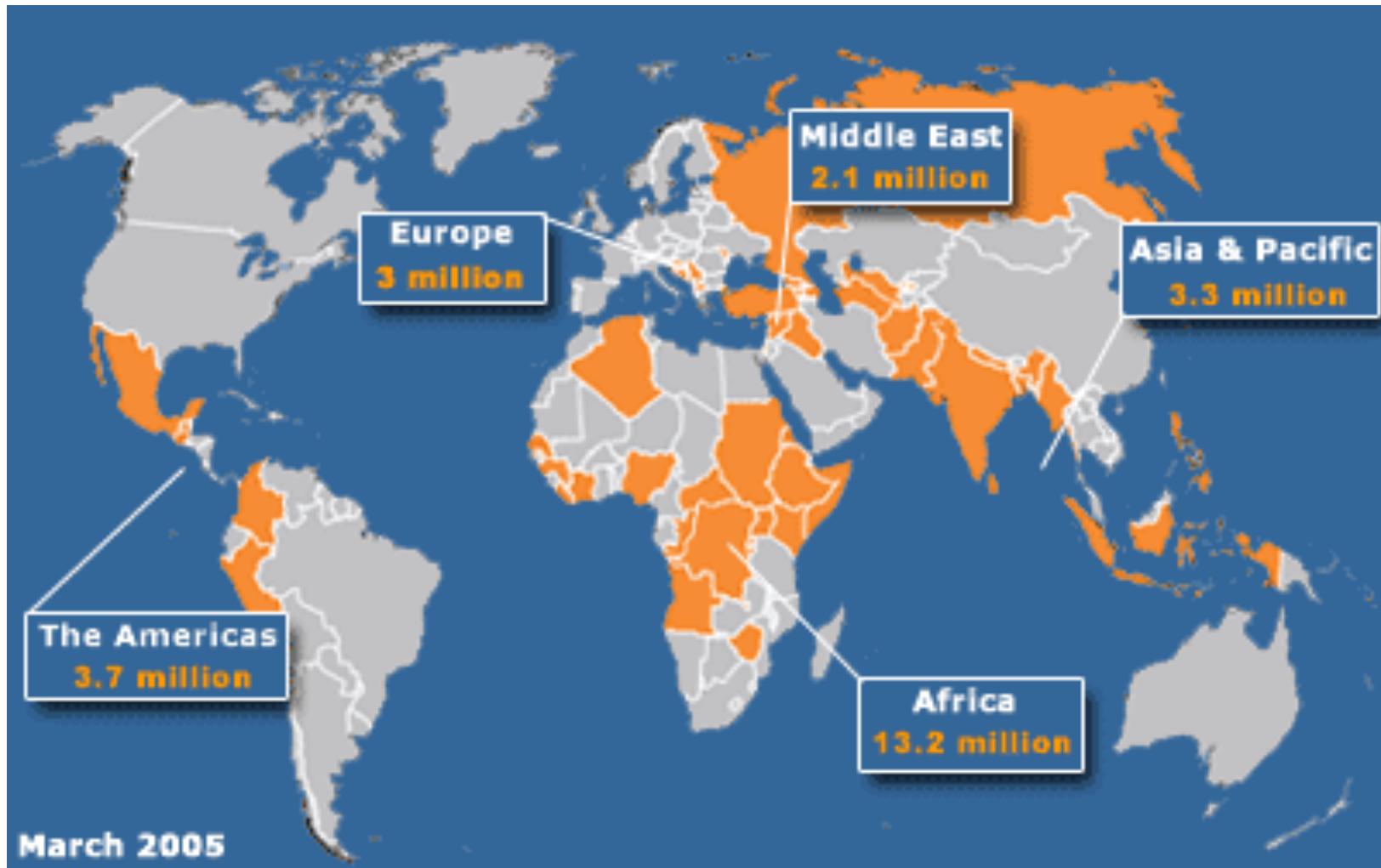
- **Increased mortality**
- **Chances of morbidity**
- **Food Insecurity**
- **Breakdown of values**
- **Split families**
- **Social disorganization**
- **Loss of indigenous languages , and**
- **Pidginization of speech**

Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons: A Growing Trend

| Year | Refugees | Internally Displaced |
|------|---------------------|------------------------|
| 1970 | 9 million | 5 million |
| 1980 | 14 million | 9 million |
| 2000 | 16 million | 22 - 25 million |
| 2004 | 13.2 million | 25 million |

Statistics based on IDMC (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre) figures

Internal Displacement WORLD WIDE

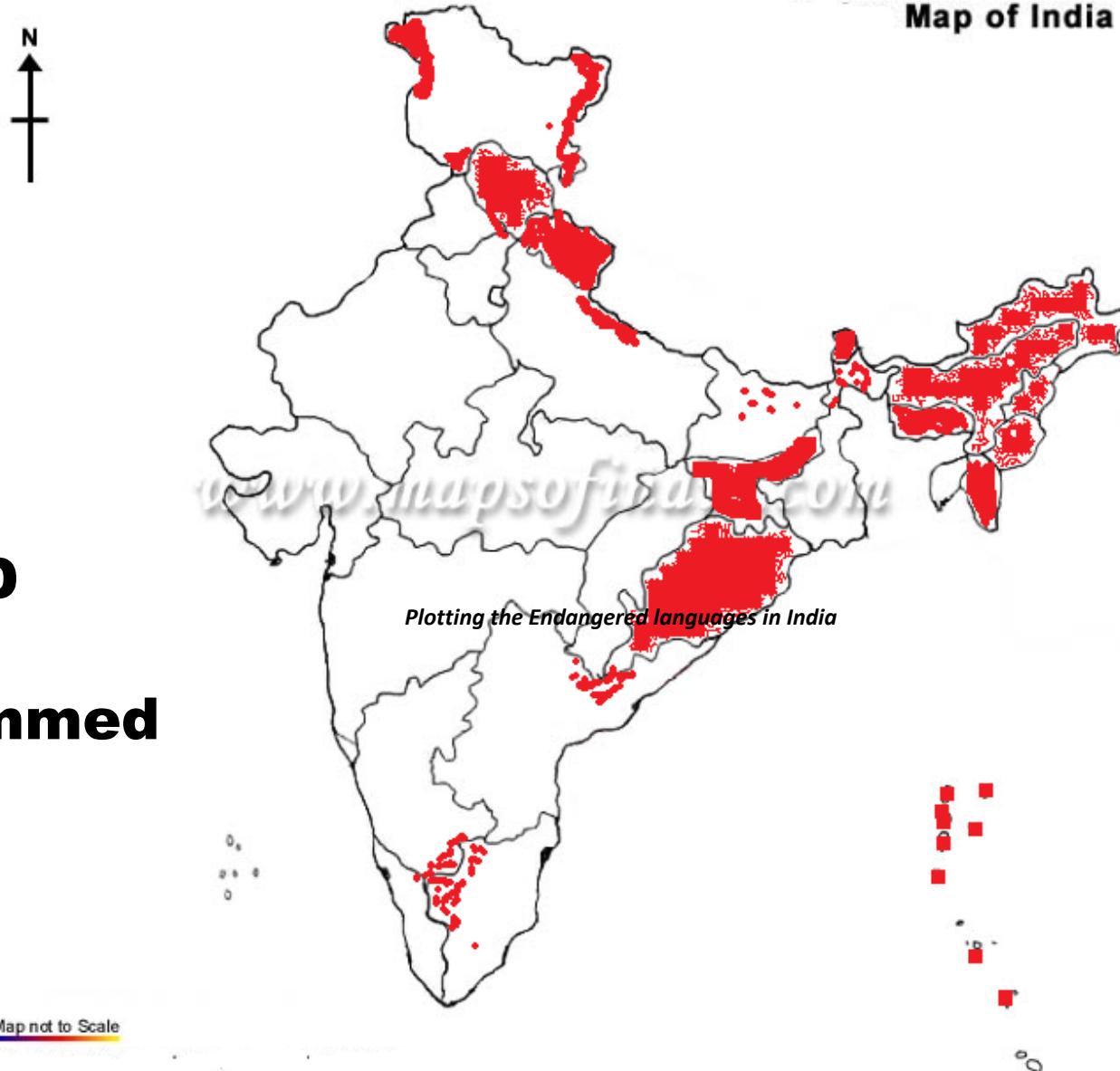


- Africa is by far the region most affected by internal displacement, with large-scale situations such as Sudan (6 million IDPs). Some of the hardest hit countries outside Africa are: Colombia, Turkey, Indonesia, India, Burma.
- While an estimated 3 million IDPs were able to return to their homes during 2004, another 3 million people were newly displaced at the same time (in particular as a result of the crisis in Darfur-Sudan)
- For many countries, figures available are only estimates, as IDPs have not been registered nor counted.

Lessons for the Students of Endangered Languages

- Many sociolinguists (Pandit, P.B. 1976 *Language in Plural Society*, New Delhi: Manohar ; Srivastava, R.N. 1976) claimed that compared to others, for South Asian immigrants, language retention was more natural than language loss.
- But in reality, the 2nd/3rd generation migrants adopt other tongues/regional languages and are assimilated. Yet nobody likes the loss of their language & cultural identity
- In my 2009-paper - The Sense of Danger: An Overview of Endangered Languages of India. (In Kamalini Sengupta, eds. *Endangered Languages of India*. 39-56. New Delhi: INTACH), certain cluster of pockets arise in the country, and a set of consortia might be best suited to tackle the task, and hence this classification of research groups.
- One can evolve a simple test -based on losses of vital linguistic features to assess the 'Distress signals.'
- It is also important to understand that 'Linguistic Documentation' of Endangered Languages cannot be an end in itself – howsoever important it may be for a linguistic theoretician or a typologist.

LANGUAGE ENDANGERMENT IN INDIA – AS PER UNESCO ATLAS



**NEEDED
A
Programmed
Action**

Two-fold Objectives:

- There are **two issues** of importance here:
- The first one is of theoretical importance and also a challenge for all practitioners of language management, namely, **how could we develop smaller languages and their culture in a diverse space - a space where number and economic development seem to be intertwined & important?**
- Secondly, given the profile of such smaller and lesser-known (and often, least cared for) languages and culture of India, **can language technology help in identifying them, changing their status and plight?**



Where does this sense of danger come from?

- To my mind, we will have to make a differentiation between the **real danger** and the **perceived** one.
- The real danger can be tackled by the moves one can make in promoting and propagating ideas and ideals of civil liberty. Its contours are known, and symptoms are identifiable.
- But it is the perceived danger that is more dangerous, as it can erode all confidence in the members of a speech group and make them “shift” to another medium, sealing the future of their own language.



What More Could LT do?

- **Creation of school texts, using ‘shell-book’ method: Papua New Guinea**
- **Generation of a computational orthography that does justice to the phonetic/phonological nature of the given language, with UNICODE link.**
- **Building up of large and annotated corpora with BIS or LDC-IL tagging tools**
- **Appropriate visual and audio documentation.**
- **Setting up of techniques of glossary formation based on such data, and automatic up-dation of the Lexical Resource when more data are added.**
- **Linking it up parallel lexicon of Hindi/English.**
- **Creation of Pictorial glossaries and addition of Cultural material.**
- **Building a bridge material with Web/CD-based or Radio/TV courses.**
- **Pilot Studies, including digital and photo documentation of a few states could be a way to begin.**
- **A model National Archive should also be created**

Survey is the answer, to begin with!



- **The Challenge lies in creating opportunities for endangered lingoes to ensure progress of their community & its members**
- **The challenge also lies in taking steps that would ensure protection of their rightful place in the multi-cultural landscape of their own regions or states.**
- **What is needed is to take up a program that will hopefully lead to integrated lang. development in education with growth of multilingual competence essential for a nation with diversity**
- **A greater challenge lies in setting up a survey & a mechanism that can reflect on our intuitive knowledge of crisis of identity.**

