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## The Specific Growth, Success, And Downfall Of An Endangered Language

Throughout history, there are many cases of how a powerful civilization has fallen apart. As time progressed, the once-popular or dominant power had become docile and weak, or simply a distant memory. When civilizations fall apart, they lose many aspects of their identity such as their practices, beliefs, and lifestyle. A very important aspect that is lost is language. Language is a defining factor of identity, as it embodies the distinct culture of those who created and first used it. In the last century, humankind has taken to preserving and salvaging not only nature but culture as well. Linguistics, the study of languages, as well as the creation of animal reserves and national parks, have greatly impacted society's mindset of preservation, as opposed to a more historical attitude of destruction. This new attitude has brought people to attempt to save what is left of cultures from thousands of years ago. One of these being languages, an important characteristic of culture. Of the 6,900 estimated languages spoken today, at least half are threatened by extinction (Bugaeva 73). To preserve and strengthen the identities of endangered languages across the world, it is necessary to understand the specific growth, success, and downfall of an endangered language.

Tuva lies in South Russia, a biodiverse Russian republic in southern Siberia. Originally nomadic herders, the Tuvans now reside in Kyzyl, the capital city of the Tuva Republic. Tuvan parents dissuade their children from learning such a minor language. Today, the Tuvan language has stabilized since the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991. Tuvan now has a newspaper and around 264,000 speakers.

In Arunachal Pradesh, India's northeasternmost state, live the Aka people. The community is so secluded from other people, that they measure personal wealth in minthan, a breed of Himalayan cattle, instead of the official Indian currency, the Indian Rupee. This isolation is not simply from geography, but government regulation as Arunachal Pradesh is restricted to not only foreigners but other Indians as well. For the Aka, parts of their cultural identity have already disappeared. Nimasow, a third-generation Akan priest, explains that although he has ritual items of a tiger's jaw, a python's jaw, the sharp-toothed mandible of a river fish, a quartz crystal and other objects of a shaman's satchet, he is not able to perform the ritual because his father had not passed down the undocumented chants before his death. Without the words, there is no way to bring the artifacts' power to life (Rymer). The undocumented chants, although a cultural tradition, has most likely ended the ritual Nimasow had planned to do. To preserve their cultural identity through rituals, the Akans may need to forego passing down rituals, or anything else orally transferred, with the intention of securing the safety of their distinct practices.

Northwest Mexico is home to the once semi-nomadic hunters, the Seri people. The Seris see their language as an important characteristic of their identity. When American linguists Edward Moser and Mary Beck Moser came to live with the Seris in 195, as the numbers of the Desemboque group reduced due to an outbreak of measles and influenza. Cmiique litom, the Seri language is an indicator of the group's close relationship with plants and animals. The close relationship/awareness is seen in 2005 as hacat, a Seri name for shark became the official name for a newly discovered species of smooth-hound shark, *Mustelus hacat*. Although newly discovered to science, the Seris had been aware of the sharks years prior (Rymer). This

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situation depicts the deep connection between the Seri and nature, as they are made known of an unidentified species years before its scientific classification. Drawing from their nomadic roots, possessions are seen as burdensome. They have also maintained suspicion of outsiders and a negative interpretation of personal wealth. Their view has changed as some owning automobiles. To further protect their language and culture, the Seris should consider being more open to trusting “outsiders;” this may lead to a project about sharing or saving the Seri language and culture.

Ainu, located in northern Japan, is one of the world’s rarest and most endangered languages. The Ainu are the original inhabitants of Japan. Experiencing repression from Japan in the early 20th century, this resulted in an abandonment of the Ainu language. The Endangered Languages Documentation Programme (ELDP) and Endangered Languages Archive (ELAR) have taken to preserving endangered languages through documentation, such as audio, video, transcriptions and other texts. (Bugaeva 73). In an ELDP project, Bugaeva sought to preserve the language through easily accessible audio recordings of Ainu folklore. The outcome, *A Talking Dictionary of Ainu: A New Version of Kanazawa’s Ainu*, Conversational dictionary, contains both a community view and a linguist view. The community view includes katakana (Japanese syllabary) transcriptions of Ainu, a word-to-word interpretation in Japanese, and categorization of parts of speech in Japanese and modern Japanese translations. The linguist view contains information about morphemic boundaries, glosses, parts of speech and English translations (Bugaeva 78-80).

The Philippines is home to 100-150 languages.  $\frac{1}{4}$  (32) of these languages are spoken by different Negrito ethnolinguistic populations. As of 2003 Negrito groups made up 0.5% of the national population. A gong these groups is the Casiguran, previously hunter-gatherers who lived in the largest rainforest in the Philippines. Although there have been many changes since then, as 3% of the rainforest remains, game and fish are close to extinction, and the Casiguran people now live near farming settlements and work as casual laborers in exchange for rice (Headland). Living among the Casiguran people in 1962, Headland discovered the tribe was unaware that they were living in the Philippines. Headland even predicts that the future Casiguran Agta will be unable to pass an intelligibility test of Agta stories that were audio-recorded in the 1960s. Today the Casiguran Agta language is not spreading, as parents urge their children to learn a different language or learn a more common language in addition to Agta. The lack of loyalty to the Agta language express that those who speak it do not believe that there is hope in preserving the language and that it will not last long in today’s day and age.

Japan’s Luchu Islands (Ryukyu Islands) are home to 6 endangered languages. The 2 severely endangered, Yaeyama and Yonaguni, and 4 definitely endangered languages, Amani, Kunigami, Uchinaa, and Mayakovsky, are all being replaced by standard Japanese, Hyojungo or Kyotsugo. The Luchuan (Ryukyuan) people experienced a severe dissuasion of their culture when annexed by Japan in 1872. After the United States’ occupation of Uchinaa, the US was inspired to separate Uchinaa (Okinawa) from Japan and encouraged their distinctive languages and cultures. The failed attempt resulted in a Luchuan Japanization movement. In this movement, Ryukyukan children were educated to become Japanese and were not allowed to speak their native language at school following the ‘Ordinance of Direct Regulation’ in 1907 (Barion & Brenzinger 1). Although seemingly harsh to the Ryukyukans, it is understandable from a Japanese perspective as Luchuan languages share only about 59-68% of cognates with Tokyo Japanese, which is lower than those between English and German (Barion &

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Brenzinger). Today, the lack of concern for these languages come from general linguists as they are classified as dialects and are rarely studied. The lack of a deserved title has made it extremely difficult for the Luchuan languages and cultures to be well studied. The lack of interests and work done concerning these endangered languages has made it difficult to understand the situation and inspire ideas of how to save them.

While some spoken languages are endangered, so are unspoken languages. In Tibet, the Lhasa Tibetan Sign Language (TibSL) is becoming extremely scarce. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has classified the fragility of Lhasa Tibetan Sign Language, by ranking 8 categories on a scale of 1 to 5, such as the number of speakers, the ability of materials for language education and literacy, and shifts in domains of language use. On a scale of 1 to 5, the results of the TibSL ranking range as anywhere from critically endangered (1) to vulnerable (4) depending on the issue. The assessment resulted in numerical ratings of 3 vulnerable (ranking of 4), 1 definitely endangered (ranking of 3), 4 severely endangered (ranking of 2), and 1 critically endangered (ranking of 1) (Hofer). With less than 300 speakers, the numbers have only decreased as medical and technological advancement has and continues to improve, which has made learning sign language arguably unnecessary. Although the invention of hearing aids would be a suspected technological advancement threatening TibSL, very few use them due to the near impossibility of finding the correct batteries in the area. Although thanks to the internet, TibSL videos via WeChat, a Chinese social media outlet similar to Facebook, has been used to promote and document the language (Hofer). For Lhasa Tibetan Sign Language, technology can be seen as both a threat and a resource. The hearing aids challenge the purpose of learning TibSL, but in reality, poses no threat at the moment due to the unavailability of the correct batteries. The use of WeChat has helped document TibSL and generate an increase in global knowledge. Using WeChat and other social media platforms will increase knowledge and interest of TibSL. If to occur, social media may be what it takes to save this endangered language.

In Oaxaca, Mexico the whistled language of Zapotec has a rich and fascinating origin. Used as a way to hide information from Spanish colonizers, the language has rich historical roots. Seen as a game, it was the perfect way to relay important information right out in the open. (Porras-Kim) Although seen as strategic, Zapotec is flawed in how sound quality can change an entire message. Unfortunately, the number of Zapotec speaking people is decreasing, as many of the speakers are transferring to a common language, and Mexico is no longer a Spanish colony. The Whistling and Language Transfiguration (WaLT) is an interdisciplinary art project created in 2012 in an attempt to bring attention to the case of the Zapotec language. The vinyl record with a translation of Zapotec in its whistled form was used to address the political and linguistic implications of the language's deterioration while examining language as the literal signifier of cultural, particularly sounds (Porras-Kim).

In conclusion, to preserve the disappearing languages of the world, it is vital to look at the growth, success, and downfall of endangered languages. The identity of the Luchuan and Zapotec languages evolved from unique and rich histories. Bugaeva and Headland's personal experiences with the Ainu and Casiguran compared the lifestyle of minority groups to today's modern and advanced society in minuscule, and commonly overlooked details. Both Bugaeva and Hofer describe the positive effects of using the internet or social media to preserve and promote endangered languages.