

Preserving Diversity: The Fight to Save Endangered Languages

Commentary On

Language City: The Fight to Preserve Endangered Mother Tongues in New York

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Introduction

Language serves as a medium for conveying meaning. It is perpetually transformed by speakers in every utterance at all times (Sultana, 2012a, 2012b). In the contemporary global landscape, multilingual individuals traverse the world and engage in diverse linguistic exchanges. In a certain community, a singular standard language is predominantly spoken and is likely extensively taught within the educational system. In addition to the predominant language, a country may possess a limited number of languages that are not taught in schools and lack trained instructors for their instruction. A multitude of complete language families is likely to be eradicated. A language is deemed endangered when it is in risk of extinction, typically due to a dwindling number of speakers.

Language City by Ross Perlin gives a clear and detailed image of New York which is the most linguistically varied in history, currently hosting speakers of hundreds of languages originating from minority and indigenous regions of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Perlin looks into the experiences of groups whose languages are in danger of going extinct. He does this by using the work of the Endangered Language Alliance (ELA) and a lot of personal anecdotes. From a social point of view, the book's purpose of raising awareness of endangered languages is important and relevant. The work includes an abundance of ethnographic details, but because of the way it is set up methodologically and analytically, there is still room for more in-depth critical engagement.

Advantages and Contributions to the Subject Area

The book is organized into three sections, comprising four subsections. The first part addresses the operations of ELA where most projects are initiated by speakers and activists from minority groups, facilitating connections with communities globally. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, ELA's assisted speakers of minority languages by providing timely information and services, as well as to record the disproportionate effects of the epidemic on these marginalized populations. The author asserts that language access has preserved lives, as speakers, linguists, and communities have facilitated it for several languages lacking official support and previously devoid of documented public health communications. Section 2 of Part 1 asserts that in New York City, every individual's homeland is a borderland, and each group represents a form of ethnic or linguistic minority. Here,

members can converse in their native languages, play their own music, and reminisce about their childhoods. Due to the presence of numerous speakers in this region, practices such as mixing, code-switching, and other forms of linguistic amalgamation are commonplace. For instance, speakers of Russian, Polish, and Ukrainian communicate along the Eastern Slavic continuum, often assimilating elements from one another's languages, occasionally to a significant extent.

The emphasis on linguistic imperialism is also compelling. The book shows that New York serves as a capital of the English empire, functioning as a hub for English-language media, publishing, and entertainment. Indigenous, minority, and predominantly oral languages in the USA are systematically underreported by the US Census. However, countless minorities and endangered languages are seldom documented. To address the deficiency, ELA has initiated its own language census, accessible online. Subsection 3 of Part 1 addresses the ELA language map, which encompasses nearly 1,200 locales, where more than seven hundred languages are spoken.

The last portion of Part 1 addresses the properties of language, asserting that no language is superior to another. Borrowing, code-switching, mixing, hybridization, creolization, and language shift exemplify the fluidity of communication in linguistic interactions. The notions of linguistic superiority or inferiority are not inherent to the languages themselves, but rather contingent upon the power, class, or status of their speakers Phillipson (2018). The author also delineates subfields of linguistic structures, including pragmatics, syntax, semantics, and phonology, when discussing languages.

The initial subsection of the second part addresses the linguistic landscape of New York City, where numerous individuals have migrated from various nations. However, not all are able to maintain their native languages in daily life due to significant pressure to abandon their mother tongues upon arrival. Nevertheless, certain minoritized languages have flourished for official purposes; for instance, Lenape has remained vital as several colonists cohabited with or maintained close interactions with its speakers, often serving as interpreters in legal contexts. Furthermore, the author discusses the significant linguistic diversity in New Amsterdam, Manhattan, and explains how, during the nineteenth century, Dutch was declining in New York City while English was advancing.

The second subsection of part 2 addresses the linguistic landscape of New York, which emerged as a final refuge for underprivileged minorities seeking improved livelihoods and opportunities, where their native languages may be subject to neglect and erasure. Despite the diverse linguistic, cultural, and religious characteristics of these marginalized communities, a commonality of expulsion and suffering is evident in their historical experiences.

The third subsection of Part 2 addresses the variety of the indigenous metropolis. Census data reveals that in 2020, more than 180,000 New Yorkers identified themselves, at least in part, as "American Indian or Alaska Native," representing the highest figure for any city in the nation. This section highlights speakers who are multilingual and possess diverse tribal roots.

The concluding segment of part 2 addresses New York City, which serves as a premier study of global nations, where individuals from East Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, and various regions worldwide have settled, particularly following the cessation of immigration, leading to an increase in population.

In the initial component of the concluding segment, the author discusses six speakers of endangered languages, such as Rasmina, a speaker of Seke. The author depicts Seke speakers residing in a communal building in Brooklyn, where they demonstrate their kinship through mutual assistance, including loan provision and childcare for younger family members. The second portion of this piece delineates the existence of Husniya, a Wakhi speaker, representing an endangered Pamiri language utilized by approximately forty thousand individuals in the isolated high-altitude region where Tajikistan, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and China intersect. The third section discusses Boris, a speaker of Yiddish. Irwin, a fluent speaker of Nahuatl, is a chef based in Queens. Karen arrives in Manhattan to instruct in Lenape, the indigenous language of the region on which the city is established.

Methodological Concerns and Significant Shortcomings

Perlin's use of census data and ELA mapping gives him useful information, but it also makes him more likely to have biases. The network and outreach of ELA have a big effect on the sample of languages and speakers, which makes me worry about how well they represent the group; even though they are interested, do the case studies that are featured show all of New York's endangered language communities or simply those with close activist ties?

The book might have looked at the problems with documenting urban language in more depth. It's great that ELA is trying to help, but more has to be done to address the problems of monitoring language use in transient, multilingual areas, where speakers may hide their language identification because of stigma or being an immigrant.

Putting Language City in Literary Context

Because it focuses on cities, Perlin's work differs from Nettle and Romaine's (2000) work and David Harrison's (2007) study. Whereas Perlin places language endangerment within the high-mobility, cosmopolitan context of New York, Harrison focuses on ecological and rural settings. More thorough discussion of earlier studies on metropolitan language ecologies and an examination of whether the trends observed in New York apply to other international cities like London or Toronto, however, might have improved this urban viewpoint.

Dimensions Not Fully Examined

Although the book makes some valid points, it ignores some issues that are becoming increasingly crucial for language preservation:

Digital preservation: While paper literature and community events are highlighted, online archiving, social media advocacy, and digital teaching tools, all crucial for preserving diaspora languages are not discussed as much.

Policy implications: Although the work places a strong emphasis on beginnings initiatives, it barely touches on national or local policy frameworks that could establish language assistance in public services, education, and cultural initiatives.

Intersection with socioeconomic pressures: Although a process of is mentioned in passing, little attention is paid to how shifts in the urban economy impact the spread of minority languages from one generation to the next.

Conclusion

In sum, this book is exemplary in the production of useful knowledge since it offers a profound and multifaceted investigation of linguistic diversity in one of the world's most

multicultural urban centers, New York. The book highlights the urgent need to preserve endangered languages and emphasizes the flexibility and cultural richness of the communities that speak them. By constructing together historical insights, personal narratives, and innovative methodologies, the author has created a significant resource for linguists, cultural historians, and anyone passionate about the preservation of global heritage. Through its fascinating narrative, the book serves as both a confirmation to the richness of linguistic diversity and a call to action for its continued preservation.

The limitations noted, such as dependence on a single institutional network for data, lack of engagement with digital preservation strategies, and inadequate policy framework discussion indicate areas that warrant additional investigation. By embracing multi-institutional collaboration, integrating new digital documentation technologies, and conducting comparative studies across diverse metropolitan environments, future research may build on Perlin's foundation. These kinds of initiatives would strengthen the connection between beginnings action and policy change and increase the results' generality.

Language City is a call to action as well as a celebration of the various languages that are spoken throughout the world. It serves as a reminder to readers that language diversity is a valuable component of cultural heritage that cannot be replaced (Tsimpli et al, 2020), and that endangered languages can thrive in urban areas if communities continue to work toward their survival, institutions support them, and policymakers recognize this. For those who work to preserve languages, whether in academia, government, or community organizations, this book will inspire, educate, and promote a new sense of urgency. Additionally, it will serve as a reminder to them that they must move swiftly to prevent more voices from being lost to time.

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