

## Margin notes

- currently almost 7,000 languages in the world → this number fluctuates as some new languages are formed and many completely disappeared
- about 40% of current languages are in danger of dying out

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**1. Why language death occurs**

There are multiple reasons:

- **Past:** war, disease, natural disasters / volcano eruptions  
e.g. Indonesia – volcanic eruption killed all speakers of a language
- **Today / Present:**
  - (1) **Globalization**
    - need to **trade** in a common language:
      - some languages are more dominant while other languages are used less and then die
    - e.g. English as an international language
      - replaces some local languages
      - English = “killer language”
  - (2) **Urbanization**
    - people move to cities → decline in rural population, especially youth
    - in isolated communities – local languages necessary
    - in larger communities → communicate with wider number of people → need to use the dominant language more and less the local language
    - e.g. Mexico: only 2 remaining speakers of Ayapaneco because the language of the nearby city became more needed

**2. Why language death is a problem**

- language death - natural phenomenon
- function of language = communication → so isn't a global language (e.g. English) a positive?
- negative consequences:
  - (1) **Culture / cultural loss**
    - language is linked to culture so language death → loss of culture, history, folklore, stories, etc.
      - e.g. Aboriginals in Australia
        - no written language
        - so if their language dies, they lose parts of their culture

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|                | <p>(2) <b>Loss of knowledge</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ especially <b>medicine</b></li> <li>▪ local cultures often have knowledge of healing power of local plants → so loss of language → loss of knowledge about how to use these plants</li> <li>▪ 1/4 of modern medicine originated from plants</li> </ul> <p><b>3. Measures to combat language death</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– active steps to preserve languages</li> <li>– e.g. <b>Wales in UK – Welsh language</b> struggled because of English influence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- in the 1990s people worried about it dying out <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) local communities / individuals promoted Welsh culture</li> <li>(2) local government measures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Welsh-medium schools</li> <li>- law passed encouraging Welsh use (e.g. use Welsh in law courts)</li> </ul> </li> </ol> </li> <li>- revival in Welsh usage: 8% → 19%</li> </ul> </li> <li>– <b>it takes effort from individuals and the government</b></li> </ul> |
| <b>Summary</b> | <p>Language death involves the disappearance of languages due to natural and human-controlled causes. Two main factors affecting recent language death are globalization and urbanization. Trade and migration to cities cause local languages to be lost as communication among increasingly diverse groups of people requires shared languages, usually dominant ones. Language death has grave consequences including the loss of cultures and unique knowledge. Preserving or reviving a language is possible but involves sustained individual and community actions</p>  |