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Anthropology 101

Short Essay 3

**Language and Culture**

For sure, huge empires had unified language: Roman used Latin, Chinese use Chinese language, Muslim use Arabic, etc. There might be empires that their people used various languages, but this condition caused limitation of expansion. In other words, the unified language is a prerequisite of expansion, and the reason is that the unified language makes the unified people. With the purpose of unification, governments have used assimilation policies, and the first policy among all is annihilation of the local language: by eradicating local languages, the government can remove the local culture and infuse the common culture instead. However, this policy makes a problem: it is hard track the extinct languages.

In modern days, cultural contents became so important. Since Fordism could improve the efficiency of production, the middle class that can afford industrial products appeared, so economic structure moved its focus on the public. At the same time, the importance of culture had increased since the public could afford the cultural contents. Cultural contents became a resource, so development and revival of culture became a good business.

To revive traditions and cultures, the reviver needs to understand the language of the culture. Since the culture is information, its passing and transitions are processed via language. Some cultures are written, but many cultures are oral because the culture is behavioral. Therefore, the study of the language is inevitable for studying the culture, and the revitalization of language is inevitable for reviving dead cultures.

The biggest difficulty for the revitalization is that it is hard to learn the extinct language. Language is based on the common sense (Lavenda and Schultz, 2015, p. 263). For instance, ‘life’ means many things, but speakers understand the meaning of life while the life is mean to non-speakers. The one who studies extinct languages does not share the common sense with the speakers, so it is hard for the scholar to understand the language. If there is no language speaker anymore, then it is much harder since there is no opportunity to share the common sense with the speakers.

In their book “Anthropology: What Does it Mean to Be Human?”, Lavenda and Schultz (2015) introduced the language revitalization in California (p.279-p.281). There were attempts to revive the indigenous languages in California. Some schools managed the program for training native Americans to speak their ancestors’ language. However, the programs did not work well since the students could not understand their ancestors’ common sense: the students’ common sense is English speakers’.

The revitalization of the language may be important. It can cause the revival of ancient cultures. However, the common senses are already eradicated, and the people’s identity is already gone. The revitalization of the language is required to revive the culture, and the revitalization of culture is required to revive the language, but there is neither the language nor the culture. It seems it is better to preserve the languages rather than revitalize them.

**References**

Lavenda, Robert H., and Schultz, Emily A. (2015). *Anthropology: What Does It Mean to Be Human? 3rd Edition.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press.