Languages Die Out, Taking History Along

By Brittany Karford *Daily Universe Staff Reporter* – 16 Mar 2005
(Brigham Young University. Universe.byu.edu)

Até logo 再見 Adiós

Do widzenia Orevwa さようなら

1 Kuna. Klctza. Cúu, ma chin áaje. There are many ways to say goodbye in Mam. But soon the world may be saying farewell to the Mayan language and the culture in which it **originated**. Along with Mam, the United Nations **estimates** half of the world's 6,000 languages will disappear in less than a century, while half of the world's people now use one of just eight languages: Chinese, English, Hindi, Spanish, Russian, Arabic, Portuguese, and French. Many linguists are scrambling[1] to save dying languages, while others say it is simply the natural **evolution** of languages to continually develop, change, and die off, just like species of plants and animals. In either case, the **globalization** of language is changing the culture of the world.

2 Lyle Campbell is involved in language revitalization[2] because he thinks the **wisdom** of the world is encoded in its languages. He is closely involved in the **preservation** of many Mayan and Native American Indian languages, but documenting a language is a **massive** undertaking[3]. A speaker of 52 different languages, David Stewart said once a language is lost, the culture behind it is also lost. Stewart said every language contains a **value** system and a way of thinking. While German is one of the best languages for a mechanical process, he said it would be poor in describing a walk through a forest. But, Portuguese, though clumsy[4] in speaking of a mechanical process, is quite beautiful in describing scenery.[5]

3 Ray Clifford, the director of the Center for Language Studies at BYU, is not **alarmed**. As language is constantly evolving, Clifford said even the English language of today would not be readily recognized by Shakespeare. To Clifford, the number of languages in existence today is **evidence** of man's creativity. Despite fewer languages, the people of the world are increasing their ability to communicate across groups. "The goal of world peace will never be achieved without **mutual** understanding," Clifford said. "You cannot achieve mutual understanding without effective communication, which shared language can provide." There is another way to say goodbye in the Mayan language of Mam—Q'onk chipena. It means "strength to all."

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[1] ***scrambling:*** trying to do something difficult very quickly

[2] ***revitalization:*** the process of making something strong, active, or powerful again

[3] ***undertaking:*** an important job or piece of work

[4] ***clumsy:*** awkward

[5] ***scenery:*** the natural features of a place such as mountains and forests

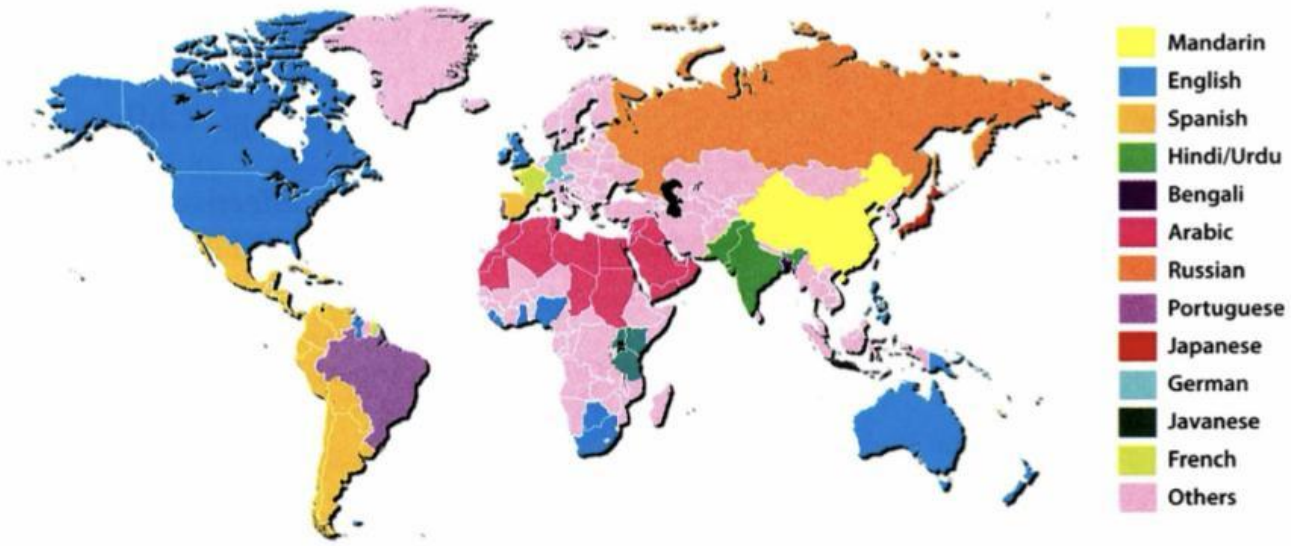
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A Main Ideas

Complete each sentence with the correct word or phrase from the box.

believes	**decreasing**	**language**	**not as many**	**shared**	**worried about**

1. The number of languages spoken around the world is _____, but the number of people who speak the same languages is increasing.
2. Some linguists are _____ languages disappearing.
3. According to David Stewart, what a group of people _____ and how they think are important parts of each language.
4. Ray Clifford believes that _____ is always changing and this is natural.
5. According to Clifford, even though there are _____ different languages today as in the past, communication between people from different cultures is increasing worldwide.
6. Clifford suggests that successful communication is based on _____ understanding, and this is very important for world peace.



Languages spoken around the world

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B Close Reading

Find each word, phrase, or number on the left in the reading. Then match each with the correct explanation on the right.

____ **1.** half of the world's languages *(paragraph 1)*

____ **2.** less than a century *(paragraph 1)*

____ **3.** eight *(paragraph 1)*

____ **4.** Mayan and Native American Indian languages *(paragraph 2)*

____ **5.** 52 *(paragraph 2)*

____ **6.** German *(paragraph 2)*

____ **7.** shared language *(paragraph 3)*

a. a language that describes a mechanical process well

b. the number of languages that will disappear in less than a century

c. an important part of effective communication

d. the amount of time it will take for half the world's languages to disappear

e. the languages Campell is trying to save

f. the number of languages David Stewart speaks

g. the number of languages half the world's population uses

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