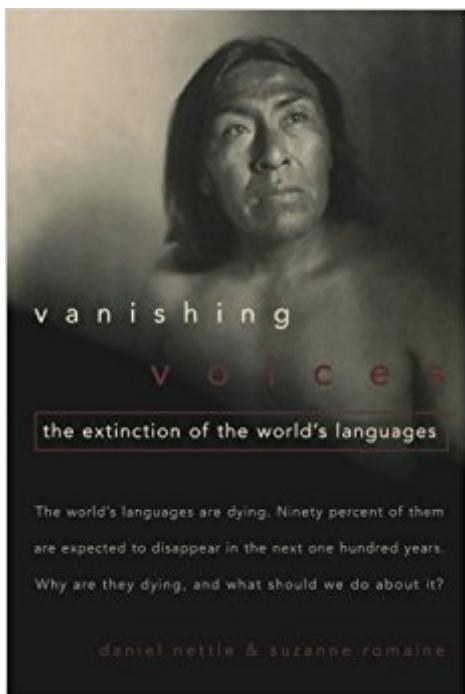


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Vanishing Voices: The Extinction Of The World's Languages



Synopsis

Few people know that nearly one hundred native languages once spoken in what is now California are near extinction, or that most of Australia's 250 aboriginal languages have vanished. In fact, at least half of the world's languages may die out in the next century. Daniel Nettle and Suzanne Romaine assert that this trend is far more than simply disturbing. Making explicit the link between language survival and environmental issues, they argue that the extinction of languages is part of the larger picture of near-total collapse of the worldwide ecosystem. Indeed, the authors contend that the struggle to preserve precious environmental resources-such as the rainforest-cannot be separated from the struggle to maintain diverse cultures, and that the causes of language death, like that of ecological destruction, lie at the intersection of ecology and politics. In addition to defending the world's endangered languages, the authors also pay homage to the last speakers of dying tongues, such as Red Thundercloud, a Native American in South Carolina; Ned Mandrell, with whom the Manx language passed away in 1974; and Arthur Bennett, an Australian who was the last person to know more than a few words of Mbabaram. In our languages lies the accumulated knowledge of humanity. Indeed, each language is a unique window on experience. *Vanishing Voices* is a call to preserve this resource, before it is too late.

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Customer Reviews

Creating an explicit link between ecological and linguistic vitality, Nettle (Ph.D., anthropology, University Coll., London) and Romaine (English language, Oxford Univ.) persuasively present the

scientific value of saving endangered languages. Anecdotes, statistics, and graphs help address significant assumptions about why languages die and how a few languages have achieved world dominance. The authors provide useful background information and tackle underlying issues, some of which spurred another recent publication, Stephen G. Alter's *Darwinism and the Linguistic Image* (Johns Hopkins Univ., 1999). Among other books that offer detailed examinations of threatened languages are *Endangered Languages*, edited by Lenora Grenoble and Lindsay Whaley (Cambridge Univ., 1998), and Robert M.W. Dixon's *The Rise and Fall of Languages* (Cambridge Univ., 1998). Highlighting the wealth of scientific knowledge encoded in threatened languages, the authors promote not only bi- or multilingualism but also the economic and ecological benefits of cooperating with endangered language speakers. Recommended for academic and large public libraries. DMarianne Orme, West Lafayette, IN Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc.

"Language extinction is a great tragedy for human culture and for scholarship on all things human. This fascinating book is the latest word on this important issue, containing a wealth of knowledge and wisdom. If we have the good sense to rescue the priceless legacy of linguistic diversity before it vanishes forever, *Vanishing Voices* will surely deserve a good part of the credit."--Steven Pinker, author of *The Language Instinct* and *Words and Rules*"Vanishing Voices is an urgent call to arms about the impending loss of one of our great resources. Nettle and Romaine paint a breathtaking landscape that shows why so many of the world's languages are disappearing and more importantly, why it matters. They put the problem of linguistic diversity into the wider context of global biodiversity, and propose the revolutionary idea that saving endangered languages is not about dictionaries and educational programs, but about preserving the cultures and habitats of the people who speak them. Along the way it's also a fascinating introduction to how language works: how languages are born, how they die, and how we can prevent their death."-- Deborah Tannen, Georgetown University"[A] superb study of endangered languages.... The tapestry of supporting detail is every bit as compelling as the central thesis-- from an examination of how indigenous languages function as museums of local culture to a history of the way in which dominant languages like English, Mandarin, and Spanish have vanquished more vulnerable tongues."--The New Yorker"Mr. Nettle and Ms. Romaine do an impressive job of identifying the process by which languages are abandoned or not passed down to the next generation, framing it in terms of disparities in social, political, and economic status."--Red Herring

A good book. From page 16: "In the native American language, Micmac, trees are named for the

sound the wind makes when it blows through them during the Autumn, about an hour after sunset when the wind always comes from a certain direction. Moreover, these names are not fixed but change as the sound changes. If an elder remembers, for example, that a certain stand of trees used to be called by a particular name 75 years ago but is now called by another, these terms [can be seen as markers for change over that period]. And just in this is a jewel of an example of the potential of "other" languages - what I think of as the magic of languages, and their collective ability to reveal a world that speakers of one language have difficulty accessing. A main premise of "Vanishing Voices" is that so-called native languages, once judged grossly inferior to the main European languages, are repositories of knowledge built up over hundreds and hundreds of years, that will be lost when the language dies, and that do not exist in any other form. But this is just a part of the book. The simplest review is this: if you like this topic, or it "speaks" to you, it's worth the time. Poetic as the Micmac example is, it is not a poetic book. It is a science book, with a message about loss of data, world-view, and different kinds of understandings of the world, and lots of examples.

Great book, but took around 3 weeks to come in.

Thank you very much! Quick shipping and arrived perfectly in time when I needed for class! Arrive exactly as described!

There is little for me to add to the other fine reader reviews of this work except to say that I found it very repetitive. I am not sure that it could not have been a long article in the Atlantic or Harper's. I am not at all sure that there is much that can be done to preserve some of these minor languages in the long run but I do find it admirable that the authors have taken up the cudgel.

Excellent book. Beautifully written and covers an amazing amount of information.

It is a very informational book.

I got the book a while ago for fun and I quite enjoyed it. The author covers really interesting topics and put language death into new light.

Great very happy

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