INTRODUCTION

➤ Since the 1990s, a considerable amount of literature has appeared on language endangerment and language revitalization.

➤ Comité International Permanent des Linguists (CIPL): The 15th International Congress in Québec in 1992 was devoted a theme “Endangered Languages.”

➤ UNESCO’s Red Book of Languages in Danger of Disappearing (since 1993) and Atlas of World’s Languages in Danger (since 1996).

➤ American Anthropologist: Entire issues of the journal (2003, Vol.105, Issue 4) devoted to issues such as language ideologies, rights and choices, and revitalization.

INTRODUCTION AND QUESTIONS

➤ How many languages are endangered exactly? (in the world and in Taiwan)

➤ “Some language became extinct or is dying” …Why should we care?

➤ Government policies on endangered languages in Taiwan.

➤ A case study: the Thao language

➤ Language and ethnicity: When very few people talk “mother tongue,” can the language still be a marker of ethnic identity?

➤ How do the Taiwanese government policies on indigenous languages affect the Thao people and language?

HOW TO DEFINE ENDANGERED LANGUAGES?

➤ There are roughly 6,000 spoken languages in the world today.

➤ There are 51 languages with only one speaker (Malik 2000).

➤ A minimum number of speakers/learners are need to allow a language to survive:

➤ Krauss (1992): 100,000 speakers to be “safe”; a language with fewer than 10,000 speakers should be regarded as “endangered.”


➤ We can expect to lose half of the world’s languages this century (Krauss 1992).

➤ Why do we have to protect indigenous/minority languages? Because “linguistic diversity is a benchmark of cultural diversity.”

☞ Language death “is symptomatic of cultural death” (Nettle and Romaine 2000).

INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES IN TAIWAN (“EXTINCT”) ❏ Pazah—The last speaker passed away in 2010. Recently they launched their own language revival program.

INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES IN TAIWAN (“CRITICALLY ENDANGERED”) ❏ Source: UNESCO Atlas of World’s Languages in Danger.
GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES IN TAIWAN

➤ The additional articles of the Constitution in 1997—“The State affirms cultural pluralism and shall actively preserve and foster the development of indigenous languages and cultures.” (§10 XI)
➤ In 1998, Education Act for Indigenous Peoples was promulgated.
➤ In January 2001, Preferential Treatment for Indigenous Student’s Admission to Higher Education was promulgated in order to secure better employment and educational opportunities for indigenous students.
➤ In November 2001, Regulations for Certification of Indigenous Language Abilities was promulgated.
➤ In December 2001, the first Certification Examination of Indigenous Languages was carried out.
➤ Since 2006, indigenous students who obtains passing score for the indigenous culture and language ability exam, the additional 35% is added to the total score in a high school/university entrance exam.

IDEOLOGIES BEHIND GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

➤ Yohani· Isqaqavut (the Minister of Council of Indigenous Peoples, 2000-2002, Bunun) has said, “the mother tongue is an identification of indigenes.”; “if a person refuses to learn his/her mother tongue, it means that he/she refuses to identify the indigenous status.’
➤ Those who don’t learn their mother tongue = They don’t deserve to have welfare and benefit for indigenes.
➤ Indigenous ethno-linguistic centrism or “native languageism.”
➤ Certification in indigenous “cultures” > indigenous decent.
➤ As for “cultural knowledge,” indigenous students have to prove their language abilities.
➤ Question: Culture = language?

THE THAO

➤ Recognized by the government in 2001.
➤ Population: 776 people (December 2016)
➤ Residence: Ita Thao village (Yuchih Township, Nantou County)
➤ Ancestor Worship
➤ A patrilineal and clannish society

HOW “ENDANGERED” IS THE THAO LANGUAGE?

➤ Under the long-term policy of a single national language and tourism industry in Sun Moon Lake, the Thao people almost lost their mother tongue.
➤ Fluent speakers are less than 10 people.
➤ But the Thao languages are still spoken in religious ceremonies.

THE CURRENT SITUATION OF THE THAO LANGUAGE

➤ A language is one of the most important cultural features of a group and often acts as a principle maker of ethnicity.
➤ Under the current circumstances, can the Thao language be still working as the ethnic boundary that define the Thao?
➤ At least for now, the Thao people don’t see the Thao language as a requirement to be the Thao.
➤ The Thao people have another option for the qualification of the group.

ETHNIC BOUNDARIES

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Every Thao household has an ulalaluan in a house. In the village, "those who has an ulalaluan is a Thao."

In the National Reading Competition in 2015, a Thao girl from Gaoxiong City took first prize defeating other Thao students from Ita Thao village.

The Thao don’t have any urban settlement. This girl was born and raised in circumstances with no Thao language.

She learned it through textbooks and online dictionary. No “village” experiments.

According to David Bradley (2010:72-73), "(Among the indigenous languages in Taiwan) six are now critically endangered... All the other surviving languages are definitely endangered and in rapid decline in most areas, with child speakers only in a few areas, even for the largest languages. All may well be extinct during this century if current trends continue."

The goal of the Certification Exam of Indigenous Languages:
- Protect indigenous languages and support cultural pluralism.
- Decrease the gap between indigenous students and non-indigenous students.
- Decrease the gap between indigenous residential district and other area.
- Compensatory justice.

The exam might interest some indigenous students in their cultures, but most students stop learning the language after the exam.

The gap between a “way of life” and “native languages” (as a second language).

Those who does not have any experience in an indigenous settlement and any local knowledge might become "indigenous elites" in future?

The younger generation are learning the indigenous languages with their phone, not from their parents.