LANGUAGE DEATH

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Category: Languages

Yesterday morning, there was an excellent article on minority languages on the BBC Today programme. I was two-thirds asleep, trying to ignore the radio, when it came on, but thankfully the piece is now online and I was able to catch up with a cup of coffee in hand! The issue of the loss of minority languages is an important one, which sadly doesn't get enough attention, as my colleague Paul Lewis, editor of the Ethnologue,Â said on the programe:

> *"You've got smallest, weakest, least resourced communities trying to address the problem. And the larger communities are largely unaware of it. We would spend an awful lot of money to preserve a very old building, because it is part of our heritage. These languages and cultures are equally part of our heritage and merit preservation."*

But languages do not exist in a vacuum; languages and the people who speak them are very closely linked and the loss of a language can also lead to the loss of ethnic identity and a sense of self-worth. Paul Lewis again:

> *"Because of the close links between language and identity, if people begin to think of their language as useless, they see their identity as such as well.This leads to social disruption, depression, suicide and drug use, he says. And as parents no longer transmit language to their children, the connection between children and grandparents is broken and traditional values are lost."*

But for the Christian there is even more that can be added, as I wrote in an earlier post:

> *The Triune God of the Bible is a God of variety and this is reflected in humanity which is created in his image. Far from being monolithic, human beings are varied in their colour, culture, food habits, music, art languageâ€¦ and so the list goes on. This variety brings and incredible richness and depth to human life and is a profound blessing from God. ...*
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> *...At the end of time, saints from all of the peoples of the world, great and small, will be gathered before the Lamb. There, as a mighty choir they will sing a song of praise and the many languages and music styles will bring this song to heights of perfection that no one group could ever have managed. But, just as a great musician will add extra little notes or changes as he plays, lifting the music from the everyday to the sublime; so the voices and music of the minority groups â€“ those who were looked down upon and marginalized on the earth, but who have been counted worthy to reign with the Lamb â€“ will take the song of praise far beyond the capacity of those who were counted strong and powerful on the earth.*

I've posted a few other articles on Endagered Languages which may be of interest to you:

- A Map of Endangered Languages
- Are African Languages Worth Saving?
- The Death of a Language
- A Talk on Language Diversity (30 mins, MP3)