

## Introduction

With the recent trend toward language activism, *language development* is a term that is entering the vocabulary of the language documentation and conservation movement. For instance, "We should not only be documenting these languages, but also working ... to promote language development in the necessary domains" (Krauss 1992:9). However, the term has yet to be fully embraced by the movement; there appear to be misgivings about the term and what it might mean. And it has yet to be legitimized by appearing in a dictionary of linguistics. This poster argues for the suitability of the term and proposes a three-sense definition.

## Known misgivings

Some known objections to using the term in relation to documentation and conservation activities are:

- The term is already used within linguistics with a meaning related to language acquisition.
- It is paternalistic to imply that an oral language is not fully developed in its own right.
- It is imperialistic to think that we as outsiders can develop languages.

The next three sections address these in turn.

## 1. At the individual level

It is clear that the predominant use of the term *language development* in the linguistic literature has to do with the process starting early in life by which a person acquires language. This should thus be the first sense of meaning in a definition of the term.

Because of this established usage, some linguists object to the way the term is used by language activists. However, language development has a social side as well as an individual side. Just as biologists look at development from the standpoints of ontogeny (development from embryo to adult) and phylogeny (development of a species over time), so too can linguists. Scholars who study language acquisition focus on the development of language in individuals, while those who study language policy and planning focus on the development of language in society.

## 2. At the societal level

Some object that speaking in terms of *development* denigrates minority languages. In the early days of sociolinguistics, Einar Haugen (1966) offered a useful definition: "What is meant by an 'undeveloped' language? Only that it has not been employed in all the functions that a language can perform in a society." Thus, the notion of "developed" is not a binary one, but one that forms a cline since there are so many ways a language can function in society. Language development happens when a society elaborates its lexicon to talk about new domains of knowledge (like HIV/AIDS or the Internet), or when an oral society adds the ability to use its language in writing to communicate across distances in space or time, or when a society implements using its language as a medium of instruction in formal education, or when a nation state begins to use a particular language for conducting all of its official business.

In *Reversing Language Shift*, Joshua Fishman (1991) introduced the Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) which places languages on an 8-level cline from safest to most endangered. Lewis and Simons (2010) have harmonized the scale with Ethnologue and UNESCO endangerment categories to create the Expanded GIDS (or EGIDS); see figure 1. The levels in the cline are characterized by the functions of a language in society. As language shift happens, languages lose functions and move down the scale. The inverse process is language development in which languages take on successively more functions and rise up the scale.

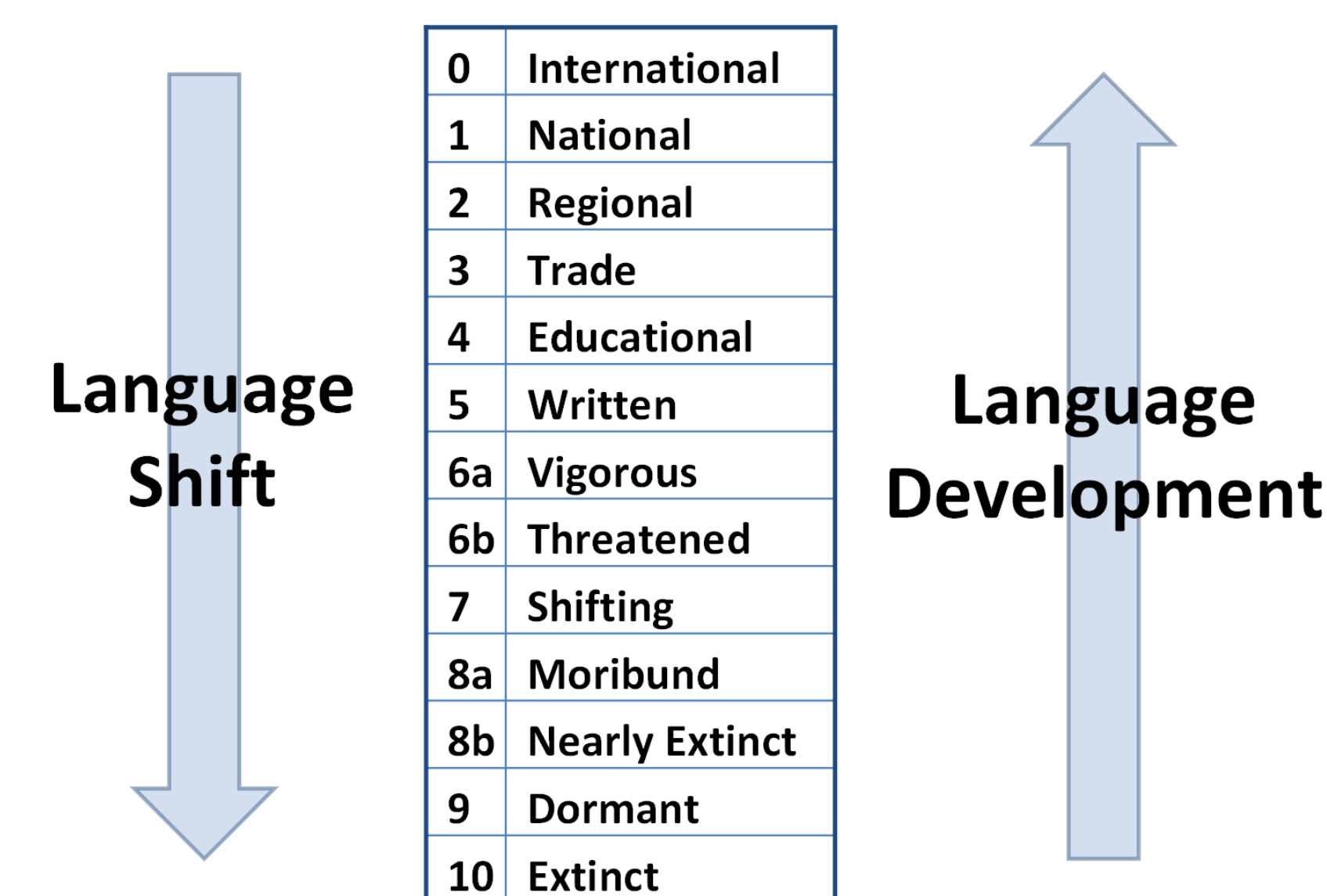


Figure 1. The Expanded GIDS (Lewis and Simons 2010)

## 3. As an activity

The term *language development* refers not only to something that happens to language in society, but also to the planned activities that people undertake in an effort to make it happen. Language planning is a well-established subdiscipline of sociolinguistics, and it has been linked with language development ever since the very first definition of language planning that appeared in the literature: "Language planning is the effort to guide the development of a language in the direction desired by the planners" (Haugen 1959).

Haugen (1966) went on to develop a model of how this works. He identified four aspects of language development that are crucial in the process of adding functions as a language climbs the development scale. These are: "(1) selection of norm, (2) codification of form, (3) elaboration of function, and (4) acceptance by the community." These components form a two-by-two matrix in which one dimension contrasts the form of language (1 and 2) versus the functions of language (3 and 4), while the other dimension contrasts language as a system of signs for encoding and decoding messages (2 and 3) versus language as a system of shared practice in a society (1 and 4).

	Form	Function
Society	1. Selection	4. Acceptance
Language	2. Codification	3. Elaboration

Figure 2. Aspects of language development (Haugen 1966)

The fundamental insight is that simply devising codifications and elaborations in the system of signs is not language development. For an outsider to take this stance would indeed be imperialistic. Language development is inherently a community activity; it only happens when the new forms and functions have been adopted into actual use by the language community. At this point we see that the first two senses of language development—the individual and the societal—blend together, since the latter cannot happen without the former. Societal development happens only when individual development happens community wide. That is, the language has

not added a function in society until a critical mass of its individual speakers have acquired it.

## Proposed definition

These considerations result in a definition like this:

**language development** *n.* 1. the process starting early in life by which a person acquires language. 2. the process by which a language takes on new functions within a society. 3. activities undertaken within a language community specifically for the purpose of developing new functions for its language or for restoring lost functions.

## Conclusion

Language development is a term that the language documentation and conservation movement can and should embrace. Indeed, the plight of endangered languages calls us to get involved in the process of helping language communities to restore the functions of their language in their society and to strengthen its use by adding new ones. In so doing we will situate our discipline in the mainstream of the global agenda for human development which affirms a people's "right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit ... their ... languages" (UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 13).

## References

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