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A Profile of Danger and Development of the Languages of Europe

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Abstract

In this paper we offer an update to the statistics on the status of language vitality in Europe. The most recent edition of the Ethnologue (Lewis, Simons, & Fennig 2013) provides an estimate of relative safety versus endangerment for every language on earth using the Extended GIDS (Lewis & Simons 2010). The profile of danger and development for Europe is unique when compared to the rest of the world with a greater proportion of the languages of Europe being developed (or developing) and a much smaller proportion being endangered. We also analyze the European profile in light of the ratification of the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages (ECRML) in each country. In general, where the ECRML has been ratified there are fewer endangered languages. However, most of the languages that are recognized under the ECRML are kin-state languages with relatively fewer roofless languages (Haarman 2005) achieving that recognition. Already developed languages are more often recognized than the weaker languages which are in greater need of the protection offered by the ECRML.

Introduction

The most recent edition of the Ethnologue (Lewis, Simons & Fennig 2013) implemented a means of categorizing the state of endangerment or development of every language of the world. The Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS) (Lewis & Simons 2010) is based on Fishman's Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) (Fishman 1991) but adds stages that go beyond those included in the GIDS thus allowing any language to be evaluated, not just those considered endangered. Using the Ethnologue database and its preliminary EGIDS evaluations as our source, we are now able to develop profiles of both endangerment and development for the languages of the world (Simons & Lewis 2013). In this chapter, we focus on Europe aligning our presentation with the multidisciplinary approach taken in the ELDIA project.

In this chapter we will first briefly describe the EGIDS as an evaluative framework. We then show how the EGIDS can be used to generate profiles of endangerment and development using the five major world regions identified by Ethnologue as examples. The profile of Europe is examined more closely. Following that, the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages (ECRML) which we use as a benchmark of language policy in Europe, is described briefly. And then, for the countries which are part of the Council of Europe, we examine the overall profile of language vitality in relationship to the status of languages under the ECRML. We conclude with some general observations about the patterns of language endangerment and development in Europe and the role of legislative instruments such as the ECRML in safeguarding endangered languages and promoting those languages which are already developed.

EGIDS

The Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS) is an expansion of Fishman's now classic GIDS. The basic premise of the GIDS (Fishman 1991) is that language shift, ending in language death, occurs as a language loses functions in society. As a language loses functions, it becomes less useful and also typically loses users. This usually occurs one generation to another and so is referred to as the loss of intergenerational language transmission. Fishman's GIDS focuses primarily on that loss of transmission and describes a series of levels, or stages, that a language passes through as it declines from vigorous oral use (GIDS Stage 6) to use by only a few elderly speakers (GIDS 8). Fishman proposed that the process of reversing language shift requires concerted activities that would restore, first and foremost, intergenerational transmission, but that full safety for a language would be achieved if it moved above GIDS Stage 6 acquiring a greater number of functions as a language of literacy, education, or with official recognition for purposes of work and governance. This is illustrated in figure 1.

[INSERT FIGURE 1 “The Basic Premise of the GIDS” ABOUT HERE]

The GIDS has become the most widely used evaluative framework of language endangerment and vitality though others have been proposed (Brenzinger, Yamamoto, Aikawa et al. 2003; Edwards 1990; Krauss 2001/2007; Landweer 1991) and used for a variety of purposes. A detailed examination of some of these and the rationale for expanding the GIDS is covered at length in Lewis & Simons (2010) but the major factors that motivated this development are:

- (1) The GIDS stages do not cover all possible vitality statuses and so can't be used comprehensively to describe all of the languages of the world.
- (2) The GIDS does not provide enough granularity in its descriptions of the stages of language shift. Several of the GIDS stages needed to be split.
- (3) While Fishman's focus on intergenerational transmission was well-founded and accurate for those languages experiencing language shift, achieving more secure stages on the scale (development) involves several other factors that build on intact intergenerational transmission.

The Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS) attempts to address these shortcomings by adding three levels to the scale, one at the top (EGIDS 0 – International) and two at the bottom (EGIDS 9 – Dormant, EGIDS 10 – Extinct). The latter two additions, in particular, recognize that many efforts to reverse language shift are taking place in languages that have no fluent speakers and are already beyond the lowest stage of the GIDS—those with only “rememberers” (EGIDS 9) and those with only documentary sources (EGIDS 10).

In addition, the needed granularity was introduced by splitting GIDS 6 into two levels—EGIDS 6a and 6b—taking into account the observation (King 2001) that the presence or absence of stable multilingualism (diglossia) in communities where intergenerational transmission is still ongoing is a significant factor in predicting the trajectory of the language on the scale. EGIDS 6a represents the level where stable diglossia is present and intergenerational transmission is intact. EGIDS 6b is the stage where the stability of diglossia is eroding and intergenerational transmission of the language is weakening.

Finally, the EGIDS more clearly defines the significant factors beyond intergenerational transmission that indicate stages of development above EGIDS 6a. These are the introduction of literacy (EGIDS 5), the institutionalization of the language in formal education (EGIDS 4), the vehicularity of the language (EGIDS 3) and the official recognition and use of the language for work and governance at both provincial (EGIDS 2) and national (EGIDS 1) levels. The use of a language for official purposes supra-nationally is in focus at EGIDS 0.

The EGIDS is deliberately modeled on the GIDS because of the widespread use and understanding of the GIDS categories and descriptions. While the GIDS is largely a measure of

disruption as its name clearly states, the EGIDS more explicitly presents EGIDS 6a as the fulcrum between endangerment and development. Languages undergoing endangerment have greater disruption and have higher numbers on the scale, while those with lower numbers on the scale demonstrate greater levels of development. The 13 levels of the EGIDS are listed and briefly defined in figure 2.

[INSERT FIGURE 2 “Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale” ABOUT HERE]

The EGIDS is not intended to provide a thorough description of all the factors that affect either the endangerment or development of any given language. It is a fairly broad and shallow shorthand approach that enables us to more easily quantify our understanding of the state of the languages of the world. More in-depth and detailed analyses in each case (such as those carried out by the ELDIA project) are always warranted. We view the EGIDS as a means of providing a general overview, focusing attention on those contexts where that deeper investigation of issues of endangerment and development ought to be a priority.

Profiles of Endangerment and Development

In an earlier study (Simons & Lewis 2013) we looked at the state of the world’s languages 20 years after Krauss’s “call to arms” (Krauss 1992) regarding the endangerment of the world’s languages. We proposed that the distinctive patterns of language endangerment that could be identified using the EGIDS seem to indicate the existence of ethnolinguistic eco-zones, each with characteristic configurations of language shift, maintenance, and development. While the Americas and Australia seem to be zones that have demonstrated the greatest levels of endangerment and language death, other regions seem to be less affected by the threat.

Figure 3 presents overall language status profiles for the five major world areas as defined within Ethnologue: America, Europe, Africa, Asia, and Pacific. In the profile graphs, we count each language only once using the EGIDS level reported for it in the country identified by Ethnologue as its primary country. This is usually the country of origin or the country with the largest L1 speaker population. The bars in each graph are color coded to indicate a more general set of categories: violet indicates languages that have institutional recognition (EGIDS 1–4), blue indicates languages that are developing (EGIDS 5), green indicates languages that have vigorous oral use (EGIDS 6a), yellow indicates languages that are in trouble (EGIDS 6b–7), red indicates languages that are dying (EGIDS 8a–9) and black indicates languages that are extinct (EGIDS 10). The graphs in figure 3 show that the distribution in the Americas is skewed toward endangerment, while in Europe it is skewed toward development. In the other three areas there is a bell shaped distribution, with Africa standing out as the area having the lowest incidence of endangerment.

[INSERT FIGURE 3 “Vitality Profiles by World Areas” ABOUT HERE]

Table 1 gives the numerical breakdown of languages by EGIDS level for Europe versus the rest of the world. The practice in *Ethnologue* (Lewis, Simons & Fennig 2013) is to define Europe in accordance with the scheme of geographical regions defined by the United Nations Statistical Division (2013). This definition is reflected in figure 3. For the purposes of this study, however, we adopt a slightly different definition of Europe. In table 1 and in everything that follows, Europe is defined as comprising the countries which are members of the Council of Europe. The difference involves 8 countries: Belarus which is part of the UN's Eastern Europe region is not a member of the Council of Europe, nor are the Isle of Man and Vatican City for which *Ethnologue* has country entries. On the other hand, 5 member countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Cyprus, Georgia, and Turkey) are part of the UN's Western Asia region. We adopt this definition of Europe in order to align with the geographical coverage of the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages (see below).

[INSERT TABLE 1 “Language status in Europe versus the rest of the world” ABOUT HERE]

Figure 4 presents the information in table 1 as a pair of bar graphs showing the relative distribution of EGIDS levels among the 320 languages of Europe versus the 7,160 languages in the rest of the world. Notable in this comparison is that the proportion of languages in Europe that are developed to the institutional level (EGIDS 0–4) is more than 3 times higher than in the rest of the world, whereas the proportion of languages that are vigorous and not developed (EGIDS 6a) is less than half of what it is in the rest of the world. The proportions in the other EGIDS levels are comparable. If we focus on EGIDS 0 to 2 the difference is even more striking. That is, 18% (57 of 320) of the languages of Europe have official status at the international, national, or provincial level, whereas the proportion for the rest of the world is only one-tenth as great at 1.6% (113 of 7,160).

[INSERT FIGURE 4 “Vitality profiles of Europe and the rest of the world” ABOUT HERE]

The European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages (ECRML)

With these profiles of language status now available, we can begin to investigate the relationship between the policy environment and the status of endangerment and development of the languages in Europe. While each country within Europe has its own history and the contexts of policy formation and political and socioeconomic development differ, the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages (ECRML) represents a shared policy instrument that can be used as a proxy for evaluating the policy environment and the prevailing attitudinal milieu within which less-commonly-known languages especially are being used.

The ECRML is a treaty created in 1992 under the auspices of the Council of Europe for the purpose of providing protections for the historical regional and minority languages within the countries encompassed by the Council. The Charter's focus is on those languages traditionally used by nationals of the various countries. It also specifies that the languages in view are those which differ significantly from the majority language(s) in use within the country. This effectively excludes languages of recent immigrants and allows the government of each country to exclude varieties that it would prefer to classify as dialects of the national or official language or of some other majority language.

The Charter provides for two levels of protection. The lower level is obligatory for all signatories. Optionally, signatories may declare their intention to provide the higher level of protection under the Charter for specific languages. The activities available to each government under the Charter are extensive and varied. Apart from the specific actions that any government might take in implementing the ECRML, we propose, for the purposes of this analysis, that signing and ratifying the Charter is itself an indicator of a generally positive attitudinal posture and a disposition of the signatories to look favorably on the preservation of the endangered languages within their borders. As with many political instruments, however, there may be a significant gap between the posture and the actual practice.

We make no claim that there is any cause-effect linkage specifically between the status of the ECRML and the endangerment or development status of any particular language. There are so many variables that could possibly affect the endangerment or development of a language that singling out one factor, such as the ECRML, in isolation isn't likely to be very helpful. Nevertheless, the country by country profiles can be examined to see if there is a correspondence between the status of the ECRML and the status of the languages within those countries.

Methodology

In order to investigate the relationship between the ECRML and the vitality of languages we extracted information from the Ethnologue 17th edition database to build a dataset. The dataset contains one row for every language that has an entry in Ethnologue for one of the countries that is a member state of the Council of Europe. In addition to columns for the identification of the country and the language, the dataset includes the population of the language community within that country and the EGIDS estimate for the status of the language within that country. Note that in this dataset, a given language may occur more than once and that its EGIDS level in different countries may be different, reflecting the level of development or endangerment which it has in that country. An additional column indicates whether the given country is the primary country for the language; for each language, one and only one country is designated as primary.

The *ELDIA Comparative Report* (Laakso, Sarhimaa, Spilpoulou Åkermark et al. 2013:21-22) identifies the distinction between “kin-state” and “roofless” languages as being significant when looking into the status of regional and minority languages of Europe. Languages that are used as official languages in another country are referred to as kin-state languages. By contrast, roofless languages (from German *dachlos* e.g. Haarman 2005) are not used as an official language anywhere. We were able to use the data available in Ethnologue to add a column for this to the dataset. The column has three possible values: “Official” if the language is EGIDS 1 in that country, “Kin-state” if it is EGIDS 1 in another country, and “Roofless” otherwise.

To the information extracted from the Ethnologue, two additional fields of information were added to reflect status within the ECRML. The first such column is simply a Boolean value to report whether or not the country in focus for the record has ratified the ECRML. This was taken from the official list of ratifications published online (Council of Europe 2013); at the time of the study, 25 of the 47 member states had ratified the charter. The second additional column is filled in only in records for countries that have ratified the charter. It specifies the recognition status under the ECRML as being either recognized or not recognized. This was determined by consulting the “List of declarations” that is published on the website for the ECRML to see what languages are specifically named as being recognized by each ratifying country.

Findings

We first look at the relationship between ratification of the ECRML and language vitality by comparing the EGIDS profiles for the countries that have ratified the ECRML versus those that have not. Of the 320 languages shown in table 1 as originating in Europe, 126 originate in countries which have ratified the ECRML while the other 194 are from countries that have not ratified the ECRML. Table 2 shows how these languages are distributed among the EGIDS categories.

[INSERT TABLE 2 “Language status in countries that have ratified the ECRML versus those that have not” ABOUT HERE]

Figure 5 shows the percentage data in table 2 as comparative bar graphs. On inspecting the graphs, one sees that the countries that have ratified the ECRML have a greater proportion of languages on the development side of the scale (that is, in purple and blue) whereas the countries that have not ratified the ECRML have a greater proportion on the endangerment side (that is, in yellow and red).

[INSERT FIGURE 5 “Vitality profiles of countries that have ratified ECRML versus those that have not” ABOUT HERE]

The trend toward greater development where ECRML has been ratified and greater endangerment where it has not is summarized in table 3. There we see that the proportion on the development side is nearly one-and-a-half times greater in the countries that have ratified, whereas the proportion on the endangerment side is more than twice as high where it has not. A chi-squared test of significance shows the probability that such a distribution is due to chance to be well below .001.

[INSERT TABLE 3 “More language endangerment where ECRML is not ratified” ABOUT HERE]

It bears repeating here that we are not making any claims as to causation. We simply note that the pattern could be explained in at least two ways:

- (1) The policy environment in countries where the ECRML has been ratified reflects the heightened interest and concern of the speaker populations themselves in strengthening the vitality of their languages. This language activism motivates the policy.
- (2) The adoption of favorable policies (such as ratification of the ECRML) has created space for minority languages to flourish. This policy climate has resulted in increased activity in language maintenance and development.

The first explanation views the heightened levels of language maintenance and development and the ratification of the ECRML as being effects of the same general trend. The second, while implying some degree of causality, includes the ECRML as only one possible contributor to the more positive situation of the minority languages.

We now turn our attention to the countries in which the ECRML has been ratified in order to investigate the characteristics of recognized versus non-recognized languages. Table 4 reports the results for the recognition of kin-state languages versus roofless languages. In the 25 countries that have ratified the ECRML, the dataset contains 270 records for languages that are not a majority language of the country or treated as a dialect of a majority language. Among those instances, a kin-state language is recognized in 79% (75 of 95) of the cases, whereas roofless languages are recognized in only 43% (75 of 173) of cases. (A chi-squared test shows this difference to be significant at $p < .001$.)

[INSERT TABLE 4 “Recognition status of non-majority languages in the countries that have ratified the ECRML” ABOUT HERE]

One could hypothesize that the likelihood of recognition for a kin-state language is relative to its population within that country. Table 5 reports the data for testing this hypothesis. It turns out that a kin-state language has been recognized in every case in which the population within the country is greater than 250,000. Below this threshold, however, there appears to be no

correlation between population and likelihood of recognition. The rate of recognition for kin-state languages with fewer than 250,000 speakers is 78% (61 of 78) and this holds all the way down to languages with fewer than a thousand.

[INSERT TABLE 5 “ECRML recognition status of kin-state languages by population” ABOUT HERE]

For roofless languages, by contrast, the rate of recognition is much lower—43%, as reported above. Table 6 shows the relationship between recognition and population in the country for roofless languages. The same trend emerges as for kin-state languages; every language with a population in the country greater than 250,000 is recognized and below that threshold there appears to be no bias toward population. Even 5 out of 9 languages with fewer than 100 speakers are recognized.

[INSERT TABLE 6 “ECRML recognition status of roofless languages by population” ABOUT HERE]

Finally, table 7 shows that there are significant correlations between ECRML recognition and the level of development as measured by EGIDS. At the high end of the scale, 88% (30 of 34) of the roofless languages that have attained the relative safety of EGIDS 4 or higher also have recognition under ECRML. By contrast, only 27% (26 of 97) of vigorous language that have not attained educational status (EGIDS 5 and 6a) enjoy recognition under ECRML. For them there is hope of rising on the EGIDS scale, but this is not so likely for the other 73%. Another observation that can be made from table 7 is that endangered languages are more likely to be recognized than the vigorous ones.

[INSERT TABLE 7 “ECRML recognition status of roofless languages by vitality level” ABOUT HERE]

Summary and Conclusions

In summary, the overall ethnolinguistic vitality profile of Europe is unique with a preponderance of developed and developing languages that is not seen in any other area of the world. Though we cannot attribute full causality, the policy environment does seem to make a difference in language maintenance and development, though by itself that environment is not sufficient to ensure language maintenance.

Most notably what emerges from this study is that in spite of a policy focus on minority languages as embodied in the ECRML, already developed kin-state languages more often receive recognition under the ECRML than do the less developed roofless languages. Clearly endangered languages also receive attention under the ECRML. It is the vigorous but undeveloped oral languages (EGIDS 6a) that are more often either overlooked or simply taken for granted.

Further study based on a more detailed analysis of language policy legislation and practice, other than the ECRML, in each country within Europe would undoubtedly refine this analysis and, perhaps, give some clearer indication of the role that the policy environment plays in fostering language development and preserving endangered languages.

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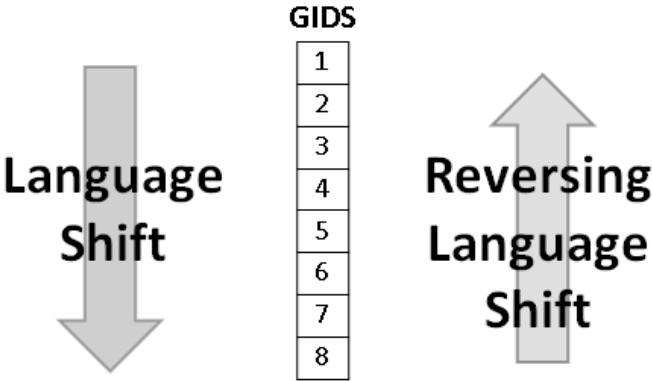


Figure 1. The basic premise of GIDS (Fishman 1991)

Level	Label	Description
0	International	The language is widely used between nations in trade, knowledge exchange, and international policy.
1	National	The language is used in education, work, mass media, and government at the nationwide level.
2	Provincial	The language is used in education, work, mass media, and government within official administrative subdivisions of a nation.
3	Wider Communication	The language is widely used in work and mass media without official status to transcend language differences across a region.
4	Educational	The language is in vigorous oral use and this is reinforced by sustainable transmission of literacy in the language in formal education.
5	Developing	The language is vigorous and is being used in written form in parts of the community though literacy is not yet sustainable.
6a	Vigorous	The language is used orally by all generations and the situation is sustainable.
6b	Threatened	The language is still used orally within all generations but there is a significant threat to sustainability because at least one of the conditions for sustainable oral use is lacking.
7	Shifting	The child-bearing generation can use the language among themselves but they do not normally transmit it to their children.
8a	Moribund	The only remaining active speakers of the language are members of the grandparent generation.
8b	Nearly Extinct	The only remaining speakers of the language are elderly and have little opportunity to use the language.
9	Dormant	There are no fully proficient speakers, but some symbolic use remains as a reminder of heritage identity for an ethnic community.
10	Extinct	No one retains a sense of ethnic identity associated with the language, even for symbolic purposes.

Figure 2. Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (Lewis & Simons 2010)

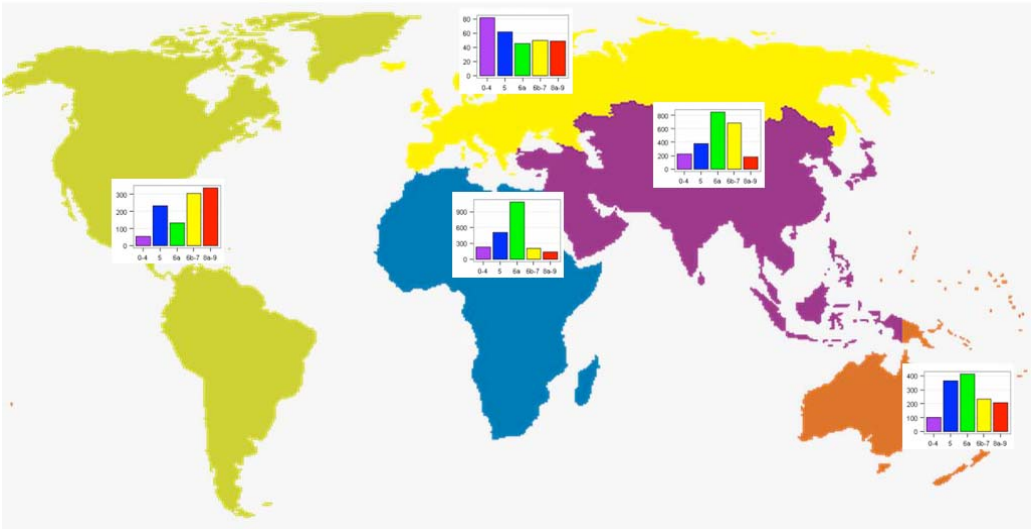


Figure 3. Vitality profiles by world areas

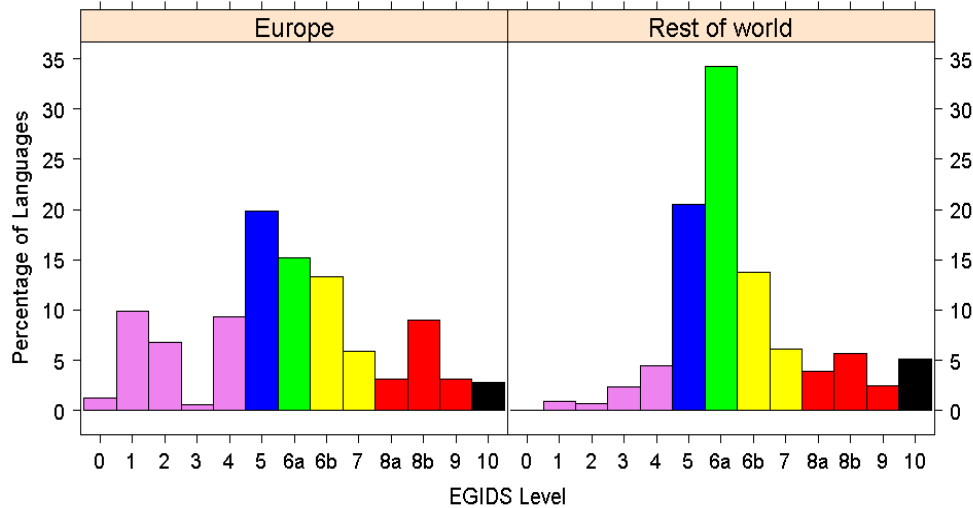


Figure 4. Vitality profiles of Europe and the rest of the world

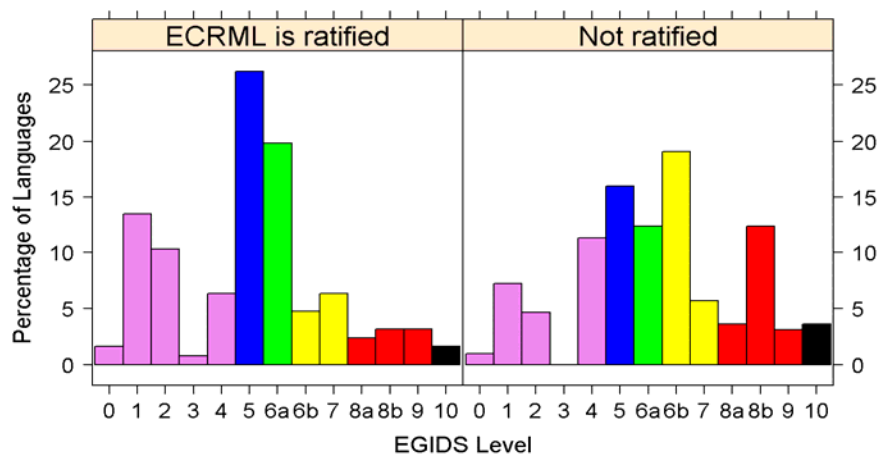


Figure 5. Vitality profiles of countries that have ratified ECRML versus those that have not

EGIDS Level	Europe	Rest of World
0 (International)	4 (1%)	2 (0%)
1 (National)	31 (10%)	63 (1%)
2 (Provincial)	22 (7%)	48 (1%)
3 (Wider Communication)	1 (0%)	166 (2%)
4 (Educational)	30 (9%)	315 (4%)
5 (Developing)	64 (20%)	1,470 (21%)
6a (Vigorous)	49 (15%)	2,453 (34%)
6b (Threatened)	43 (13%)	982 (14%)
7 (Shifting)	19 (6%)	437 (6%)
8a (Moribund)	10 (3%)	276 (4%)
8b (Nearly Extinct)	28 (9%)	404 (6%)
9 (Dormant)	10 (3%)	178 (2%)
10 (Extinct)	9 (3%)	366 (5%)
Totals	320 (100%)	7,160 (100%)

Table 1. Language status in Europe versus the rest of the world

EGIDS Level	ECRML is Ratified	Not Ratified
0 (International)	2 (2%)	2 (1%)
1 (National)	17 (13%)	14 (7%)
2 (Provincial)	13 (10%)	7 (4%)
3 (Wider Communication)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)
4 (Educational)	8 (6%)	21 (11%)
5 (Developing)	33 (26%)	30 (15%)
6a (Vigorous)	25 (20%)	24 (12%)
6b (Threatened)	6 (5%)	37 (19%)
7 (Shifting)	9 (7%)	12 (6%)
8a (Moribund)	3 (2%)	9 (5%)
8b (Nearly Extinct)	4 (3%)	24 (12%)
9 (Dormant)	4 (3%)	6 (3%)
10 (Extinct)	2 (2%)	7 (4%)
Totals	126 (100%)	194 (100%)

Table 2. Language status in countries that have ratified the ECRML versus those that have not

Language Status	ECRML Ratified	ECRML Not Ratified
Institutional or Developing (EGIDS 0–5)	73 (58%)	74 (39%)
Vigorous (EGIDS 6a)	25 (20%)	25 (12%)
In Trouble, Dying, Extinct (EGIDS 6b–10)	28 (22%)	95 (49%)
Totals	126 (100%)	194 (100%)

Table 3. More language endangerment where ECRML is not ratified

	Kin-state Languages	Roofless Languages	Totals
Recognized 75		75	150
Not Recognized	20	98	118
Totals	95	173	N = 268

Table 4. Recognition status of non-majority languages in the countries that have ratified the ECRML

	100-999	1,000-9,999	10,000-99,999	100,000-249,999	250,000 or more	Unknown	Totals
Recognized 2		22	26	11	11	3	75
Not Recognized	1 6		7	3	0	3	20
Totals	3	28	33	14	11	6	N = 95

Table 5. ECRML recognition status of kin-state languages by population

	0-99	100-999	1,000-9,999	10,000-99,999	100,000-249,999	250,000 or more	Unknown	Totals
Recognized 5		11	19	22	3	9	6	75
Not Recognized	4 6		16	21	5	0	46	98
Totals	9	17	35	43	8	9	52	N = 173

Table 6. ECRML recognition status of roofless languages by population

	Institutional (EGIDS 1–4)	Vigorous or Developing (EGIDS 5–6a)	In Trouble or Dying (EGIDS 6b–9)	Totals
Recognized 30		26	19	75
Not Recognized	4 71		23	98
Totals	34	97	42	N = 173

Table 7. ECRML recognition status of roofless languages by vitality level