

Language development versus language endangerment: Assessing the situation worldwide

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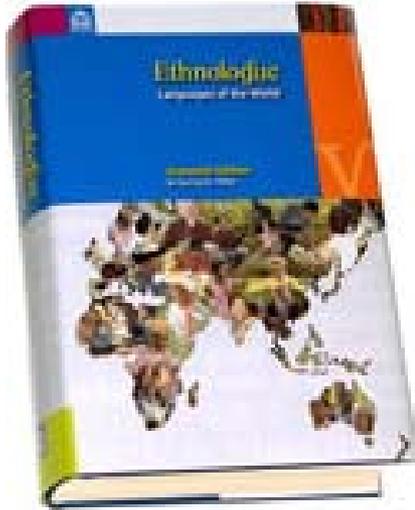
Development vs. Endangerment

- As a minority language community encounters dominant international and national languages, it can:
 - add the functions of language that will make its own language more powerful for coping with change, or
 - let the outside languages fill those functions
- These are the paths of
 - language development in which the local language is adding functions and becoming stronger, versus
 - language shift in which it is losing functions, which may lead to language endangerment and even death

Overview of presentation

- Introduce *Ethnologue* as the major reference work on the language situation in the world
- Define EGIDS as a scale for assessing the status of language development versus endangerment
- Describe our methodology for creating an EGIDS estimate in *Ethnologue* for every language on earth
- Present results from our global study, with special focus on the status of languages in western Africa

Ethnologue



- *Ethnologue: Languages of the World, 16th edition.* M. Paul Lewis, ed. 2009.
- Published by SIL International 
- Online: <http://www.ethnologue.com>
- Lists 6,909 living languages + 421 that are dormant or extinct since 1950
- 17th edition in preparation: 2013
- Sample entry from web edition ...

Buli: a language of Ghana

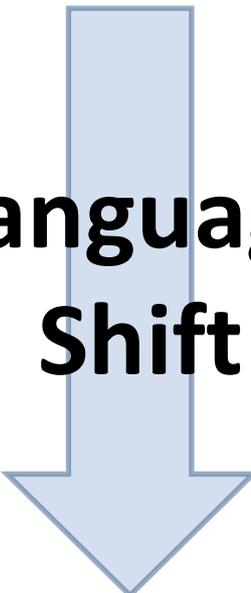
ISO 639-3	bwu
Population	150,000 (2003 GILLBT), increasing.
Region	Sandema District.
Alternate names	Bulisa, Guresha, Kanjaga
Dialects	None known. Most similar to Konni [kma]. Lexical similarity: 77% with Mampruli [maw].
Classification	Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Volta-Congo, North, Gur, Central, Northern, Oti-Volta, Buli-Koma
Language use	Vigorous. All domains. All ages.
Language development	Literacy rate in L1: Around 10%. Literacy rate in L2: 5%–15%. Dictionary. Grammar. NT: 1995.
Writing system	Latin script.
Comments	‘Kanjaga’ and ‘Guresha’ are names given by others. Traditional religion, Christian, Muslim.

A scale for language status

- We began with GIDS — the Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale from Joshua Fishman's (1991) seminal book on *Reversing Language Shift*
- He developed GIDS as a measuring rod for language shift:
 - Level 1 is highest: an official national language
 - Level 8 is lowest: a dying language
 - Going up the 6 levels between represent successively more functions for language in society
 - The scale measures disruption so higher numbers represent greater levels of disruption

The basic premise of GIDS

- Language shift (ending in extinction) happens as a language loses functions in society
- To reverse language shift, the community must engage in development to bring those functions back



**Language
Shift**

1

2

3

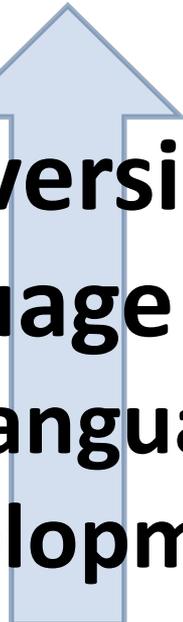
4

5

6

7

8



**Reversing
Language Shift
(= Language
Development)**

EGIDS: an Expanded GIDS

- In using GIDS in *Ethnologue*, we had some problems:
 - Needed to add extinct languages at bottom of scale, while keeping the *Ethnologue* distinction between dormant and extinct
 - Wanted to add international languages at the top
 - GIDS gives only two levels of endangerment, but we wanted to harmonize with the 4 levels from UNESCO's [*Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger*](#)
 - Wanted to add names for the levels
- This resulted in EGIDS as a 13 level scale

The 13 levels of EGIDS

- Lewis, M. Paul and Gary F. Simons. 2010. "Assessing endangerment: Expanding Fishman's GIDS," *Revue Roumaine de Linguistique* 55:103-120.
http://www.lingv.ro/resources/cm_images/RRL-02-2010-Lewis.pdf

0	International
1	National
2	Provincial
3	Wider communication
4	Educational
5	Developing
6a	Vigorous
6b	Threatened
7	Shifting
8a	Moribund
8b	Nearly Extinct
9	Dormant
10	Extinct

The basic logic of EGIDS

0, 1, 2, 3	Vehicular language	Language is widely used, not only within its native community but by other language communities as well
4, 5, 6a, 6b	Local home language	Language is used by people of all generations within its native community in the home domain
7, 8a, 8b, 9	Heritage language	Language retains an identificational function for its native community but is not used fluently by all generations
10	Extinct language	No one retains a sense of ethnic identity associated with the language

What is the level of official use?

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 major administrative subdivisions of a nation.

3. Wider communication

The language is used in work and mass media without official status to transcend language differences across a region.

What is the sustainability status?

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 many parents are no longer transmitting it to children.

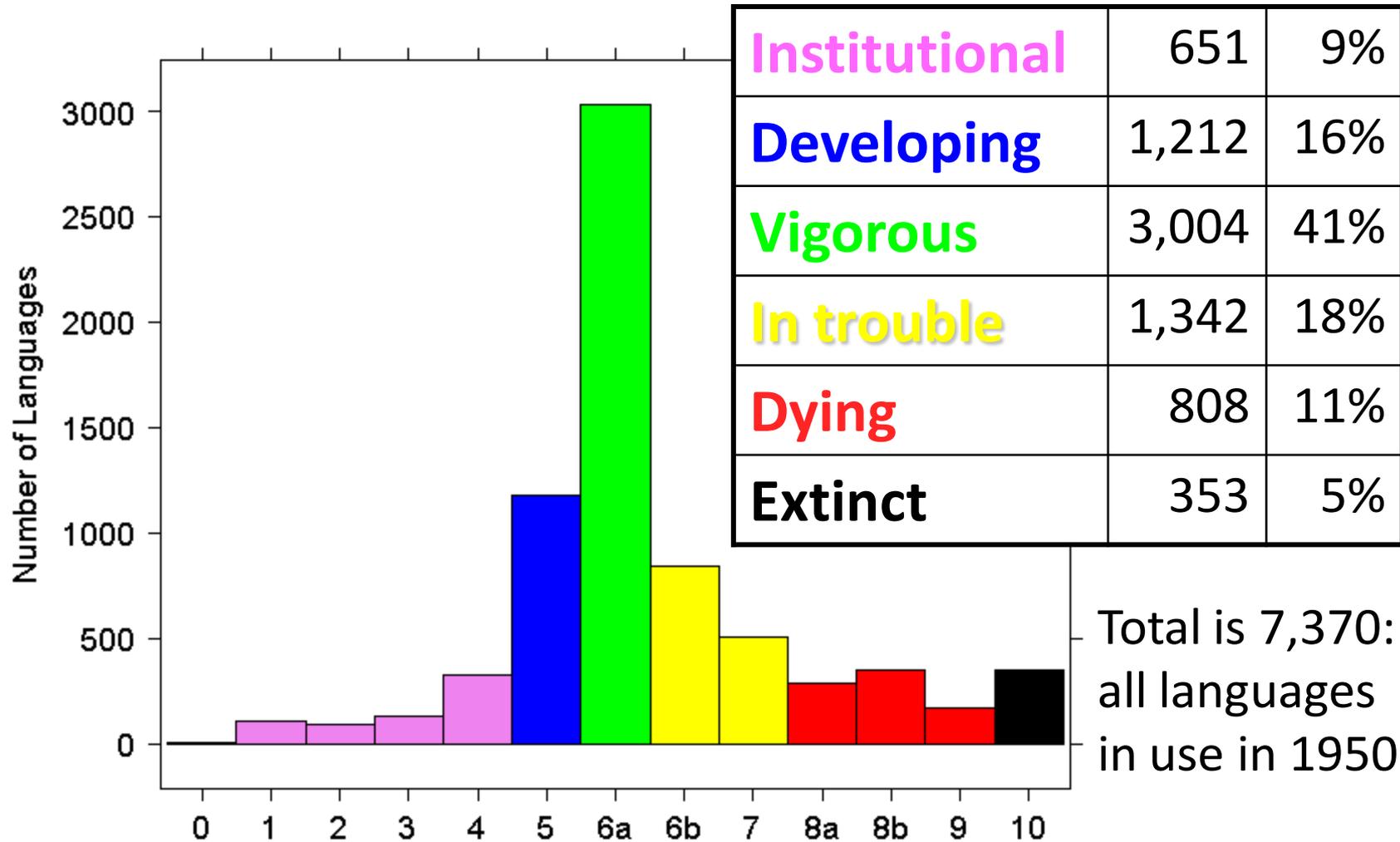
What is the youngest generation of proficient speakers?

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 are elderly and they have little opportunity to use the language.
9. Dormant	There are no fully proficient speakers, but symbolic use may remain as a marker of heritage identity for an ethnic community.

An EGIDS estimate for every language

- We followed these steps:
 1. Base initial estimate on data in the existing *Ethnologue* description of a language
 2. If *Ethnologue* gave no clues, consult the UNESCO *Atlas* to follow their assessment if endangered
 3. If still no specific clues, assume the unmarked case of Level 6a, a vigorous oral language
 4. Send the estimates to our worldwide network of field reviewers and follow their corrections
 5. To date, 84% of estimates have been reviewed

A global profile of language status



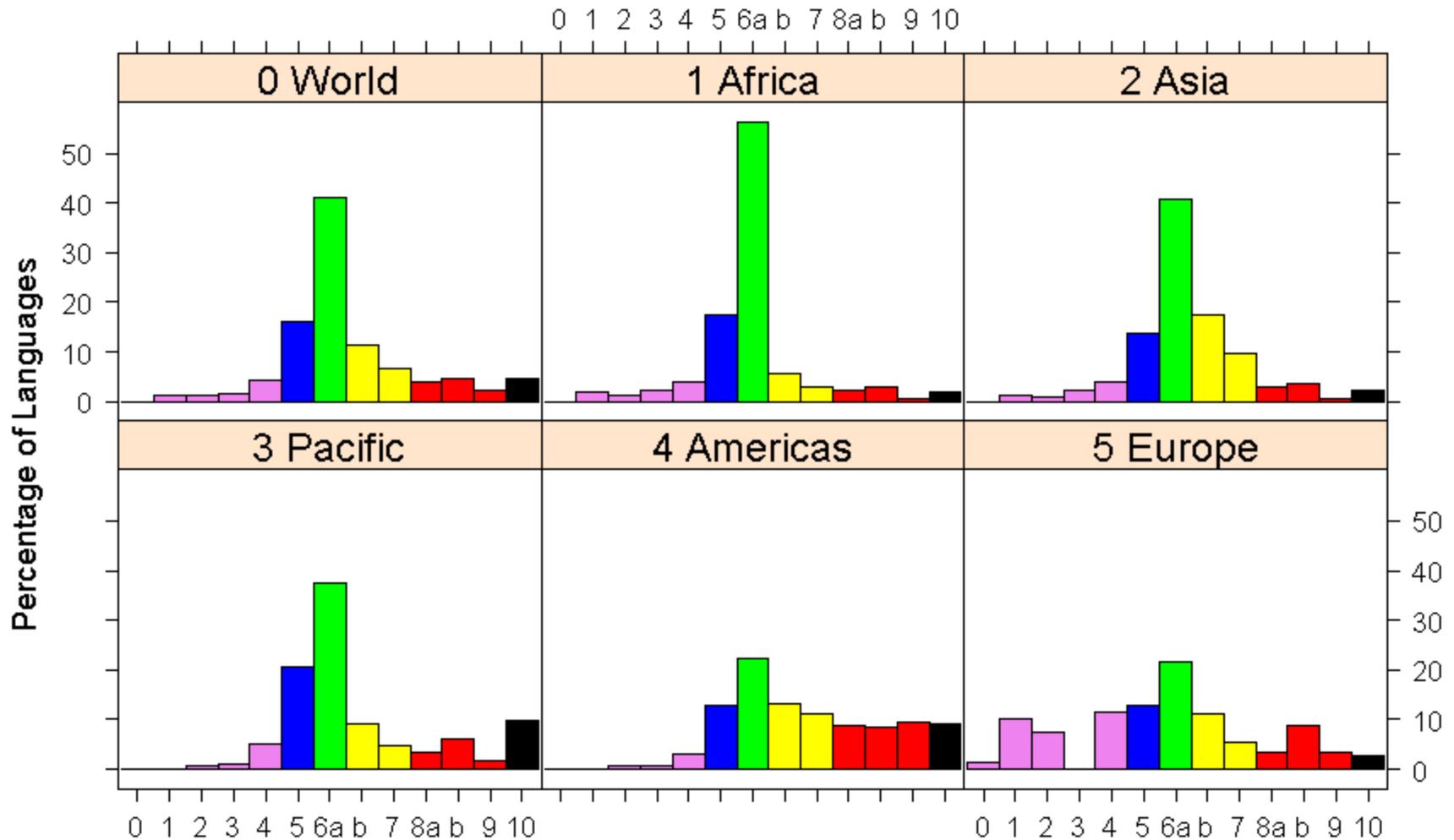
The color coding

- Violet (*“Institutional”*) — The language has been developed to the point that it is used and sustained by institutions beyond the home and community.
- Blue (*“Developing”*) — The language is vigorous and is being used in written form in parts of the community, though literacy is not yet sustained through a formal institution.
- Green (*“Vigorous”*) — The language is unwritten and in vigorous oral use among all generations.

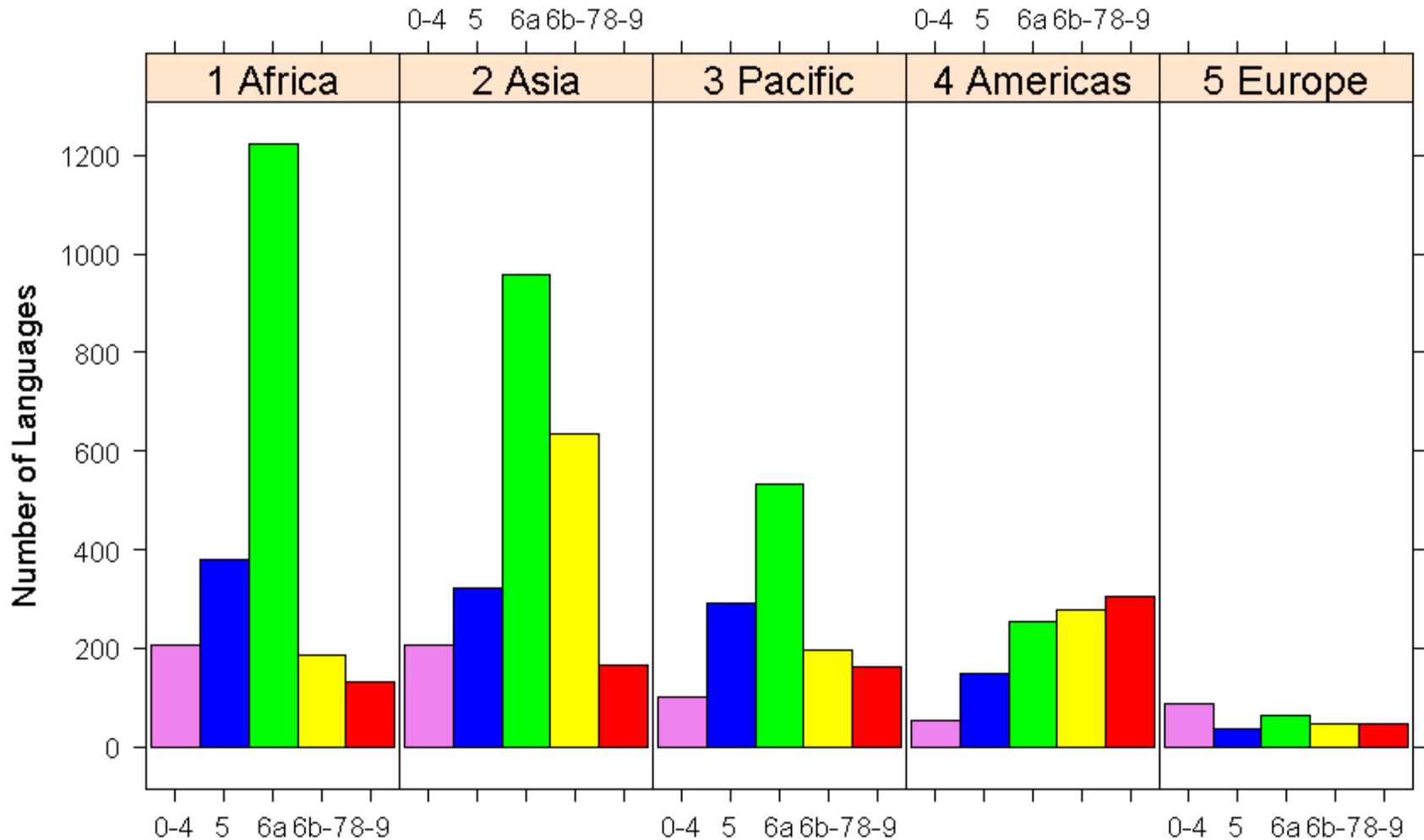
The color coding (2)

- Yellow (*"In trouble"*) — Intergenerational transmission is in the process of being broken, but the child-bearing generation still speaks the language so revitalization efforts might be able to restore transmission of the language in the home.
- Red (*"Dying"*) — It is too late to restore natural intergenerational transmission in the home.
- Black (*"Extinct"*) — The language has fallen completely silent.

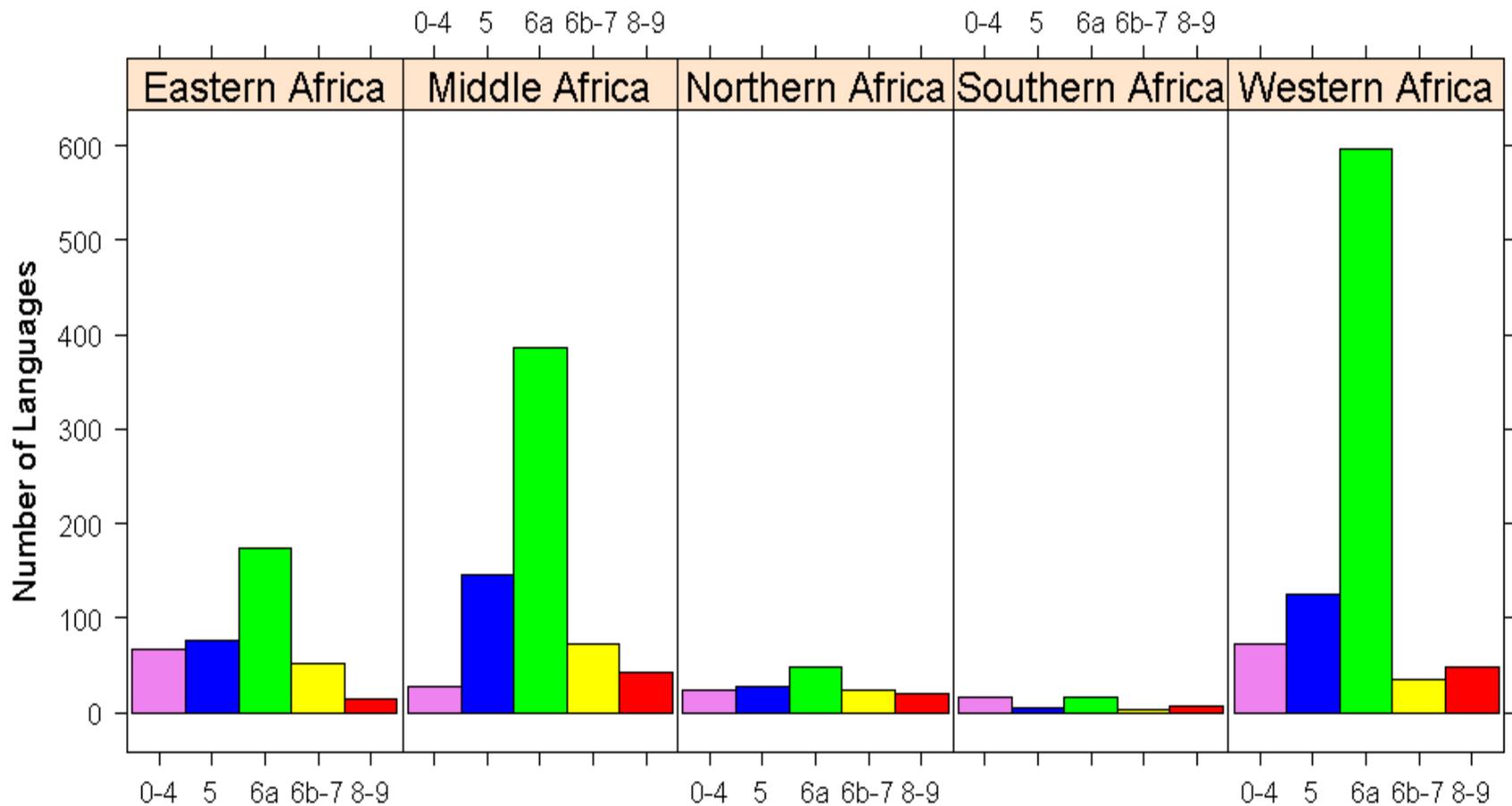
Language status by world areas



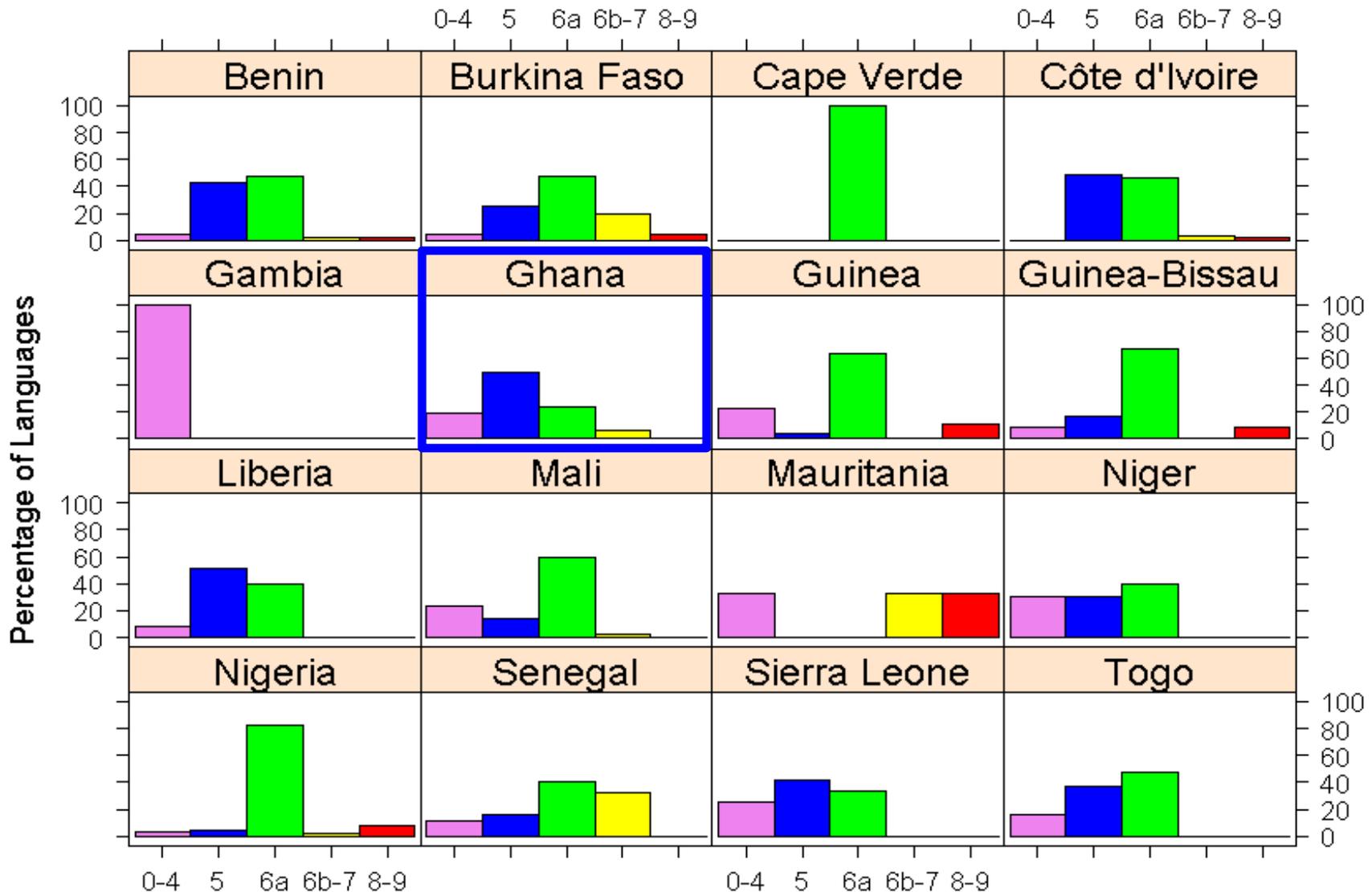
Status of living languages by world area



Status of living languages by regions of Africa



Language status in Western Africa



Conclusions

- The global survey of language status shows that:
 - Languages are healthiest in Africa: only 15% of living languages are in trouble or dying. By contrast, 56% are in trouble or dying in Americas; 33% in the rest of the world.
- Within Africa, western Africa has the most languages:
 - 878 languages, with only 7% in trouble or dying
 - 159 (or 18%) are Developing and 65 (or 7%) are being sustained in institutions like government, media, education
- In Ghana, language development has been exemplary:
 - Written languages now far outnumber unwritten languages
 - The next challenge: move from Developing to Educational