

Reviving Language Proficiency

A view on learning and teaching from endangered-
language communities

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Languages of the World

- How many languages are there in the world?
- What are the top 10 with the most native speakers?
- What percentage of the world population does this cover?

(No "right" answers because even our best estimates are problematic... but just to get an idea!)

Languages of the World

- How many languages are there in the world? **~6000-7000**
- What are the top 10 with the most native speakers?

Mandarin	English	Hindi-Urdu	Bengali	Japanese
Spanish	Arabic	Portuguese	Russian	Punjabi

- What percentage of the world population does this cover?
Very roughly about 45%

What about the other... 6000-7000 languages?

Languages of the World

- Most languages are spoken by **fewer than 10,000** people
- About half of these - that's 2000 languages - are actually spoken by **fewer than 1000** people (Ethnologue.com)
- **At least 43%** of the world's total languages are **endangered**: they could stop being spoken in the near future (UNESCO)

How can small communities revitalise their languages?

What teaching methods can be used?

How might these methods be applied to "bigger" languages?

The Huaves of southern Mexico



- Language isolate
- 4 dialects
- Ethnic population ~16,000



<http://www.eumed.net/cursecon/libreria/mebb/1b.jpg>

San Francisco del Mar dialect

- Probably < 30 fluent speakers remaining, all elderly
- Spanish is the language of daily life in the community

Language Teaching: Aims and Purposes

- In revitalisation, people aim to start speaking their traditional language again
 - Everyday **oral communication** - the more **frequent**, the better
 - Putting skills **into use** is crucial - build **confidence, motivation**
 - Often, everything else (incl. grammar) is a means to this end
- Language is also a way of connecting with traditional **culture**

How do these compare to desired outcomes in UK language classrooms - yours, the students', the school's?

Challenges

- Lack of materials
- Teachers not fluent
- No standard way of writing

Teaching Approach

- Formulaic "snippets"
- Be a speaker! (Redefining "speaker" as anyone who uses the language at all)
- 100% Conversation

Teaching Approach

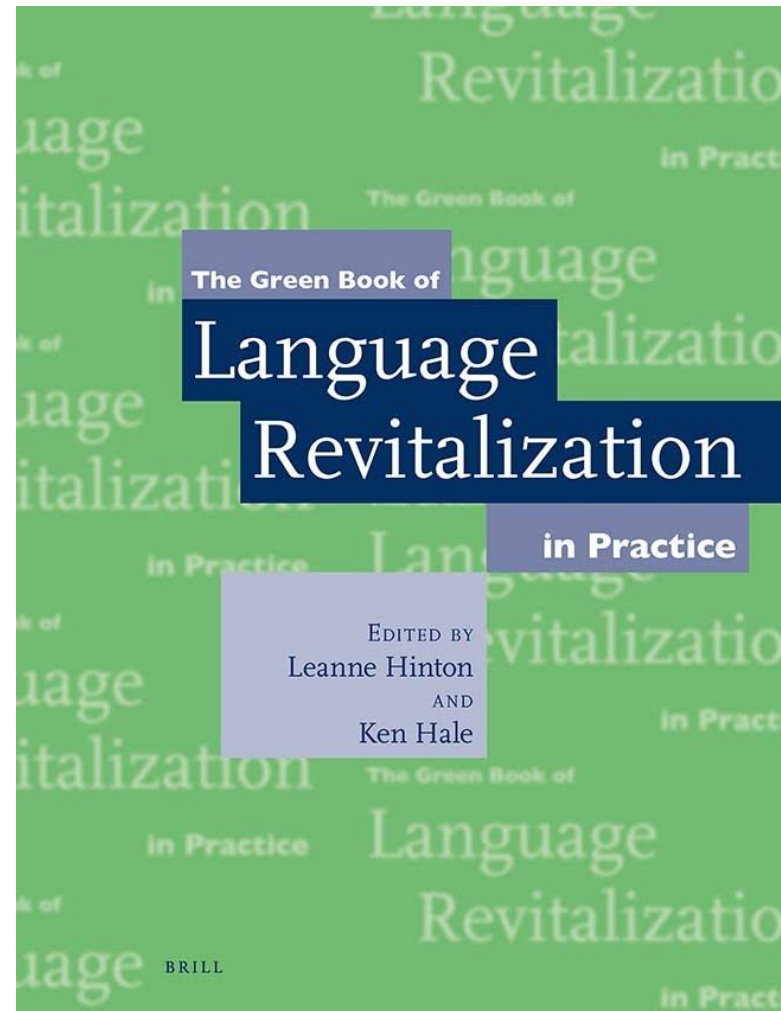
- Formulaic snippets for **immediate regular use** once learned
- What are the most common, useful phrases for daily life?
 - Greetings
 - Commands/requests
 - ?
- Can be learned from fluent speakers or any authentic materials
- Very short, but with 2-3 response options for spontaneous expression

Teaching Approach

Based on methods developed most intensively for Native North American languages

The Green Book of Language Revitalization in Practice
eds. Leanne Hinton & Ken Hale

London: Academic Press, 2001



Master-Apprentice Model

- Pairs a fluent speaker with a learner
- Lessons during and about daily activities: cooking, gardening, washing, traditional crafts... All in the target language!
- Bridging the initial communication gap: Commands
- Key learner starter phrases: What's this? What am I doing?
- 20 x 20 rule: to master a new word, hear or use it 20 times in each of 20 situations

Lesson Structure

Target language + gestures only - Teaching in full sentences

1. Comprehensible input
2. Imitation & Guided practice
3. Independent practice