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The consequences of "New World" colonization on linguistic diversity

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Abstract

The language diversity of our planet is quickly shrinking. This process is often referred to as "natural" but since the life of languages, strictly speaking, depends not on nature but on humans' activity (or lack of it), it is important to understand what we can do in order to manage language diversity, at least to a certain degree. This article analyzes the state of affairs in the so-called "New World" where the impacts of colonizers were quite tangible and had long-lasting effects on many spheres of life, including languages. The results show that for the moment there is no region with an unconditionally effective language policy in terms of (re)vitalization of indigenous languages but since the situation is in constant flux it is worth further monitoring.

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Introduction

There has been considerable discussion lately about globalization and the inevitable decline of the planet's linguistic diversity, as in (Blommaert 2010). Nevertheless, it is easy to see that the situation in many regions is not the same.

The specifics of the so-called "New World" lie in the fact that colonizers in many cases were more powerful and their languages were more "modernized". As time went on, almost everywhere in the "New World" European languages were approved as official, and even in Greenland, which formally is monolingual, Greenlandic is often supplemented by Danish and English. These facts have been expectedly detrimental for local languages; nevertheless, it is important to understand why the degrees of the impact are different.

Our research questions are: how do language preferences in the "New World" correlate with the usage of languages in governmental spheres, job markets, linguistic landscapes, and education? What factors contribute to the varying degrees of impact on indigenous languages in the "New World"? How does the official status of languages affect their vitality and usage in different regions of the "New World"?

Materials and methods

The materials comprise official documents and publications related to language policy, demographics, educational institutions, and statistics of language use. Sure, it would be very tedious and impractical to analyze every region of the "New World" in this context (there surely would be a lot of very similar tendencies), so it was needed to form some informative sample. I decided to limit myself to regions that meet the following criteria: a) more than one language has official status (no doubt, real usage is more important than statuses but, in many cases, wide usage of unofficial language is complicated); b) at least one of the official languages is "endemic" (to reduce external factors influencing its "popularity", compare the situation with English and French in Canada); c) the corresponding "endemic" languages are not part of dialect continua, as otherwise, the difficulties in identifying the used language may increase. It was also decided to leave sign languages out of the current study, as the spheres of their distribution are often somewhat more special.

After applying the above criteria, the sample came up with ten regions:

1) Hawaii (USA) with "endemic" Hawaiian (Austronesian family), alongside English;

2) Papua New Guinea with "endemic" Tok Pisin (a creole language based on English) and Hiri Motu (a creole language based on Austronesian Motu), alongside English;

3) Vanuatu with "endemic" Bislama (a creole language based on English), alongside English and French;

4) Fiji with "endemic" Fijian (Austronesian family), alongside English and Hindi;

5) Palau with "endemic" Palauan (Austronesian family), alongside English;

6) Northern Mariana Islands with "endemic" Carolinian (Austronesian family), alongside English and Chamorro (official also on Guam);

7) Northwest Territories (Canada) with "endemic" Cree (Algic family), alongside

English and French (also Gwich'in, Inuinnaqtun, Inuktitut, Inuvialuktun, North Slavey, South Slavey, Dogrib, Chipewyan, all of which are parts of dialect continua);

8) Choctaw Reservation (Oklahoma, USA) with "endemic" Choctaw (Muskogean family), alongside English;

9) Haiti with "endemic" Haitian (a creole language based on French), alongside French;

10) Ecuador with "endemic" Shuar (Chicham family), alongside Spanish and Kichwa (forms a part of a dialect continuum).

However, it is necessary to make some additional remarks. The real situation in South America is more complex (for example, there are several languages declared as official in Bolivia, Venezuela, and Colombia), but more or less reliable information on the usage of indigenous languages was found only about Ecuador. Similarly, there are other reservations in the United States but it is the Choctaw one that best meets the required criteria.

Oceania also has more regions of potential interest (all of them officially pair their national language with English, except Easter Island where the main languages are Rapa Nui and Spanish) but due to the number of their population, they will hardly provide serious exceptions to worldwide trends (otherwise much more mentions of them could be expected in the literature). At the same time, New Zealand was excluded from the sample because Māori has official status not only there but also on the Cook Islands (where it is called Cook Islands Māori); nevertheless, the case of New Zealand is quite instructive, so I decided to take it into consideration too.

By examining selected regions with varying language situations, the study uses comparative analysis to understand how different factors affect language vitality. The study assesses correlations between language vitality and usage in public spheres such as governmental spheres, job markets, linguistic landscapes, and education. This involves analyzing the extent to which indigenous languages are integrated into these areas and how this affects their usage and preservation.

These methods collectively allow the study to explore the complex dynamics of language preferences and usage in the "New World" and to draw conclusions about the factors influencing language vitality.

Results

New Zealand

New Zealand came under British control in the 19th century and gained self-government in 1947. Population ~ 5 million people (2023), area ~ 268,000 square kilometers, GDP per capita ~ 48,000 dollars (2023).

The Māori Language Act 1987 gave Māori the status of an official language (English is an official language de facto, but not de jure), which implies, in particular, mandatory use of Māori in the names of government agencies and the possibility of using it in public services, courts, the armed forces, and public hospitals. The Māori Language Act 2016 prescribes the use of Māori in the promotion of government services and in the provision of information to the public as far as is reasonably practicable but explicitly stipulates the impossibility of going to court on these issues

(and insisting on being addressed or answered in Māori during legal proceedings). Māori is used on the currency, in automatic teller machines, although its use, for example, in urban landscape remains limited (O'Toole 2020: 201–204).

English was mandated as the language of instruction by the Education Ordinance 1847 and the Native Schools Act 1867; although Māori was not totally banned, sometimes the policy was quite strict (often supported by parents hoping for a better future for their children) and schoolchildren that spoke Māori were punished, also physically (Hoskins et al 2020).

Only in the early 1980s, Māori language nests began to appear, and within a few years, their number had grown to several hundred. Māori-medium primary and secondary schools soon followed (Benton 2023: 580). Māori language nests reached their peak popularity at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s, after which interest in them began to wane somewhat: in 2014, they were attended by just under 9,000 children, which is 36% less than in 1993 (King 2018: 602). According to the Education Counts website, in 2024, of the 4,409 preschools in New Zealand, 434 (9.8%) were using the Māori immersion method.

As for school education, according to the same Education Counts website, in 2000, out of 729,689 schoolchildren, 16,524 (2.3%) received education with Māori as the predominant language of instruction; in 2012, out of 759,960 – 16,792 (2.2%); in 2024, out of 850,999 – 27,125 (3.2%).

As of 1981, there were virtually no children with whom Māori was spoken (King 2018: 594–595). According to the censuses, in 2001, out of a total New Zealand population of 3,737,277, Māori was spoken by 160,527 (4.3%); in 2013, the same figures were 4,242,048 and 148,395 (3.5%), respectively; and in 2023 – 4,993,923 and 213,849 (4.3%).

As it is possible to see, the overall situation ceased to be critical; nevertheless, the value of the language remains much more linked to considerations of identity (out of 213,849 speakers of Māori, 182,001, or 85.1%, are ethnical Māori, although the general share of Māori in New Zealand is only 17.8%), improving intercultural relationships and self-development than to economic rewards (Te Huia 2020; O'Toole 2020; Berardi-Wiltshire, Bortolotto 2022), therefore it will be probably difficult to expect a significant increase in the proportion of speakers without further changes in the language policy.

Hawaii

In the 19th century, the Hawaiian Islands came under the control of the United States of America. In 1959, Hawaii received the status of a full-fledged state of the USA. Population ~ 1,5 million people (2020; 0.4% of the US population), area ~ 28,000 square kilometers (0.3% of the US territory), GDP per capita ~ 75,000 dollars (2019; US average for 2024 ~ 85,000 dollars).

In 1900, English was adopted as the sole working language of government; since 1943, laws had to be published only in English (Nakata 2017: 19–20). The 1978 Constitution named English and Hawaiian as the official languages of Hawaii, with the caveat that "Hawaiian shall be required for public acts and transactions only as provided by law".

State and local governments use Hawaiian for certain words and names in official documents (Nakata 2017: 16), local banks accept checks written in Hawaiian and include Hawaiian in ATMs (Wilson 2014: 222), but the language is not used, for example, in governmental proceedings (Andrade 2020: 37). A result of the long struggle for the use of Hawaiian in courts is that although court proceedings are conducted in English (Kai-Hwa Wang 2018), a notice on the site of Hawaii State Judiciary affirms that people are allowed to communicate with the courts in both English and Hawaiian. The current linguistic landscape in Hawaii is dominated by English: aside from some street and place names, a limited number of business names, and familiar greetings, very few official signs contain the Hawaiian language (Townsend 2014: 11, 78). At the same time, knowledge of Hawaiian opens up some employment opportunities in tourism, entertainment, archives, and museums; Hawaiian is the working language at the Hilo campus of the University of Hawaii (Brenzinger, Heinrich 2013: 309–311).

In 1896, English became the only permitted language of instruction, speaking Hawaiian in schools was punished, and teachers even reprimanded parents who spoke Hawaiian to their children at home (Nakata 2017: 19).

Hawaiian language nests and immersion schools began to appear in the mid-1980s (Snyder-Frey 2013: 235; Nakata 2017: 15; Kaʻai 2020: 33). Programs of total immersion usually entail teaching all subjects through Hawaiian, except English language arts, typically introduced at Grade 5; partial immersion at the secondary level typically involves teaching Hawaiian language arts and at least one other subject-matter course through Hawaiian (Wilson, Kamanā 2011: 43). As of 2015, 21 educational institutions and approximately 2,000 students were involved in instruction in Hawaiian (Nakata 2017: 21–22); their approximate share of the total can be estimated given that, according to the Department of Education, in 2024 there were 294 educational institutions and approximately 173,000 students in Hawaii. However, even some school principals consider education in Hawaiian detrimental to students' social adaptation (Wilson, Kamanā 2013: 154–155).

In 1978, the number of native Hawaiian speakers was estimated at 2,000 (Noʻ Eau Warner 2013: 135–136); by the time Hawaiian language education programs were launched, of approximately 1,000 speakers, 200 were residents of the closed island of Niihau and 800 were people aged 60 and older (Galla 2018: 110). According to recent estimates, there are 5-7 thousand (Brenzinger, Heinrich 2013: 309) or 10 thousand (Wilson 2014: 225) fluent speakers, and a number of 18,610 people speaking Hawaiian at home (American Community Survey 2009–2013) is less reliable because it probably includes those using just separate terms and phrases. Anyway, although the situation of the Hawaiian language has improved significantly, the percentage of those who speak it remains small (according to the 2010 census, the population of Hawaii was 1,360,301 people).

It is also worth noting that a key role in the increase in the number of speakers was played by education since most parents of new speakers of Hawaiian do not speak it. In addition, the new speakers are ethnically heterogeneous, that is, unlike many other communities, the defining factor here is not a common "physical" or "blood" identity,

but a linguistic one (Brenzinger, Heinrich 2013: 312–314); this can be partly explained by historically active migration processes (Cowell 2012: 179–182; Smead 2012: 212).

Papua New Guinea

In 1884, the eastern half of the island of New Guinea (the future Papua New Guinea) was divided between Germany in the north and the United Kingdom in the south; both parts came under the control of Australia at the beginning of the 20th century. In 1975, Papua New Guinea gained independence. Population ~ 12 million people (2021), area ~ 463,000 square kilometers, GDP per capita ~ 2,500 dollars (2025).

The Constitution (adopted in 1975) does not explicitly proclaim any language as official, but calls for all persons and governmental bodies to endeavor to achieve universal literacy in Tok Pisin, Hiri Motu or English, and requires applicants for citizenship to speak and understand Tok Pisin, or Hiri Motu, or a vernacular of the country (there are more than 800 of them), sufficiently for normal conversational purposes. The three languages are also mentioned in PNG National Policy on Information and Communications: English – as the official language of international communication and commerce, Tok Pisin and Hiri Motu – as the official languages of convenience. In practice, Tok Pisin is the dominant language in parliament, and English is the dominant language in the courts, business (Anere 2017: 1), and the linguistic landscape (Volker 2015: 207).

In 1962, English was established as the language of education (Megarrity 2005); since 1976, schools were legally allowed to use the vernacular in Grades 1 and 2 when necessary for specific explanations, and local-language pre-primary schools had attained national support by 1986 (Honeyman 2015). In the second half of the 1990s, the government initiated an education reform that defined the first three years of education to be “in the child’s own language” (Department of Education 1996: 7). Practical realization of this prescription caused many difficulties (among other things, with materials and personnel), and after years of complaints from parents and teachers, in 2013, English was re-established as the language of instruction (Litteral 2015: 95–97), although Elementary Preparatory teachers are allowed to use the local vernacular during their lessons to explain difficult concepts (Government of PNG 2013: 2). To summarize it briefly, well-developed curriculums and acquisition of skills useful for modern life turned out to be more important arguments than support of linguistic diversity and comfort of pupils (Volker 2015).

Censuses do not provide data on the number of speakers, but as of 2022, the website www.ethnologue.com estimated the number of Tok Pisin speakers as a first language at 130,000, as a second language at 4 million; the number of Hiri Motu speakers as a second language was estimated at 100,000 which is a decrease from 120,000 in 1989 (Sankoff 2021: 76), despite at least threefold grow of the population since that time. The Australian National University website estimates the number of Tok Pisin speakers as more than 6 million.

The country’s significant linguistic diversity will inevitably diminish: according to a study by Kik et al (2021), 66% of the families surveyed spoke Tok Pisin, 4% spoke English, and all other languages were spoken in only 30% of families. If parents speak

different languages, the main language in the family usually becomes Tok Pisin or English (Devette-Chee 2021a: 2); sometimes this also happens when the parents have a common "local" language (Volker 2015: 210).

One more question is: how is it possible to have such a low number of English speakers despite at least its omnipresence in schools? PNG's literacy rate is on the rise (57.3% in 2000, 61.6% in 2010, 63.4% in 2015) but still remains low, and the reasons are many: lack of affordable education facilities and learning resources, weak teaching skills, frequent teacher and student absenteeism, use of the local languages instead of English, general poverty and so on (Devette-Chee 2021b). Nevertheless, the situation is improving, so it is quite possible that over time, Tok Pisin will also begin to be on the decline.

Vanuatu

The first Europeans arrived in Vanuatu in the 17th century. In 1906, the territory came under the joint control of France and Britain. In 1980, Vanuatu gained independence. Population ~ 350,000 people (2023), area ~ 12,000 square kilometers, GDP per capita ~ 3,000 dollars (2023). It should also be noted that taking into account the approximate number of local languages (138), most of which have no more than a thousand speakers, Vanuatu is the most linguistically densely populated region on the planet (François et al 2015).

According to the 1979 Constitution, the national language of the Republic is Bislama; the official languages are Bislama, English, and French; the principal languages of education are English and French; citizens of Vanuatu may obtain the services which they may rightfully expect from the administration of the Republic in the official language of their choice, and may make complaints to the Ombudsman in case of violations. The main of many additional recent specifications are listed below.

In the public sphere: Vanuatu State Law Office ensures all bills are in English and French, the Parliament ensures that debates are in Bislama though bills are in English and French (Government of Vanuatu 2020a: 13); in general, it is English that prevails in the legal context (Schneider 2022). Any document to be disseminated for public consumption through the Government Network must be in Bislama, English, and French, "or, in worst cases, in English and French" (Government of Vanuatu 2020b: 38); any public institution may use a vernacular language to disseminate a piece of information if it deems necessary (Government of Vanuatu 2020a: 24).

The private sector is free to communicate information in any of the official languages, but if the government deems it necessary, it may require private sector institutions to also use the two other official languages, and in times of emergency private sector institutions may use all the three official languages or a vernacular language; information sent out to Vanuatu citizens through mobile phones should be also in Bislama; languages should not be an obstacle to access job opportunities, hence, job advertisements, in some cases, should not have strict language requirements; products from Vanuatu shall also be labeled in Bislama; user instructions for any product or service should be in any of the three official languages (Government of Vanuatu 2020a: 22–24, 29, 33). In practice, Vanuatu's language market continues to be dominated by English and French (Vandeputte 2020: 281).

In 2012, it was permitted to use Bislama or a local vernacular in the first two years of school, with the possibility to use the agreed local vernacular languages to support children as long as is necessary (Vanuatu Ministry of Education 2012: 2). Later instructions are more strict: services in the educational sphere shall be provided in English and French, and may also be provided in Bislama and vernaculars when necessary; teaching and learning in all schools around the country shall be done in English and French, vernacular languages and Bislama may also be allowed in a classroom only to ease understanding of young children; Bislama teaching in classrooms shall first go through careful consultation with all the national stakeholders before it shall be applied; teaching and learning in Rural Training Centers may also be conducted in Bislama; for education and training institutions and providers it is enough to disseminate information in the language of instruction, not in all three official languages (Government of Vanuatu 2020a: 20–21, 24).

Since the British-French condominium, there has been an informal dividing line between regions that give priority to English or French in education (Van Trease 1995). According to the 2009 census, of a total of 61,931 students aged 5 years and over, English was the language of instruction for 29,357 (47.4%), French for 13,259 (21.4%), English and French for 927 (1.5%), and the local language for 1,861 (3.0%); data for the languages of the remaining students are not available.

According to the Ministry of Education and Training data for 2020, Bislama was used as the language of education only in pre-school institutions (for 1,352, or 8.3%, out of 16,253 students); in primary schools, out of 56,633 students, 38,561 (68.1%) studied in English, 17,862 (31.5%) in French; in secondary schools, out of 23,943 students, 17,128 (71.5%) studied in English, 6,815 (28.5%) in French.

The presence of Bislama in education is sometimes further restricted: for example, the relevant prohibitions are spelled out in the statutes of the Louis-Antoine de Bougainville School and the Catholic School of Montmartre – but in practice, these prohibitions are often violated both outside and inside the classroom (Vandeputte 2020: 280). At the same time, many parents perceive the presence of Bislama in educational programs as an obstacle to learning English and French (Vandeputte 2020: 279–281) and question the usefulness of Bislama in future life (Willans 2017: 9–11).

The 2009 census provides data on the language spoken at home: of 47,373 private households, Bislama was the main language for 15,985 (33.7%), English for 930 (2.0%), French for 297 (0.6%), local languages for 29,947 (63.2%), and other languages for 214 (0.5%). Of the 195,800 persons aged 5 years and over living in private households, 143,977 (73.6%) spoke ("can write and read a simple sentence") Bislama, 125,313 (64.0%) spoke English, 72,245 (36.9%) spoke French, and 98,232 (50.2%) spoke other (local) languages.

The 2020 Census contains a question on the chronologically first language learned: out of a total of 239,839 residents aged 3 years and above living in private households, this is Bislama for 34,723 (14.5%), English for 4,955 (2.1%), French for 1,942 (0.8%), and other (local) languages for 198,216 (82.6%). 90.1% of the population aged 15 years and above can read or write a simple sentence in Bislama, 76.9% in English, 40.0% in French, and 70.9% in other (local) languages.

From the data presented, it is easy to see that the population masters Bislama (especially if involved in interethnic and urban communication (Lavender Forsyth 2024)). At the same time, the knowledge of English and French is also growing. Given the situation in education, Bislama works as lingua franca between "anglophones" and "francophones", and in view of the recent changes in language policy, the situation certainly deserves further monitoring.

Fiji

Fiji came under British control in 1874. From 1879 to 1915, into the country came ~ 60,000 workers from India (according to the 2007 census, Indo-Fijians made up ~ 37.5% of the population). Independence was gained in 1970. Population ~ 925,000 people (2018), area ~ 18,000 square kilometers, GDP per capita ~ 6,000 dollars (2023).

The 1990 Constitution specifies English, Fijian, and Hindi as official languages, and English as the official language of Parliament (with the possibility to address the Speaker in Fijian and Hindi). The 1997 Constitution emphasizes the equality of Fijian, Hindi, and English. The 2013 Constitution makes no explicit mention of official languages but states that it will be adopted in English with subsequent translation into Fijian and Hindi and that Fijian and Fijian Hindi will be taught as compulsory subjects in primary schools.

After independence, English has continued to dominate official life and business, although some documents were also translated into Fijian and Hindi; only English is used on the currency, with the exception of the one-dollar coin, which features a traditional ceramic water jug and its Fijian name: saqamoli (Mangubhai, Mugler 2006: 30–32). Difficulties in expanding the scope of Fijian were also due to the lack of a strong literary tradition (Goundar 2019: 61), and for Hindi, to the fact that many Fijians do not master the Devanagari writing system, while Fijian Hindi itself remains poorly described (Mangubhai, Mugler 2006: 33; Goundar 2019: 65).

The Education Commission's 1969 regulation establishing English as the language of instruction from grade four onwards is still in force (Nicholls 2014: 10). The language of instruction in primary schools is chosen by the religious, community, and parent-teacher committees (Shameem 2002: 390). This choice is often (especially in rural areas) facilitated by the traditional division of schools into "Fijian" and "Indian", despite attempts to eliminate this division (Mugler 1996: 282).

According to statistical research of 1985, in grade 1, Fijian was used 20% of the time, (other) local languages 80% of the time; in grade 2, the percentage was 40% for Fijian, 40% for local languages, 20% for English; in grades 5 and 6, Fijian had 40% of the time, local languages – 10%, English – 50% (Roberts 2007: 19). Currently, English is the dominant language of instruction, especially in multicultural schools (ibid), including in the primary grades (Lagi 2016: 92), but teachers often switch between languages while giving explanations (Nicholls 2014: 63; Lagi 2016: 93).

At the same time, teachers (Nicholls 2014: 95), parents (Lagi 2016: 95), and students themselves (Nicholls 2014: 3) express opinions about the greater importance of English for future life.

Fijian and Fijian Hindi are roughly equally distributed as the first languages of approximately 95% of the population of Fiji, while English is the first language of 1-

3% (Mangubhai, Mugler 2006: 26). In absolute figures, the number of Fijian speakers is estimated at 400-500 thousand (Mangubhai, Mugler 2006: 63; Roberts 2007: 8).

Although English is the home language of a clear minority of students (Nicholls 2014: 60), a survey conducted as early as 1993 showed that in the capital region, people with different primary languages actively used English as lingua franca (Mangubhai, Mugler 2006: 86); a later study shows the same tendency for inter-ethnic communication in schools (Hopf et al 2017). In addition, some parents use English to make the learning process at school easier for their children (Lagi 2016: 90), and the most familiar written language for schoolchildren is also English (Nicholls 2014: 60). As a result, more and more parents complain about children's poor knowledge of their language, especially in urban areas (Mangubhai, Mugler 2006: 103; Roberts 2007: 34).

Palau

In the 18th and 19th centuries, the Palau Islands gradually came under Spanish control. In 1899, the archipelago was sold to the German Empire. In 1914, the Japanese Empire established its control, followed by the United States in 1944. In 1994, Palau gained independence, however, the country remains highly dependent on US funding, and its economy also relies heavily on tourism, mainly from Japan and China (Matsumoto 2020: 36). Population ~ 17,000 people (2021), area ~ 459 square kilometers, GDP per capita ~ 17,000 dollars (2024).

The Constitution (adopted in 1981) proclaims Palauan and English as official languages. Japanese, Tobian, and Sonsorol are additional official languages in one state each, but since the population of these states, according to the 2015 census, is 119, 25, and 40 people, it can be expected that the impact of these statuses on the actual linguistic situation is minimal.

Without knowledge of English, it is impossible to apply for prestigious jobs, such as civil servants or employees of Palau Community College: the country's only university (Okayama 2015: 111–112, 148). Almost all documents, with the exception of legal documents on land disputes, are written in English; Palauan is present on a small number of information signs: in shops, in the national hospital, and in the national museum (Okayama 2015: 244, 277). At the same time, the use of Palauan is complicated by the large influx of migrants (especially from the Philippines, where English is one of the two official languages): as of 2012, approximately 27% of Palauan citizens were born in another country (Okayama 2015: 6).

In 1963, English was designated as the language of education, and a bilingual education program was launched in 1973 (Okayama 2015: 68–69). Since 1997, instruction in Palauan has been part of the curriculum in both primary and secondary schools; many students do not understand either English or Palauan well, so teachers alternate between the two languages in varying proportions (Okayama 2015: 175–192). Textbooks for all subjects except Palauan studies are written in English (Okayama 2015: 226).

Interestingly, many English-speaking parents send their children to schools where Palauan is predominantly used because they see no other way to acquire the language; as a result, the use of English in schools increases (Matsumoto 2020: 48).

According to the 2005 census, of the 14,154 residents aged 18 years and over,

Palauan was the only language spoken at home by 8,753 (61.8%), while English was spoken at home by 2,268 (16.0%) and Japanese by 115 (0.8%). In the 2020 census, the same numbers were, respectively, 13,576 and 5,367 (39.6%), 8,893 (65.6%), and 20 (0.15%).

It is possible to add several more specific observations to these statistics: the older generation often complains that youngsters do not know how to speak Palauan correctly and often switch to English (Matsumoto 2020: 47); out of more than 300 participants in a research survey, not a single one asked for a version of the questionnaire in Palauan, that is, English is absolutely dominant as a written language (Matsumoto 2020: 51); according to a survey by the Japan Foundation in 2017, Palau is in third place in the world in terms of the number of people studying Japanese, and the Japanese of young Palauans is expectedly closer to the literary version than that of older ones (Matsumoto 2020: 42–43).

Northern Mariana Islands

Spain laid claim to the Northern Mariana Islands in the 16th century. In 1899, they were sold to the German Empire, in 1918, came under the control of the Japanese Empire, and in 1947, were transferred to the United States as a trustee. In 1986, they became an unincorporated territory of the United States. Population ~ 55,000 people (2022), area ~ 464 square kilometers, GDP per capita ~ 21,000 dollars (2019).

The Constitution (ratified in 1977) names as official languages Chamorro, Carolinian, and English, and specifies that the legislature may provide government proceedings and documents in at least one of the three languages. There are prescriptions for the establishment of the Chamorro-Carolinian Language Policy Commission which should, among other things, establish and enforce policies regarding Chamorro and Carolinian translations, certify all Chamorro and Carolinian translators, promulgate rules and regulations for Chamorro and Carolinian languages used on all government or public documents and public places, make recommendations on policies governing the usage of Chamorro and Carolinian language in the government sector (Fifteen Northern Marianas Commonwealth Legislature 2007), but it appears that in practice English is the only useful language on the job market (Ellis 2012: 352).

In 1972, bilingual education programs were launched and quickly gained momentum. However, despite the efforts of enthusiasts, it was not until 1985 that these programs were officially approved, and officially implemented in 1988, by which time the initial enthusiasm had already faded (Ellis 2012: 346). At the same time, parents usually preferred to address their children in English, which would be useful both at school and at work, and to expect that children would learn local languages from their peers and through bilingual education programs (Ellis 2012: 352).

Among the more recent immersion initiatives, it is possible to mention the Carolinian Immersion Program at Kagman Elementary School in Saipan, due to which 12 kindergarten students and 16 first graders take Carolinian classes entirely in the native language (KUAM News 2023).

According to the 1990 census, there were 3,000 people speaking Carolinian. Today it is difficult to find Carolinian speakers below the age of thirty or so (Ellis 2016:

199), and while a few decades ago, many members of the younger generation spoke a mixture of Carolinian and English, now it is much more difficult to detect traces of Carolinian in children's speech (Ellis 2012: 353–354).

Northwest Territories

At the beginning of the 18th century, these lands came under the control of the British Empire; in 1870 – under the control of Canada. The Northwest Territories have existed in their current borders since 1999. Population ~ 41,000 people (2021; 0.1% of Canada's population), area ~ 1.3 million square kilometers (13.5% of Canada's territory), GDP per capita ~ 108,000 thousand dollars (2017; average for Canada in 2024 ~ 55,000 dollars).

The Language Act was approved in 1984, mentioning the indigenous (aboriginal) languages of the Northwest Territories but designating only French and English as official languages. In 1990, the Act was amended recognizing the official status of the indigenous languages and creating the position of the Languages Commissioner (with authority to investigate complaints in regard to compliance with the Act; and also, to engage in activities related to the promotion and protection of the official languages which is now fulfilled by the Minister Responsible for Official Languages and the Official Languages Board). The amendments of 2001 have brought the number and names of the official languages to the current state. The Act provides the possibility to receive government services in the official languages where there is "a significant demand" and it is "reasonable".

There are additional payments for bilingual civil servants, but the data on the number of such employees is contradictory: in 2021/22, out of a total of 6,300 employees, either 340 (19th Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly 2023: 9) or 171 (Government of Northwest Territories 2022: 18) received additional payments, in 2023/24 their number was 169 (Government of Northwest Territories 2024: 19), but it remains unclear whether knowledge of languages also implies their use. Teachers receive additional payments specifically for the use of indigenous languages: their number was 105 in 2010 (19th Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly 2023: 9), 37 in 2021/22 (Government of Northwest Territories 2022: 18), and 50 in 2023/24 (Government of Northwest Territories 2024: 19).

NWT Fire Information Officers with the Department of Environment and Climate Change have local language interpreters available when on an incident (Government of Northwest Territories 2024: 16). The lobby signage/directory for the Yellowknife office is in all official Indigenous languages (ibid: 18). Ensuring the right to receive services in any of the official languages and supporting government employees who speak the official languages – as well as increasing the presence of Indigenous languages in the linguistic landscape – are among the recommendations of the Standing Committee on Government Operations (19th Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly 2023).

In the 2021/22 school year, 4 of the 49 schools in the Northwest Territories were implementing indigenous language immersion programs in primary grades, with the number expected to increase to 5 schools the following year (Government of Northwest Territories 2022: 10). The Standing Committee on Government Operations plans to

further increase the presence of the indigenous languages in education (19th Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly 2023: 7): a teacher training program has been established for the 2023/24 school year, with the possibility of further expansion (Government of the Northwest Territories 2023: 5).

The total number of speakers of indigenous languages in the region is decreasing: in 2014 there were 7,900 of them (of which 320 were Cree speakers), in 2019 – 6,800 (260), with half of them over 50 years old, and fifth – over 65 (19th Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly 2023: 4). According to the study by the Bureau of Statistics, the number of people wishing to learn indigenous languages is several times greater than the number of speakers; specifically for Cree, 3,470 people expressed such a desire (19th Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly 2023: 4–5). Nevertheless, it is obvious that not every (adult) person who wants to learn the language manages to master it well, even under ideal conditions.

It is also important to note that the overall situation with the Cree language is much less dire, with a total of 96,000 speakers according to the 2016 census. However, based on formal criteria, it is "endemic" to the Northwest Territories: at the moment, Cree has not received official status in any other region (of Canada).

Choctaw Reservation

Oklahoma became a part of the United States in 1803, and the Choctaw Reservation in its modern borders has existed since 1867. Population ~ 227,000 people (2020; 0.07% of the US population), area ~ 28,000 square kilometers (0.3% of the US territory), GDP per capita in Oklahoma ~ 53,000 dollars (2019; US average for 2024 ~ 85,000 dollars).

Much space in the existing literature is devoted to the struggle of Choctaw people for their rights but I have not managed to find information about the status of the language and regulation of its usage: for example, there are no mentions of Choctaw language in the current Constitution of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma (ratified in 1983). In practice English is the only language used in the workplace, while Choctaw can be seen on signs at buildings and casinos (Kickham 2015: 22). And although the site of Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma offers some career possibilities for Choctaw tribal members, knowledge of the language is not mentioned as an advantage.

Currently, the main role of Choctaw in educational programs is a (possible) object of study (Oklahoma 2014: 5): according to the site of Choctaw Tribal Schools, this project is realized in six elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. There were attempts to introduce the Choctaw Bilingual Education program in Mississippi with Choctaw as a primary medium of instruction with a gradual switch to English as early as the 1970s (York et al 1976: 7); there are some mentions of more recent immersion programs but without concrete quantitative data (Kwachka and Thompson 2018). Be it as it may, observations show that the students usually do not overcome a basic level of language proficiency (Pauls 2024), and 13 years of the Choctaw Community Education Program have not produced a single speaker of the language (Kickham 2015: 2). Maybe a full-fledged language nest could be more productive but, according to the data on the site of Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, for the moment it is on the stage of planning.

Estimates of the number of Choctaw speakers vary: at least 4,000 in 2007, with all first language speakers over the age of 50 (Kickham 2015: 19–20); the 2015 census put the figure at 9,600. Still, without further changes, this number will inevitably decrease because parents no longer transmit the language to their children (Kickham 2015: 2).

Haiti

The Spanish first arrived in the future territory of Haiti in 1492, and then gradually took control of it. In 1697, the corresponding lands were transferred to France. In 1804, Haiti gained independence. From 1915 to 1934, it was controlled by the United States. Population ~ 11.5 million people (2023), area ~ 28,000 square kilometers, GDP per capita ~ 2,500 dollars (2025).

The 1918 Constitution declared French the official language. The 1983 Constitution left French as the official language and designated two national languages: French and Haitian. The 1987 Constitution declared Haitian the national language, Haitian and French the official languages, and explicitly established the state's obligation to use both languages to inform citizens. However, this requirement is generally ignored: a quick glance at government websites and documents is enough to see the almost total dominance of French (DeGraff et al 2022: 51); French is also the language of most court proceedings (Kuhn 2020: 10).

Among other language provisions in the Constitution are the following: reasons for detention or arrest must be stated in both Haitian and French, customs documents must be completed in French, and tax returns may be filed in both French and Haitian. Banknote inscriptions are in French, partly duplicated in Haitian. As for employment opportunities, many of them require the use of French (Ulysse, Burns 2022: 167).

Signs on government buildings are in French only; municipal buildings in the capital have signs in French, and those in provincial towns – in French and Haitian. Large stores and large businesses in the capital have signs and advertising posters in French, medium-sized businesses – in French and Haitian, and small businesses – in Haitian only (Kozhemyakina 2021: 148).

In 1979, it was permitted to learn Haitian and study in Haitian in schools. In 1982, a decree was passed mandating the use of Haitian as the language of instruction from first to tenth grade, while French was determined as an additional language of instruction in sixth grade, but a moratorium was placed on this decree later that year (DeGraff et al 2022: 48–50).

Despite many further discussions, experiments, and plans (Dewar 2019: 13–14; DeGraff et al 2022: 73), for now, the language of education remains French, and Haitian appears (in some places quite actively) in the educational process "out of necessity", since students – and sometimes teachers – do not always have sufficient knowledge of French (Dewar 2019; DeGraff et al 2022: 37–38): according to the results of testing in 2009, approximately 85% of 367 teachers showed a level of proficiency in French between A2 and B1 (Wolff, Aithnard 2014: 359). At the same time, there are also cases when students are punished, humiliated, and even expelled from school for speaking Haitian (DeGraff 2017).

A study of parents' views on the possible use of Haitian as a language of

instruction in schools found that while parents acknowledged the importance of Haitian for their children, they saw a problem with the limited scope of Haitian in society and the labor market, compared to French (Dewar 2019).

Reliable data on language proficiency in Haiti is not easy to find: in general, researchers agree that (almost) everyone speaks Haitian, while figures for French include 5% (Hebblethwaite 2012), 42% (Wolff, Aithnard 2014: 18) (most likely an overestimate, since the publisher is Francophonie), at most 5% (DeGraff 2016: 435), around 5% (Marcelin 2020: 1), less than 10% (Dupuy 2023: 428).

How is it possible to explain the continued strength of the Haitian language? In recent decades, the country has been periodically shaken by armed coups and natural disasters. About half of Haiti's population is illiterate; among children who enter the first grade, a large proportion drops out of school at an early age, and at most 10% graduate from high school (DeGraff 2016: 435). I personally visited Haiti in 2010 and saw houses made of cardboard boxes in the suburbs of the capital, as well as many school-age children who are forced to earn a living instead of studying. It is obvious that in such conditions, the language policy has less influence on the language preferences of the society.

Ecuador

In the 15th century, the territory of the future Ecuador came under the control of the Incas, most of whom were Quechua Indians. In the 16th century, the territory came under Spanish control. In 1830, Ecuador gained independence. Population ~ 17,5 million people (2023), area ~ 284,000 square kilometers, GDP per capita ~ 6,500 dollars (2024).

Even the more widespread Kichwa (the language of ~ 3.2% of the population, according to the 2022 census) did not immediately achieve official recognition: only in the 1979 Constitution were "Kichwa and other languages as parts of the national culture" added to the official Spanish.

The path of the Shuar was as follows: in 1964, a federation for the protection of the rights of the Shuar people was created (Valeš 2014: 50); in the Constitution of 1998, not only Kichwa but also Shuar ("and other indigenous languages") were mentioned as official languages for the ethnic groups that speak them; in the current Constitution (2008), the official language is Spanish, and the official languages of intercultural communication are Spanish, Kichwa and Shuar (for the other indigenous languages, official status is provided for the corresponding ethnic groups in the places of their compact residence).

In practice, only Spanish is used in the official sphere; the role of other languages remains symbolic and does not bring any regular financial benefits. Moreover, Kichwa is the only indigenous language that is at least more or less actively discussed in this context, since even the level of description of other languages remains very low (Valeš 2014).

Starting from the 1940s, there were some experimental initiatives in the sphere of bilingual education. 1982 saw a ministerial agreement that provided formalization of bilingual-bicultural education in areas with a predominantly indigenous population. The Constitution of 1983 included a prescription that in education systems developed

in areas with a predominantly indigenous population, Kichwa, or the language of the respective culture was to be used as the primary language of education, and Spanish – as the language of intercultural relations (the current Constitution formulates that the language of the respective nationality will be used as the primary language of education and Spanish – as the language of intercultural relations). In 1988, the National Directorate of Bilingual Intercultural Indigenous Education was created (Ministerio 2013: 23).

Throughout the 1990s, most Shuar schools became part of the national Intercultural Bilingual Education System (Buitron, Deshoulliere 2019: 180). Nevertheless, the effectiveness of the bilingual programs raises many questions, since in practice presence of indigenous languages in them is very limited (Mashinkiash Chinkias 2012: 121–122; Valeš 2013: 132–133; Rodríguez Cruz 2015: 666; Haboud 2019: 10), often producing less than modest results (Limerick 2018). And since only Spanish offers economic advantages, using other languages, for example, in mathematics lessons would be "irresponsible" (Robinette 2015: 20).

According to the 2001 census, the number of Shuar speakers was 46,261 (with an overall population number of 12,156,608 or 12,142,429); the 2011 census does not give a precise number of Shuar speakers, but indicates that out of 1,017,469 speakers of indigenous languages, Shuar is spoken by 6.05% (that is 61,557; out of 14 483 499 or 14 459 077 of the total population); according to the 2022 census, Shuar is spoken by 58,770 (out of 16,938,986 of the total population). The apparently stable quantity of Shuar speakers ceases to be such if we take into consideration the general growth of the population; moreover, it is Morona Santiago province which is the home of the most Shuar speakers and at the same time maintains the highest fertility rate. And even if for the moment the loss of Shuar has not had a very noticeable effect on the number of speakers, the language is less widely used by youngsters compared with elders in all communities (Valeš 2013: 134).

On the other hand, how is it possible to explain that the shrinking of the Shuar for the moment is not very drastic? According to the 2010 census, 78.5% of the indigenous people in Ecuador lived in rural areas, 48% of indigenous households had no access to clean drinking water and 72% were not connected to a public sanitary sewage network. Moreover, according to the National Survey of Employment, Unemployment and Underemployment (Encuesta Nacional de Empleo, Desempleo y Subempleo), in 2003, the average years of schooling for urban adult (24 years or older) population was 10.39 years, while for rural adult population only 5.68 years; in 2017, the same numbers were, respectively, 11.31 and 7.50 years. If the trend towards modernization continues, the situation with Shuar can quickly become much worse.

Discussion

Many studies of language policy, like (Spolsky 2021), mention a lot of factors that can potentially influence the language choices of communities. Nevertheless, as we saw above, some of these factors can be named "primary", and in competition between historical, ideological, cultural, and utilitarian factors, unfortunately for many scientists (see also (Garcia 2015)), it is the economic perspectives that usually win. Of

course, it is easier to find a possibility for cultural development if more basic needs of Maslow's hierarchy are satisfied, but without support from above, enthusiasts in most cases are capable of creating no more than linguistic ghettos.

Another popular trend in the literature concerns the potential benefits of using mother tongues in education (Volker 2015; Stoop 2017; DeGraff et al 2022; and many others). Throughout the world, people receive education in a language other than their family language in about 40 percent of cases (Walter, Benson 2012: 282), but as we saw above, in many cases societies are ready to tolerate this discomfort if their languages do not help to invest efforts in a "better future".

Conclusion

Language diversity of the "New World" is affected by languages brought to it by colonizers everywhere but to different degrees. Many communities that have not managed to get official status for their languages actively shift to other languages, and in many cases, officialization is not a panacea either: it can provide a framework for language maintenance but must be accompanied by active usage in public and socioeconomic spheres to give people stable motivation to strengthen their (and their children's) language skills.

More concretely, the language situations considered above can be roughly divided into three groups:

1) indigenous languages have not managed to take a perceptible niche in the public sphere and gradually fall out of use: Fiji, Palau, Northern Mariana Islands, Northwest Territories, and Choctaw Reservation;
2) indigenous languages have not managed to take a perceptible niche in the public sphere but their loss is hampered by the harsh socioeconomic conditions of life: Papua New Guinea, Haiti, and Ecuador;
3) indigenous languages have managed to take a perceptible niche in the public sphere that to somewhat extent helps to stabilize the situation: New Zealand, Hawaii, and Vanuatu.

It seems that for the moment the "New World" lacks a possible fourth scenario in which indigenous languages reclaim space for active spreading, like in Basque Country or Kazakhstan, but let us continue to keep an eye on this area.

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