

Citation: Dwyer, Arienne M. 2011. Tools and techniques for endangered-language assessment and revitalization. In *Vitality and Viability of Minority Languages*. October 23-24, 2009. New York: Trace Foundation Lecture Series Proceedings. Preprint.  
Online: [http://www.trace.org/events/events\\_lecture\\_proceedings.html](http://www.trace.org/events/events_lecture_proceedings.html)

## **Tools and techniques for endangered-language assessment and revitalization**

Arienne M. Dwyer  
University of Kansas

### **Abstract**

A number of tools to assess the degree of language vitality have been developed, tested, and refined in an international collaborative context. This paper explores the uses and limits of these tools through case examples of assessment, including successful language revitalization and maintenance efforts. The significant role in linguistic and cultural maintenance that NGOs can play is discussed, particularly in the Tibetan context.

### **Biographical Sketch**

Dr. Arienne M. Dwyer is an Associate Professor of Linguistic Anthropology and co-Director of the Institute for Digital Research in the Humanities at the University of Kansas. A specialist on language documentation and revitalization and a China/Central Asian researcher, she was part of the 2003 UNESCO ad hoc Expert Committee on Language Endangerment which developed language vitality assessment tools. She is a past chair of the Committee for Endangered Languages and their Preservation of the Linguistic Society of America, and will co-direct the 2012 Co-Lang documentary linguistics summer school.

### **1. Assessment Tools**

Language shift refers to the process in which a group of speakers of a language (a “speech community”) comes to use another language; this shift may result in the partial or total abandonment of the first language. Taking active measures to counter language shift is referred to as fostering language maintenance and/or language revitalization. A language assessment is the prerequisite both to understanding language shift and to take measures to reverse it.

Assessing the degree to which shift occurs invariably entails determining and applying a range of largely quantifiable sociolinguistic variables, such as the number and age of speakers, or whether there is a writing system, educational materials, or media in the language. One of the earliest assessment tools was Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor (1977), which emphasized the importance of transmission in the home; for an example of its application, see Decker (1992). The most influential have been Fishman’s (1991) Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS, updated by Simons and Lewis (2006) as E[xtended]GIDS), and the UNESCO (2003) “nine factors.” We look at these below.

#### **1.1. Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS; Fishman 1991)**

Fishman noted that intergenerational transmission - whether parents passed on the language to their children - was critical in determining the continuity of a language. He developed a scale with eight levels, in which the first six levels (1–6) the language is being maintained. In the last two levels (7 & 8), however, adult speakers are not passing the language on to their children, who have shifted to another language.

The table below illustrates this scale:

*Table 1. Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (Fishman 1991)*

<b>GIDS</b>	
<b>LEVEL</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION</b>
1	The language is used in education, work, mass media, government at the nationwide level
2	The language is used for local and regional mass media and governmental services
3	The language is used for local and regional work by both insiders and outsiders
4	Literacy in the language is transmitted through education
5	The language is used orally by all generations and is effectively used in written form throughout the community
6	The language is used orally by all generations and is being learned by children as their first language
7	The child-bearing generation knows the language well enough to use it with their elders but is not transmitting it to their children
8	The only remaining speakers of the language are members of the grandparent generation

The GID Scale focuses on language domains (Levels 1-3), literacy (Level 4-5), and intergenerational transmission (Levels 6-8). Levels 5 & 6 above illustrate the most common preconditions for language loss to occur, even though the speakers have not yet shifted to the other language: the domains in which the original language is used are more and more limited.

Central Tibetan, for example, would be evaluated between a Level 2 and a Level 4, depending on how narrowly the criteria are defined. Within greater Tibet, the language is certainly used for local and regional mass media and government (=Level 2), though not exclusively (Mandarin Chinese being dominant in these domains). Central Tibetan is certainly used for local and regional work by insiders (=Level 3), yet not necessarily by outsiders, who are more likely to use Mandarin. Level 4 (literacy via education) is the lowest GIDS level for Central Tibetan that does not need qualification.

Amdo and Khams Tibetan could also be evaluated at Level 2-Level 4 (though the domains of media and government communication are much less represented for these varieties). The apparent GIDS parity between the three main varieties of Tibetan may be misleading: while all three are regional standards by convention, only Central Tibetan serves as a greater Tibetan lingua franca, is subject to formal standardization, and also commands a higher prestige. As can be seen from this example, the levels as defined in the GID Scale may not be adequate to distinguish a threatened language from one that is being maintained.

## 1.2. UNESCO’s “Nine Factors” (2003)

In March 2003, the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Unit committed to focus on language as part of cultural heritage, and convened an Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages. In the document *Language Vitality and Endangerment* (UNESCO 2003), the group detailed a set of determining factors that allow a speaker community or outsiders to assess the vitality of a language. The rubric was intended as a guideline adaptable to a variety of local situations, and assumes that a small-scale language use survey has been conducted in situ. Most factors have grades (0 through 5), where zero represents complete shift to another language (termed extinct in UNESCO parlance), and five represents vitality of a language for that factor (termed safe).

The factor intergenerational transmission was retained from Fishman’s GID Scale, while new elements were introduced to evaluate the critical influence that language attitudes can have on the vitality of a language. Whether or not there are documentary materials was also considered an important factor in determining just how urgent countermeasures to language attrition are. All told, nine major factors are proposed to assess the language situations. Six factors evaluate a language’s vitality and state of endangerment, two further factors to assess language attitudes, and one additional factor to evaluate the urgency of documentation. Below the factors are explicated in turn (based on UNESCO 2003); for an application of this assessment tool to Tibeto-Burman languages, see section 2.

### Factor 1: Intergenerational Language Transmission

For a language to receive a grade of 5 and to be considered safe, the language must be used by all ages and transmitted from one generation to the next. The more transmission occurs, the stronger the language.

*Table 2. UNESCO Factor 1: Intergenerational Transmission*

Degree of Endangerment	Grade	Speaker Population
safe	5	The language is used by all ages, from children up.
unsafe	4	The language is used by some children in all domains; it is used by all children in limited domains.
definitively endangered	3	The language is used mostly by the parental generation and up.
severely endangered	2	The language is used mostly by the grandparental generation and up.
critically endangered	1	The language is used mostly by very few speakers, of great-grandparental generation.
extinct	0	There exists no speaker.

## Factor 2: Absolute Number of Speakers

A language with only a handful of speakers is clearly critically endangered. A small population is also much more vulnerable to decimation by disease, warfare or natural disaster by merging into a larger group. Yet the absolute number of speakers can be misleading: first, many sources will confuse population numbers with speaker numbers, which usually results in a large overestimate of speakers. Second, language groups can have even a million speakers, but if other factors (such as intergenerational transmission and/or literacy/education/media in the language) are absent, a language can still be endangered. Therefore, absolute speaker numbers are more meaningful by comparing Factors 1 (intergenerational transmission) & 3 (proportion of speakers within the total population).

*Factor 2: Absolute Number of Speakers:* \_\_\_\_\_

In addition to recording the absolute number of speakers, a reference date, a source, and the reliability of this source should be recorded.

## Factor 3: Proportion of Speakers within the Total Population

The number of speakers in relation to the total population of a group is a more significant indicator of language vitality than absolute speaker population numbers:

*Table 3. UNESCO Factor 3: Proportion of Speakers within the Total Population*

Degree of Endangerment	Grade	Proportion of Speakers Within the Total Reference Population
safe	5	All speak the language.
unsafe	4	Nearly all speak the language.
definitively endangered	3	A majority speak the language.
severely endangered	2	A minority speak the language.
critically endangered	1	Very few speak the language.
extinct	0	None speak the language.

## Factor 4: Trends in Existing Language Domains

Language assessors determine where and with whom is the language used, and for what range of topics it is used. The more consistently and persistently the language is used, the stronger the language is. Ideally, a language is used in all domains (universal use).

*Table 4. UNESCO Factor 4: Trends in Existing Language Domains*

Degree of Endangerment	Grade	Domains and Functions
universal use	5	The language is used in all domains and for all functions
multilingual parity	4	Two or more languages may be used in most social domains and for most functions.
dwindling domains	3	The language is in home domains and for many functions, but the dominant language begins to penetrate even home domains.
limited or formal domains	2	The language is used in limited social domains and for several functions
highly limited domains	1	The language is used only in a very restricted domains and for a very few functions
extinct	0	The language is not used in any domain and for any function.

### **Factor 5: Response to New Domains and Media**

New language domains include for example schools, new work environments, new media, including broadcast media and the Internet. The more actively the language is used in new domains, the stronger the language is. Ideally, a language is also used in all new domains, and thus termed dynamic.

*Table 5. UNESCO Factor 5: Response to New Domains and Media*

Degree of Endangerment	Grade	New Domains and Media Accepted by the Endangered Language
dynamic	5	The language is used in all new domains.
robust/active	4	The language is used in most new domains.
receptive	3	The language is used in many domains.
coping	2	The language is used in some new domains.
minimal	1	The language is used only in a few new domains.
inactive	0	The language is not used in any new domains.

### **Factor 6: Materials for Language Education and Literacy**

In the educational domain, having instruction in the relevant language for the duration of the school day is far preferable to having instruction in a dominant language, with an occasional hour per day or per week of the relevant language as a “subject language.” If education is conducted in the language, with abundant materials in both oral and written forms, the language

receives a grade of 5. The more varieties of materials in the language are used for education, the stronger the language is.

*Table 6. UNESCO Factor 6: Materials for Language Education and Literacy*

Grade	Accessibility of Written Materials
5	There is an established orthography, literacy tradition with grammars, dictionaries, texts, literature, and everyday media. Writing in the language is used in administration and education.
4	Written materials exist, and at school, children are developing literacy in the language. Writing in the language is not used in administration.
3	Written materials exist and children may be exposed to the written form at school. Literacy is not promoted through print media.
2	Written materials exist, but they may only be useful for some members of the community; and for others, they may have a symbolic significance. Literacy education in the language is not a part of the school curriculum.
1	A practical orthography is known to the community and some material is being written.
0	No orthography available to the community.

Factors 7 & 8 address attitudes and policies at the local, regional, and/or national level.

**Factor 7: Governmental and Institutional Language Attitudes and Policies, including Official Status & Use**

This factor addresses the attitudes of those external to the language community towards the relevant language. Governments and institutions have explicit policies and/or implicit attitudes toward the dominant and subordinate languages. A region or nation in which the use of all languages is supported for public domains (in media, education, business, and government) would receive a grade of 5. The more positive official attitudes and policies are toward the language of the community, the stronger the language is.

*Table 7. UNESCO Factor 7: Governmental and Institutional Language Attitudes And Policies, Including Official Status and Use*

Degree of Support	Grade	Official Attitudes toward Language
equal support	5	All languages are protected.
differentiated support	4	Minority languages are protected primarily as the language of the private domains. The use of the language is prestigious.
passive assimilation	3	No explicit policy exists for minority languages; the dominant language prevails in the public domain.

active assimilation	2	Government encourages assimilation to the dominant language. There is no protection for minority languages.
forced assimilation	1	The dominant language is the sole official language, while non-dominant languages are neither recognized nor protected.
prohibition	0	Minority languages are prohibited.

### **Factor 8: Community Members' Attitudes toward their Own Languages**

This factor addresses the attitudes of those internal to the language community towards the relevant language. Members of a speech community may see their language as essential to their community and identity, and they promote it. The more positive their attitudes are and more pride they have in language and traditions, the stronger the language is.

*Table 8. UNESCO Factor 8: Community Members' Attitudes toward Their Own Language*

Grade	Community Attitudes towards language
5	All members value their language and wish to see it promoted.
4	Most members support language maintenance.
3	Many members support language maintenance; others are indifferent or may even support language loss.
2	Some members support language maintenance; others are indifferent or may even support language loss.
1	Only a few members support language maintenance; others are indifferent or may even support language loss.
0	No one cares if the language is lost; all prefer to use a dominant language.

### **Factor 9: Amount and Quality of Documentation**

Ideally, a language community would have an abundance of well-documented, transcribed, translated, and analyzed materials. These include comprehensive grammars and dictionaries, extensive texts, and abundant annotated high-quality audio and video recordings. The more historical and contemporary language materials there are, the stronger the language is.

The final factor is one measure of the urgency of (further) documentation. Taken with other factors above, it allows communities or governments to prioritize language maintenance, revitalization, and documentation. The type and quality of existing language materials help members of the language community to formulate specific tasks, and help linguists to design research projects together with members of the language community. Such materials also help non-governmental organizations (NGOs) formulate ways to support documentation efforts

*Table 9. UNESCO Factor 9: Amount and Quality of Documentation*

Documentation	Grade	Language Documentation
superlative	5	There are comprehensive grammars and dictionaries, extensive texts; constant flow of language materials. Abundant annotated high-quality audio and video recordings exist.
good	4	There are one good grammar and a number of adequate grammars, dictionaries, texts, literature, and occasionally updated everyday media; adequate annotated high-quality audio and video recordings.
fair	3	There may be an adequate grammar or sufficient amount of grammars, dictionaries, and texts, but no everyday media; audio and video recordings may exist in varying quality or degree of annotation.
fragmentary	2	There are some grammatical sketches, word-lists, and texts useful for limited linguistic research but with inadequate coverage. Audio and video recordings may exist in varying quality, with or without any annotation.
inadequate	1	Only a few grammatical sketches, short word-lists, and fragmentary texts. Audio and video recordings do not exist, are of unusable quality, or are completely un-annotated.
undocumented	0	No material exists.

The UNESCO framework comes with **several important caveats**. None of these factors should be used alone; the nine factors are intended to be used together to assess language vitality. Further, the UNESCO group cautions against treating all factors as equally important, adding together a language's grades for each factor, and then comparing languages based on these simple quantitative results. While comparing unweighted quantitative results may indeed yield an approximate measure of vitality, specific local conditions may render one factor more important to language vitality than others. Therefore, the UNESCO group recommends that language assessors consider weighting the factors. (If languages are being compared, the factors of all languages in a given survey should have the same weighting in order to be comparable.) For example, many language assessors would agree that Factors 1 (intergenerational transmission), 3 (proportion of speakers within the total population), & 4 (language domains) are critically important, and may want to assign them a greater weight than language attitudes and documentation (Factors 7, 8, and 9).

The UNESCO approach requires a fairly detailed on-site local and national survey of language use. Much of this information can be obtained in several small-scale sociolinguistic surveys. Yet certain data (such as the proportion of speakers in a population) are neither available in national censuses, nor realistically obtainable by a small language survey team, as we will see in the case studies in section 2 below. In these situations, language use assessors must make an informed estimate based on interviews and local or national sources.

Comparing the UNESCO approach to Fishman's GIDS, Levels 1-3 of the GID Scale are expanded to five grades in UNESCO's Factor 4: Existing Language Domains; GIDS Levels 4-5 on literacy are also expanded to five grades in UNESCO's Factor 6: Materials for Education and



Literacy; and Levels 6-8 of the GID Scale are expanded to five grades in UNESCO's Factor 1: Intergenerational Transmission.

The UNESCO assessment tool introduced four innovations: It considers (1) not only existing but also new language domains (Factor 5); (2) both absolute and relative population numbers (Factors 2 & 3); (3) internal and external prestige (language attitudes and policies, Factors 7 & 8), and (4) the amount and quality of documentation (Factor 9). Moreover, the five grades for each factor allows a fine-grained assessment that is not possible with the GIDS model. We would for example be better able to distinguish the relative vitality of Central, Amdo, and Kham Tibetan with the UNESCO model than with GIDS, which showed little apparent difference between the three.

### **1.3. Extended GIDS (Lewis and Simons 2010)**

The UNESCO language assessment tool was designed with small-scale in situ language use surveys in mind. Locally-based research is essential to an accurate and detailed assessment of the vitality, range, and factors in the maintenance or attrition of a language. Nonetheless, partially in order to motivate more on-the-ground language use research, there is also a need for a simplified and less-nuanced tool that quickly allows the very approximate comparison of large numbers of languages from afar (e.g. via the internet).

Broad language survey sources on the internet list population figures, approximate numbers of speakers; the premier source in this genre, the Ethnologue (Lewis 2009), often assigns a language vitality label (“vigorous,” “threatened,” “extinct”), and sometimes lists in-house documentation. Lewis (2006) used the Ethnologue's data on 100 languages, including four Tibeto-Burman languages, to test the UNESCO model. Unsurprisingly, he found that much of the information required for assessment was hard to obtain from a broad survey source, such as information on intergenerational transmission. Given the limited information available over the internet for most of these languages, for rough estimates, Lewis and Simons (2010) propose to extend Fishman's simpler GIDS model (in 1.1 above) from eight to ten levels. Their model retains Fishman's concise single-table format and his focus on language domains, literacy, and intergenerational transmission. It adds two levels that concern the relationship of ethnic identity to high-prestige linguistic remnants such as greetings, what Lewis and Simons aptly term symbolic proficiency (Levels 9 & 10).

“A language can be evaluated in terms of the EGIDS by answering five key questions regarding the identity function, vehicularity, state of intergenerational language transmission, literacy acquisition status, and a societal profile of generational language use” (Lewis and Simons 2010). The scale is as follows:

Table 10. Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (adapted from Lewis & Simons 2010 and Fishman 1991)

<b>EGIDS LEVEL</b>	<b>EGIDS LABEL</b>	<b>EGIDS DESCRIPTION</b>	<b>UNESCO Descriptor</b>	<b>UNESCO Factor</b>
0	International	The language is used internationally for a broad range of functions.	Safe	4 (existing domains)
1	National	The language is used in education, work, mass media, government at the nationwide level.	Safe	4 (existing domains)
2	Regional	The language is used for local and regional mass media and governmental services.	Safe	4 (existing domains)
3	Trade	The language is used for local and regional work by both insiders and outsiders.	Safe	4 (existing domains)
4	Educational	Literacy in the language is being transmitted through a system of public education.	Safe	6 (literacy domains)
5	Written	The language is used orally by all generations and is effectively used in written form in parts of the community.	Safe	6 (literacy domains)
6a	Vigorous	The language is used orally by all generations and is being learned by children as their first language.	Safe	1 (intergen. transmission)
6b	Threatened	The language is used orally by all generations but only some of the child-bearing generation are transmitting it to their children.	Vulnerable	1 (intergen. transmission)
7	Shifting	The child-bearing generation knows the language well enough to use it among themselves but none are transmitting it to their children	Definitely Endangered	1 (intergen. transmission)
8a	Moribund	The only remaining active speakers of the language are members of the grandparent generation.	Severely Endangered	1 (intergen. transmission)
8b	Nearly Extinct	The only remaining speakers of the language are members of the grandparent generation or older who have little opportunity to use the language.	Critically Endangered	1 (intergen. transmission)
9	Dormant	The language serves as a reminder of heritage identity for an ethnic community. No one has more than symbolic proficiency.	Extinct	4, Grade 1 (highly ltd. domains)
10	Extinct	No one retains a sense of ethnic identity associated with the language, even for symbolic purposes.	Extinct	4, Grade 1 (highly ltd. domains)

As can be seen, the EGIDS proposal focuses heavily on existing language domains and intergenerational transmission. In a compact format, it provides more nuanced descriptors between levels. It identifies the transition from levels 6b to 7 (Threatened, with only some intergenerational transmission, to Shifting, with no transmission) as the critical point in language attrition. In adding Levels 9 & 10, this model specifies the likely “highly limited domain” of language use found in UNESCO’s Factor 4, Level 1.

Overall, however, the EGIDS proposal simplifies assessment, in that it does not take into account the absolute or relative speaker numbers, community language attitudes, government policies, and existing documentation. Nonetheless, its emphasis on intergenerational transmission (Levels 6–8) means that this assessment tool also requires in situ language use surveying, since such information does not currently appear on internet sites and is only rarely part of otherwise detailed print publications. While EGIDS entail a somewhat briefer survey than the UNESCO factors, both require someone on site gathering information; it cannot be done entirely remotely, and it must be done at regular intervals.

## **2. Language Use Surveys: Gathering data for assessment**

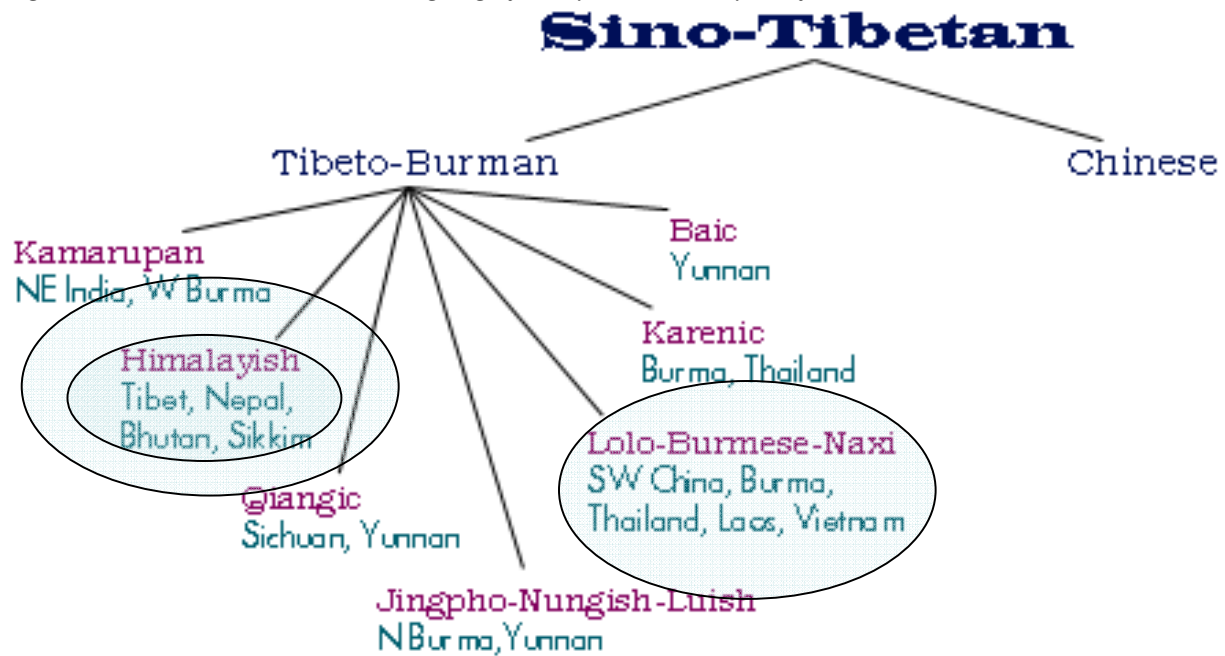
The UNESCO document, EGIDS, and GIDS have highlighted this issue of language use surveys, which are a prerequisite to any accurate assessment of language vitality. A language assessment survey “requires making constant and repeated efforts” (Fishman 2001: 12). Ideally, a speech community should be surveyed every few decades. However, with only 1000 of the nearly 7000 languages in the world having even minimal documentation, even having *one* language-use survey per language variety would be a tremendous contribution.

Any community - or NGO working with a community - should conduct at least a limited language survey, even if language use is not the NGO’s only focus, and even if the language is considered to be vigorous. There are numerous resources available for planning a survey. For an overview of language planning, see First Peoples’ Heritage Language and Culture Heritage Council (2010); for some theoretical background, see Agheysi and Fishman (1970), Liberson (1980) and Waters (1998); for research specifically on language attitudes, see Garrett et al (2003) and Giles et al (1987); for sample survey questions, see Grenoble and Whaley (2006). The main existing reference handbooks are Blair (1990), Grimes (1995), and Blum-Martinez et al (2001). For sample surveys, see Lewis (2009b). In Section 2 below, I exemplify this process, using three Tibeto-Burman languages.

## **3. Assessment Case Studies**

The Tibeto-Burman language family is a large language family of at least 350 languages, a high proportion (> 20%) of which are undescribed (Matisoff 1987-2006). The need for language-use surveys and language documentation is therefore critical. To illustrate the language assessment process, below I apply the UNESCO and GIDS criteria to Amdo macrogroup, as well as to the individual languages Wutun and Sanie.

Figure 1. The Tibeto-Burman language family (Case study subfamilies circled)



Source: <http://stedt.berkeley.edu/html/STfamily.html#Lolo-Burmese>

### 3.1. Amdo (ISO 639-3: adx)

The Amdo Tibetan macro-group has a population of about one million people, all of whom are speakers. The language is distributed broadly across two dozen counties of northeastern Tibet (administratively northern and southeastern Qinghai, and southern Gansu provinces). The macro-group counts as a regional lingua franca, and tends to be classified by region or economic basis, i.e. the “nomadic” (Zeku) vs. “farming” (Xiahe (Labrang)) varieties. Amdo Tibetan is used in many language domains and the media, including in schooling, publishing, and the broadcast media. Amdo Tibetan is being passed on to younger generations. Existing linguistic documentation is relatively copious, but non-comprehensive, leaving ‘blank spots’: these include classifications: Uray (1949), Hermanns (1952), Skal bzang & Skal bzang (2002); phonetics/phonology studies (two subdialects only): Nagano (1980), J. Sun (1986); grammars: Roerichs (1958), Wang (1996), Haller (2004); dictionaries: Ngag dbang (1980), Hua and Klu’bum (1993), Hua (2002), also Bielmeier et al. (2001); language textbooks: Min and Geng (1989), Norbu et al. (2000); unpublished: Prins on “Magsar” in Aba Prefecture; and articles (mostly verbs & historical phonology of Labrang & Themchen). Overall, Amdo Tibetan appears to be vigorous and non-endangered, though there are gaps in its documentation (such as the absence of multimedia corpora).

### 3.2. Wutun (ISO 639-3: wuh)

Wutun is an amalgam of northwestern Chinese, Central and Amdo Tibetan, some Mongolic spoken by some 2000-4000 in two main villages in Rebgong (Tongren), Qinghai province.

Formerly Han Chinese who were part of a military garrison, the people of Wutun today are culturally Tibetan while being officially “Tu” (Monguor, i.e. Mongolic). Wutun (endonymically *Sangeshong*) is an important thankha painting center. There is universal bilingualism in Amdo Tibetan, and the domains in which the Wutun language is spoken are limited to the household and village. Therefore, the language is threatened, particularly because it has neither an orthography nor media in the language; indeed, the language has no official status. Schooling is in Tibetan, and many Wutun intermarriage with Tibetans and Mongolic speakers (“Qinghai Bonan”), even though the language is passed on intergenerationally.

There is a growing amount of documentation on the language, including in phonetics/phonology: Chen (1982, 1986), Xi (1983); a sketch Grammar: Janhunen et al (2008); and an unpublished corpus: Dwyer et al (2001-2008, with assistance from Shawo Dondrup and the Volkswagen Foundation).

### 3.3. Sanie (ISO 639-3: ysy)

Sanie is a Burmic language of the Eastern Yi subgroup with only about 7000 speakers out of a total population of 18,000. Fluent speakers are above 60 years in age, and the youngest semi-speakers are young adults (Bradley 2005). This indicates that intergenerational transmission had already been broken almost twenty years ago. The language, like Wutun, has no official status. There are 76 Sanie villages to the west of Kunming in Yunnan province, in which the Sanie are largely assimilated to Hans. Speakers are multilingual in quasi-standard Eastern Yi (Yunnan Nasu) and Southwestern Mandarin. The language has a Latin-script (Chinese *pinyin*-based) orthography, but only to aid learning Chinese, via a transliteration of a standard Yi language textbook. Only recently have the Sanie developed a sense of having a pan-Yi identity.

Available language documentation is rather thin: only surveys conducted in 1997 and 1999 exist (Bradley 2005). As the only language which preserves the *\*ngw-* onset, Sanie is also of great typological interest, but it is undergoing rapid language shift, as is shown by extensive internal variation.

### 3.4. Assessment Summary: Amdo, Wutun, and Sanie

Table 11. UNESCO score sheet

Factors	Amdo Tibetan ISO 639-3 code: adx	Wutun (wuh)	Sanie (ysy)
	rating		
Intergenerational Language Transmission	5 - strong	5 - strong	2/3 - no under-20s
Absolute Number of Speakers	ca. 1 million	ca. 2000-4000	ca. 7000
Proportion of Speakers within Total Population	5 - ca. 100%	5 - ca. 100%	2 - 39%
Trends in Existing Language Domains	4 - most domains strong	3 - strong private and village use	2/3 - (ltd. info)

Response to New Domains and Media	4 - transliteration on internet	0 - no new media	0 - no new media
Materials for Language Education and Literacy	5 - schooling, media	0 - no orthography	1 - schooling in Std Yi; ltd. orthography
Official Status and Use: Governmental & Institutional Language Attitudes, Policies	4 - regional standard (Dwyer 1998)	3 - no official status; ethnically misclassified	2 - no status; but official policy support
Community Members' Attitudes toward Their Own Language	5 - strong	2 - mixed opinions on language maintenance	1/2 - no transmission to children, suggests active abandonment
Amount and Quality of Documentation	4 - fairly extensive; no corpora	3 - no dictionary; sketch grammar only	1 - survey

### 3.5. Overall assessment

Overall, the Amdo macro-group is strong. However, there are lacunae in documentation areally, and a lack of multimedia corpora. The Wutun language is clearly endangered, even though intergenerational transmission of the language remains strong. If the language is to thrive, however, new language domains are needed, and additional documentation would be advantageous. Sanie is the most severely endangered of the three; transmission has ceased and speakers are actively abandoning the language; there is next to no documentation.

Using the EGIDS model, Amdo would, like with the predecessor GIDS model, rank ambiguously between a Level 2-4: it is a regional language, but is subordinate to Mandarin in media and government domains; it is a trade language, but generally not with outsiders; it is used in education, but not at the highest levels. In the EGIDS model, Wutun would rank at Level 6a “Vigorous” simply because it is being transmitted, even though all other factors (low speaker numbers, lack of literacy, lack of formal support including media and schooling, ethnic misclassification) point to an imminent level of endangerment. Sanie, however, is the least ambiguous of all three in the EGIDS model, ranking a Level 7 “Shifting/Definitively Endangered,” since the child-bearing generation is no longer transmitting the language.

In contrast, the UNESCO tool is broad and gradient enough to have a language show comparative strength in some areas (such as the intergenerational transmission of Wutun), while overall showing a more problematic picture (as Wutun scores zero in several other key domains). An assessment of a different language family may show the opposite. The strength of the UNESCO model is that it allows the evaluator to pinpoint and act on the most problematic areas. If no on-site survey is possible and only a rough estimate is desired, the EGIDS model may well yield faster results, but they may be misleading.

## 4. The Role of NGOs in linguistic and cultural maintenance

Dislocation, urbanization, and globalization have a major effect in language vitality (Bowden and Romanovsky 2007). As the case studies make clear, intergenerational language transmission, together with community and regional support and positive language attitudes and policies, are

key to the continued vitality of a language. Given that Tibeto-Burman has between 250 and 400 languages (Matisoff 1987-2006), the involvement of NGOs, together with local communities and regional or national governments, is crucial in linguistic and cultural maintenance.

Maintaining or revitalizing a language entails community collaboration, assessment, and documentation. Primary pitfalls include “survey mania” (mistaking language use surveys as the goal, rather than a means to an end, i.e. language maintenance and revitalization) and underestimating time and resources (the technology need not be complex, but training and plenty of time are critical ingredients for successful projects).

As noted in Section 2 above, since language use surveys are still both infrequent and not comprehensive, the information available on many threatened languages is currently insufficient to allow for evaluation. Beyond the language use survey techniques listed in Section 2, social surveys can also be useful in evaluating language contact and vitality. These include the techniques of rapid rural assessment (Banks 2000, Brenzinger et al 2003) and social mapping (Bowden and Romanovsky 2007), or a combination of the two.

The distinction in EGIDS between Dormant and Extinct languages is important. Dormant languages are those for which “revitalization” may not require establishing the language as an everyday means of communication. Retaining greetings, specific words or rituals is often an achievable and satisfying goal. Revitalization efforts must be tailored to the desires of the community rather than simply assuming that high ratings on all factors are equally important.

## 5. Recommendations

NGOs may consider the following steps:

1. *Strategic Assessment*: Available resources, interdigitation with other foundation goals  
*If the language is...*

Threatened ⇒ Fortification (via education)

Endangered ⇒ Revitalization (via Domain expansion)

Critically endangered ⇒ Documentation

Promote the economic and social advantages of linguistic diversity; get involved with work on “newly discovered” Tibeto-Burman languages. Consider piloting longitudinal assessments of these and other languages.

2. *Collaboration with players*: Speaker communities, governments, NGOs, language archives and revitalization specialists

Key aspect of collaboration include defining mutually-agreeable goals and expanding language domains (e.g. via new media).

3. *Multimedia documentation*: audio-visual, annotated

One critical aspect for project sustainability is to build local documentation capacity in the areas of both multimedia documentation and data capture. Documentation is defined broadly to include not only linguistic forms, but also a broad range of symbolic and other cultural practices, such as metaphor, dance, politeness, and ceremony.

4. *Preparation of language materials*: pedagogical; child/adult; grammars and dictionaries for communities

5. *Training*: Of local language workers, including master-apprentice training (Hinton 1994) Instruction should be provided in the native and dominant languages, with the native language first if possible. Training should be extensive for teachers, and also for semi-speakers of the language. Students should also be trained in documentary and archiving methodologies.

6. *Consider working towards or linking to a language and culture portal*: as in LinguistList's EMELD portal, or the Tibetan and Himalayan Digital Library; Build social networks and data networks, with community language researchers at the center. Community needs should be matched with training and re-purposable resources.

7. *Collaborate with existing language archives and revitalization experts*. Infrastructure building is a key component, including the possibility of creating small new local repositories. Collaboration allows the use of existing tools, makes repositories less daunting and ensures interoperability between searchable, accessible resources, to ensure broad access and preservation into the future.

Maintaining a language in a multilingual environment (which is the norm rather than the exception worldwide) requires constant proactive measures. "To defy history, leading people to believe that we shall be the first to maintain the balanced coexistence of two languages in a given territory, is an error which will be paid for dearly" (Prats 1990). Regular and repeated assessment of language status can be a powerful tool in language maintenance.



## Appendix: Language Vitality Assessment Form

based on : Brenzinger, Matthias, Akira Yamamoto, Noriko Aikawa, Dmitri Koundioubu, Anahit Minasyan, Arienne Dwyer, Colette Grinevald, Michael Krauss, Osahito Miyaoka, Osamu Sakiyama, Riëks Smeets and Ofelia Zepeda. 2003. *Language Vitality and Endangerment*. Paris: UNESCO Expert Meeting on Safeguarding Endangered Languages.

Factors	Language name: ISO 639-3 code:	
	rating	
Intergenerational Language Transmission		
Absolute Number of Speakers		
Proportion of Speakers within the Total Population		
Trends in Existing Language Domains		
Response to New Domains and Media		
Materials for Language Education and Literacy		
Official Status and Use: Governmental & Institutional Language Attitudes and Policies		
Community Members' Attitudes toward Their Own Language		
Amount and Quality of Documentation		

## References

- Agheysi, Rebecca and Joshua A. Fishman. 1970. Language attitude studies: A brief survey of methodological approaches. *Anthropological Linguistics* 12.5: 137-157.
- Aristar, Anthony, Helen Aristar-Dry and Martha Ratliff. 2009. *Multitree: a digital library of language relationships*. Online: <http://multitree.linguistlist.org/>
- Banks, Glenn. 2000. Social impact assessment monitoring and household surveys. In L.R. Goldman, ed. *Social impact analysis: an applied anthropology manual*. Oxford: Berg, pp. 35-59.
- Bielmeier, Roland, et al. 2001 preprint. *Comparative Dictionary of Tibetan Dialects*. Berne: University of Berne.
- Blair, Frank. 1990. *Survey on a shoestring: A manual for small-scale language survey*. Arlington, TX: Summer Institute of Linguistics and the University of Texas at Arlington.
- Blum-Martinez, Rebecca, Leanne Hinton, and Christine P. Sims. 2001. *A Manual for Community-Based Language Revitalization*. Albuquerque, NM: Linguistic Institute for Native Americans.
- Bowden, John and Kathy Romanovsky. 2007. Rapid Rural Appraisal. Presentation at the International Conference on Austronesian Endangered Languages Documentation. Taiwan.
- Bradley, David. 2005. Introduction: language policy and language endangerment in China. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 173, pp. 1–21.
- Brenzinger, Matthias and Tjeerd deGraaf. 2004-2008. Documenting Endangered languages and language maintenance. *UNESCO encyclopedia of life support systems (EOLSS)* 6.20B.10.3.
- Chen Naixiong. 1982. Wutunhua chutan. [A preliminary investigation into the Wutun vernacular]. *Minzu yuwen* 10-18.
- Chen Naixiong. 1986. Guanyu Wutunhua. [On Wutun language/An Outline of the Wutun Linguistic Structure]. *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 31: 33-52.
- Decker, Kendall D. 1992. Factors Affecting Language Maintenance and Shift in Chitral District, Pakistan. University of Texas at Arlington: Unpublished Master's thesis.
- Dwyer, Arienne M. 1998. The Texture of Tongues: Languages and Power in China. In William Safran, ed., *Nationalism and Ethnoregional Identities in China*. Frank Cass, pp. 68–85.
- Dwyer, Arienne M. et al. 2001-2008. Salar-Monguor-Wutun Documentation Project. VW-DOBES. Online archive: <http://www.mpi.nl/DOBES>
- First Peoples' Heritage Language and Culture Heritage Council 2010. Stages of Language Planning. <http://www.fphlcc.ca/language/revitalization/language-planning/stages-of-language-planning> Accessed November 22, 2010.
- Fishman, Joshua A. 1991. *Reversing Language Shift*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Fishman, Joshua A., ed. 2001. *Can threatened languages be saved? Reversing language shift, revisited: A 21st century perspective*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- Garrett, Paul, Nikolas Coupland, and Angie Williams. 2003. *Investigating language attitudes: Social meanings of dialect, ethnicity and performance*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press.

- Giles, Howard, R.Y. Bourhis, and D. Taylor. 1977. Towards a theory of language in ethnic group relations. In Howard Giles, ed. *Language, Ethnicity and Intergroup relations*. London: Academic Press.
- Giles, Howard, M. Hewstone, E.B. Ryan, and P. Johnson. 1987. Research on language attitudes. In Ulrich Ammon, Norbert Dittmann, and Klaus J. Mattheier, eds. *Sociolinguistics: an international handbook of the science of language and society*. Berlin: de Gruyter, pp 585-597.
- Grenoble, Lenore A. and Lindsay J. Whaley. 2006. *Saving Languages. An introduction to language revitalization*. Chapter 7.9. Sample Survey questions (pp. 198-201). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Grimes, Joseph. 1995. *Language survey reference guide*. Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics.
- Haller, Felix. 2004. *Dialekt und Erzählungen von Themchen*. Bonn: VGH Wissenschaftsverlag.
- Hinton, Leanne 1994. *Flutes of Fire. Essays on California Indian languages*. Berkeley, California: Heyday Books.
- Hermanns, Matthias. 1952. Tibetische Dialekte von Amdo. *Anthropos* 47: 193-202.
- Hua Kan and Klu 'bum rgyal 1993. *Amduo Zangyu kouyu cidian* [Colloquial Amdo dialect dictionary]. Lanzhou: Gansu Minzu.
- Janhunen, Juha, Marja Peltomaa, Eriki Sandman and Xiawu Dongzhou. 2008. *Wutun*. Munich: LincomEuropa.
- Lewis, M. Paul. 2006. Towards a categorization of some of the world's endangered languages. SIL International. Online: <http://www.sil.org/silewp/abstract.asp?ref=2006-002>
- Lewis, M. Paul, ed. 2009. *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*. 16th edition. Dallas: SIL International. Online: <http://www.ethnologue.org>
- Lewis, M. Paul, ed. 2009b. Language Surveys. SIL International. Online: [http://www.ethnologue.com/show\\_subject.asp?code=LSV](http://www.ethnologue.com/show_subject.asp?code=LSV) . Accessed November 22, 2010.
- Lewis, M. Paul and Gary Simons. 2010. Assessing Endangerment: Expanding Fishman's GIDS. *Revue Roumaine de Linguistique/Romanian Review of Linguistics*, v. 2.
- Liberson, Stanley. 1980. Procedures for improving sociolinguistic surveys of language maintenance and language shift. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 25.1:11-27.
- Krauss, Michael. 1992. The world's languages in crisis. *Language* 68.1:4-10.
- Matisoff, James et al. 1987-2006. Sino-Tibetan Etymological Dictionary and Thesaurus (STEDT). Online at <http://stedt.berkeley.edu/>
- Nagano, Yasuhiko. 1980. *Amdo Sherpa Dialect*. Tokyo: Institute for the Study of Languages of and Cultures of Asia and Africa.
- Min Shengzhi and Geng Xianzong. 1989. *Amduo Zangyu huihua xuanbian* [Selected dialogues of Amdo Tibetan]. Xining: Minzu.
- Ngag dbang Chos dar 1980. *Amduo kouyu yu cihui* [Colloquial Amdo Vocabulary]. Lanzhou: NW Nationalities Institute.
- Norbu, Kalsang, Karl Adam Peet, dPal Idan bKra shis and Kevin Stuart. 2000. *Modern Oral Amdo Tibetan*. Mellen.
- Prats, M. 1990. Reflexió ignasiana sobre la normalització lingüística. In M. Prats, A. Rafanell and A. Rossich, eds. *El futur de la llengua catalana*. Barcelona: Empúries, pp. 9-28.

- Prins, Marielle. 2002. Towards a common language: Amdo perspectives on attempts at language standardization. In Toni Huber, ed., *Amdo Tibet in Transition: Society and culture in the post-Mao era*. Leiden: Brill.
- de Roerich, Georges. 1958. *Le Parler de l'Amdo*. Roma: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente.
- Skal bzang 'Gyur med and Skal bzang Dbyangs can (Gesang Jumian and Gesang Yangjing). 2002. *Zangyu fangyan gailun*. [An introduction to Tibetan Dialects]. Beijing: Minzu.
- Sprigg, Richard Keith. 1979. The Golok Dialect and written Tibetan past-tense verb forms. *BSOAS* 42.1: 53-60.
- Sun, T.-S. Jackson. 1986. *Aspects of the Phonology of Amdo Tibetan: Ndzorge Sæme Xɣra Dialect*. Tokyo: Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa.
- Sun, T.-S. Jackson. 1991. Evidentials in Amdo Tibetan.
- UNESCO Ad hoc expert group on endangered languages (Matthias Brenzinger, Arienne M. Dwyer, Tjeerd de Graaf, Collette Grinevald, Michael Krauss, Osahito Miyaoka, Nicholas Ostler, Osamu Sakiyama, María E. Villalón, Akira Y. Yamamoto, Ofelia Zapeda). 2003. *Language vitality and endangerment*. Document submitted to the International Expert Meeting on UNESCO Programme Safeguarding of Endangered Languages, Paris, 10-12 March 2003. Online: <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/doc/src/00120-EN.pdf>
- Uray, Géza. 1949. The Classification of the Dialects of Eastern Tibet. Budapest: PhD Diss.
- Wang Qingshan. 1989. *A grammar of spoken Amdo Tibetan*. Chengdu: Sichuan minzu.
- Waters, Glenys. 1998. *Local literacies: Theory and practice*. Dallas: Summer Institute Language surveys.
- Xi Yuanlin. 1983. Tongren Tuzu kaocha baogao. Sizhaizi (Wutun) de minzu lishi, yuan he yishu. Di'er bu: yuyan [A report on an investigation of Tongren Monguors: the history, language, and art of the four villages (Wutun). Part II: Language]. Qinghai Nationalities College Tongren Monguor Research group. Ms.