LINGUISTIC CLASSIFICATIONS OF ABORIGINAL LANGUAGES IN CANADA: IMPLICATIONS FOR ASSESSING LANGUAGE DIVERSITY, ENDANGERMENT AND REVITALIZATION

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ABSTRACT / RÉSUMÉ

Any study of language diversity and endangerment necessarily reflects the linguistic classification underlying the data. This paper explores the connections between the classification of Aboriginal languages in Canada and the potential impacts on framing the picture of regional diversity, language vitality, endangerment, and revitalization; and, their implications for language planning, policy and programs. The impacts of two separate linguistic classifications are explored using census-based language data. Different outcomes are highlighted along various language indicators such as: the degree of language endangerment; regional measures of viable and endangered languages; and revitalization of endangered languages through second language learning.

Toute étude portant sur la diversité des langues et leur risque de disparition reflète nécessairement la classification linguistique sous-tendant les données. Le présent document explore les liens existant entre la classification des langues autochtones au Canada et les répercussions possibles de celle-ci sur le portrait d'ensemble formé par la diversité régionale, la vitalité, le risque de disparition et la revitalisation des langues, ainsi que les incidences de ce bilan sur la planification, les politiques et les programmes linguistiques. Les répercussions des deux classifications linguistiques distinctes sont étudiées au moyen de données linguistiques fondées sur le recensement. Divers résultats sont mis en évidence, ainsi que divers indicateurs linguistiques tels que le degré de risque de disparition des langues, l'évaluation régionale de la viabilité et du risque de disparition des langues, ainsi que la revitalisation des langues au moyen de l'apprentissage d'une langue seconde.

INTRODUCTION

Canada is known to have a rich diversity of Aboriginal languages, comprising First Nation, Inuit and Métis languages that reflect a variety of distinctive histories, cultures and identities. The state of these many different languages also varies considerably, some with flourishing populations of speakers, young and old, while other languages are smaller and endangered, with declining and aging numbers of speakers.

The classification of languages is a necessarily important consideration in any study of language diversity and endangerment, especially since linguistic classifications can vary, depending on the purpose and criteria used in the identification of languages. In fact, the definition of language itself can be problematic:

> *Due to the nature of language and the various perspectives brought to its study, it is not surprising that a number of issues prove controversial. …The definition of language one chooses depends on the purpose one has in identifying a language. Some base their definition on purely linguistic grounds. Others recognize that social, cultural, or political factors must also be taken into account… Not all scholars share the same set of criteria for what constitutes a "language" and what constitutes a "dialect." (Gordon and Grimes 2005, 8)*

This paper explores the connections between the classification of languages and the potential impacts on shaping the picture of regional diversity, language vitality, endangerment, and revitalization; and consequently, on the implications for language planning, policy and programs. The significant impacts of two separate linguistic classifications are demonstrated through examples that highlight their different outcomes along various measures, such as: the classification and numbers of Aboriginal languages, speakers and their communities by degree of language endangerment; regional numbers and shares of viable and endangered languages; and the extent of language revival through second language learning, by degree of endangerment.

BACKGROUND

Observers of Aboriginal languages in Canada are fortunate to be able to draw on a rich source of data in the Census to better understand the diversity and state of Aboriginal languages, especially at the community level. Furthermore, census data on languages spoken within specific communities can also be utilized in relation to other more detailed linguistic classifications (Norris 2009), as employed in this paper.

The linguistic classification underlying census data is based on Kinkade (1991), which identifies some 50 different Aboriginal languages spoken by First Nations, Inuit and Métis, categorized into 11 language families or isolates. From this linguistic classification the Census provides data, not for all 50 languages, but for 35 separate categories, owing to small numbers of speakers.[1] By contrast, the most recent fifteenth edition of *Ethnologue: Languages of the world*, estimates that within Canada there are 78 living (spoken as a first language) languages "Indigenous" to the country (Gordon and Grimes 2005).

The classification framework utilized in the third edition of the UNESCO A*tlas of the world's languages in danger* (2009a), lists 86 Aboriginal languages. This estimate is based on three major sources: Statistics Canada census data; the previous second edition of the *Atlas*, which identifies 104 languages (UNESCO 2001), and the *Ethnologue*, which, as noted above, identifies 78 languages (Gordon and Grimes 2005). With respect to the third edition, the decrease from the second edition is attributable mainly to the dropping of the Trade or Pidgin languages and the long-extinct (greater than 100 years) languages. It is most compatible with, although not identical to, that of the *Ethnologue*, yielding 86 distinct languages, plus two that are known to have become extinct within living memory. The gap relative to the *Ethnologue* is attributable mainly to the splitting of Inuktitut into several distinct dialects, similar to those previously identified in the second edition (Norris 2009).

While Kinkade, UNESCO and the *Ethnologue* all recognize the significant linguistic diversity of Aboriginal languages in Canada, the UNESCO framework provides not only a more detailed classification of languages for measuring level of endangerment, but also, more importantly, obtains perhaps a more consistent approach across regions in detailing the number of different languages, thereby allowing for more reliable comparisons of regional diversity and endangerment. It is always necessary to be cognizant of the limitations of comparability across geographic areas associated with consistency of linguistic classifications, whether across regions within the same country or across different countries. As the *Atlas* notes regarding international comparisons of language endangerment, "…countries with high linguistic diversity tend to have high numbers of endangered languages, while countries where very few languages are currently spoken tend to have few that are endangered… [yet, in terms of the comparability of the level of endangerment] …ratios of languages in danger cannot be calculated until consistent methodologies are applied in

assessing the total number of languages in each country or area" (UNESCO 2009b).

ENDANGERED LANGUAGES

It has been estimated that only about a third of Aboriginal languages originally spoken in Canada have a good chance of survival and that "fewer than half… are likely to survive for another fifty years…" (Kinkade 1991). According to the 2006 Census, out of the 1,172,800 people who self-identified as First Nation, Métis or Inuit Aboriginal, 220,000, or one in five (19%), said they had learned an Aboriginal language as their mother tongue or first language (Statistics Canada 2008); this is down from 21% in 2001.[2] Over the past twenty five years, many Aboriginal languages in Canada have undergone long-term declines in intergenerational transmission and mother tongue (first-language) populations, the effect being that some endangered languages now have fewer than 200 first-language speakers, and that these endangered languages are spoken mostly by the older parental, grandparental or great-parental generations.

ASSESSING LANGUAGE ENDANGERMENT

In terms of assessing degree of language endangerment of different languages there are various approaches and criteria that can be considered, just as in language identification. For example, Kinkade (1991) developed a five-category classification of Aboriginal language viability and endangerment mainly on the basis of speaker populations and communities as follows: "Viable large" languages have a large enough population base that long-term survival is relatively assured; "Viable but small" languages have more than 1,000 speakers, spoken in isolated and/or well-organized communities with strong self-awareness; "Endangered" languages, spoken by enough people to make survival a possibility given community interest and support; "Near Extinction" beyond the possibility of revival (spoken by only a few elderly people); and "Already Extinct" (no speakers) (Kinkade 1991). Languages differ significantly in the size of their speaker populations, with the more endangered having few speakers, some less than a hundred, compared to the more viable large and widespread languages having relatively large numbers, generally in the thousands.

A more comprehensive approach is used in UNESCO's framework for assessing language vitality and endangerment. This framework of nine major evaluative factors, which recognizes that no single factor alone can be used to assess a language's vitality, incorporates a number of demographic measures, including: intergenerational language transmission, absolute number of speakers, and proportion of speakers within the total population (UNESCO Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages 2003). UNESCO's third edition of the *Atlas of the world's languages in danger* employed the major factor of "intergenerational language transmission" for purposes of determining degrees of language endangerment. These intergenerational classifications, summarized in Table 1, indicate the extent to which the languages are spoken by all generations, including children, or just the older adult generations of parents, grandparents, great-grandparents and others. They range from "vulnerable" (potentially endangered but corresponding more to Kinkade's "viable" category); "definitely" endangered; "severely" endangered; and "critically" endangered (similar to Kinkade's "close to extinction" category) and extinct.

In the case of Canada, the level of endangerment assigned to each language in the Atlas for most languages of the country's 86 languages is based on community-level measures and indicators developed from the 2001 Census where data permit.[3] Indicators included the average age of the mother-tongue population (first language speakers) combined with the absolute number of speakers to estimate the UNESCO factor of "intergenerational language transmission," Factor 1 (Norris 2009). Languages that are viable or healthy, and are being passed on to the next generation of children, have lower average ages than

TABLE 1: Classification of Languages by Degree of Language Endangerment Based on UNESCO Factor 1 of Intergenerational Transmission

DEGREE OF ENDANGERMENT	INTERGENERATIONAL LANGUAGE TRANSMISSION
Safe	Language is spoken by all generations; intergenerational transmission is uninterrupted >> *not included in the Atlas*
Vulnerable	Most children speak the language, but it may be restricted to certain domains (e.g. home)
Definitely endangered	Children no longer learn the language as mother tongue in the home
Severely endangered	Language is spoken by grandparents and older generations; while the parent generation may understand it, they do not speak it to children or among themselves
Critically endangered	The youngest speakers are grandparents and older, and they speak the language partially and infrequently
Extinct	There are no speakers left >> *included in the Atlas if presumably extinct since the 1950s*

Source: UNESCO. 2009. Atlas of the world's languages in danger. http://www.unesco.org/culture/en/endangeredlanguages/atlas/.

endangered ones. The level of endangerment assigned to a given language is based on the characteristics of first-language speakers residing in the Aboriginal communities associated with that particular language. Since the derivation of the more detailed language classifications in the Atlas is dependent on the location of Aboriginal communities, level of endangerment could therefore not be assigned to speakers outside of these communities.[4]

The following discussion explores the extent to which the Census and UNESCO classifications may yield different outcomes with respect to measures of regional diversity, language endangerment and revitalization of Aboriginal languages in Canada. In order to assess the impact of the two different linguistic classifications the same methodology for assigning level of endangerment as employed in the *Atlas*, is used for both. This involves applying the same measures of endangerment based on 2001 Census community-level data to languages classified according to Statistics Canada's census-based linguistic classification. Levels of intergenerational transmission were calculated for communities belonging to each of the 32 individual Census language categories where census data were available (data were not available for three of the 35 categories).

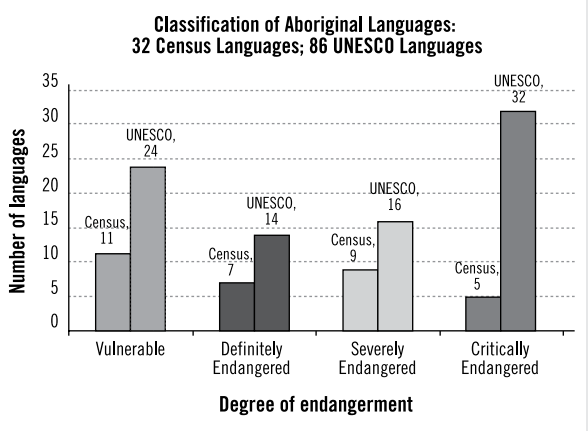
The UNESCO classification provides considerably more linguistic detail as compared to the Census, mainly in the case of the smaller, endangered languages, but also for the larger, more viable languages. For example, in the case of larger viable languages, the Census classification treats Cree and its variants as one language, whereas the UNESCO classification recognizes six different versions of Cree as separate languages rather than dialects; similarly the UNESCO framework provides more detailed Inuit language categories, with 11 different languages, compared to one of Inuktitut prior to 2006 Census (two listed in 2006). Regionally, the UNESCO classification yields higher numbers of languages, especially in British Columbia and Ontario, owing mainly to the impact of a greater number of languages that have only a few speakers.

The more detailed UNESCO classification yields a somewhat different picture of language endangerment in comparison to that based on the Census classification. On one hand, for some viable languages like Cree, more linguistic detail can produce a greater number of viable languages, increasing from one "viable large" language of Cree, in the Census, to two counts of "viable large" languages of Plains Cree and Swampy Cree, and four counts of "viable small" Cree languages. On the other hand, in the case of endangered languages, more linguistic detail not surprisingly results in greater numbers of more severely or critically endangered languages. Using the example of "other Salish" in the Census, community-level calculations for the UNESCO factor 1 of "intergenerational transmission" yielded a degree of endangerment of "severely" endangered overall. With the more detailed UNESCO-based Salish languages, corresponding separate community-level calculations specific to each of the several languages yielded counts of: one definitely endangered language; four severely endangered; and three critically endangered languages.

CLASSIFICATION OF ABORIGINAL LANGUAGES BY DEGREE OF ENDANGERMENT

Both the Census and UNESCO frameworks demonstrate that the majority of languages – 66% and 72% respectively – are endangered. But a significant difference emerges between the two linguistic classifications concerning the degree of endangerment: 32 languages, or well over a third, 37%, of the 86 different UNESCO-based languages, are critically endangered in contrast to just five or 16% of the 32 Census-based languages. Much of that differential is associated with more detailed languages shifting from "severely" endangered category under the broader Census classification (at 28%) to "critically," within the UNESCO classification, with a lower proportion, at 19%, "severely" endangered (Figure 1).

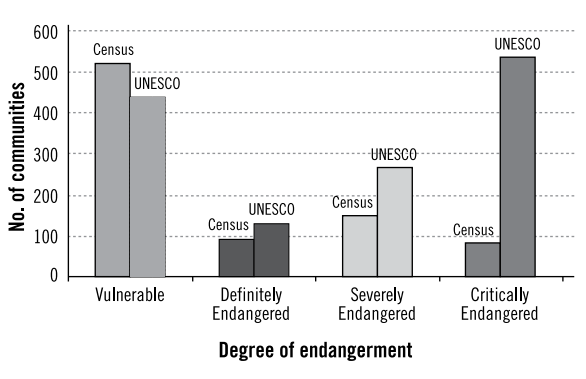
FIGURE 1: Distribution of Aboriginal Languages by Degree of Language Endangerment, based on UNESCO Factor of Intergenerational Transmission



The distribution of close to 900 Aboriginal communities by degree of language endangerment differs somewhat between the two different classifications,

reflecting UNESCO's higher number and share of endangered languages. Under the Census classification, 62% of communities have traditional languages that are categorized as "vulnerable," (but not endangered) whereas under the UNESCO classification, the number of communities in the "vulnerable" category drops to 440, or 50% of communities (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2: Number of Communities, by Degree of Endangerment, Based on Census and UNESCO Linguistic Classifications, Canada, 2001



INVERSE RELATIONSHIPS OF ABORIGINAL LANGUAGES, SPEAKERS AND COMMUNITIES, BY LEVEL OF LANGUAGE ENDANGERMENT

According to the UNESCO classification, the 37% of Aboriginal languages that are critically endangered are spoken by only 1,200 or 1% of first-language speakers; conversely, the 28% of languages (24) that are "vulnerable" or viable (not considered endangered), are spoken by the vast majority, some 134,000, or 90%, of Aboriginal language speakers in communities. The census-based classification yields similar, but less pronounced observations: 16% of languages critically endangered are spoken by just 1% of first-language speakers; whereas the 34% of languages not endangered are spoken by 93% of speakers (Figure 3).

Languages not only vary in numbers of speakers; they also differ significantly in the number of communities they are spoken in, with some languages having only one or two communities, and others with a large number of communities, some numbering in the hundreds. According to the UNESCO-based classification, 62 or nearly three out of four languages (72%) are endangered; however, they represent the traditional languages of just half of Aboriginal communities, while the remaining 28% of languages that are "vulnerable" or viable – but not endangered, are spoken in the other half of communities. Furthermore, the proportion, 37%, of languages critically endangered is four times the proportion of communities (9%) where critically endangered languages are spoken. The census-based classification yields similar, though less pronounced contrasts: while two out of three languages (66%) are endangered, they are spoken in just 38% of Aboriginal communities, conversely the 34% of languages that are not endangered are spoken in almost two out of three communities; the proportion of languages critically endangered; 16%, is also four times the community share at 4% (Figure 3).

Overall, both linguistic classifications demonstrate the inverse relationships between numbers of languages, speakers and communities with respect to degrees of endangerment. Although the majority of Aboriginal languages are endangered, they are spoken by a minority of speakers, and represent the traditional languages of half or less of Aboriginal communities (depending on the classification). Some differences between classifications are especially significant: according to the UNESCO classification, well over a third of languages, 37%, are critically endangered- yet under the less detailed Census classification, that share is much lower at just 16%; similarly, languages are critically endangered in one in ten Aboriginal communities compared to just one in twenty with the Census linguistic classification (Figure 3).

FIGURE 3: Number and Percent Distribution of Aboriginal Languages, Communities and First Language Speaker Populations, by Degree of Language Endangerment, Canada, 2001

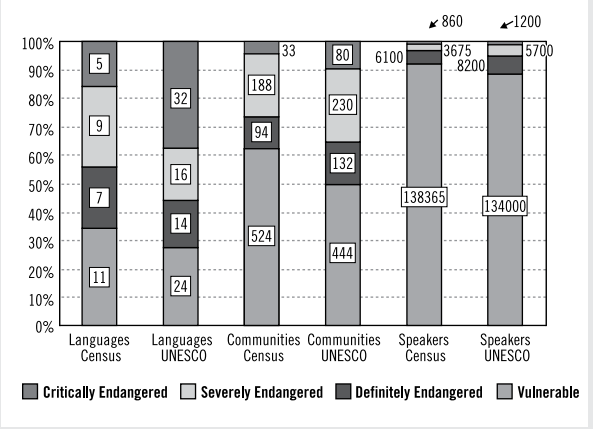
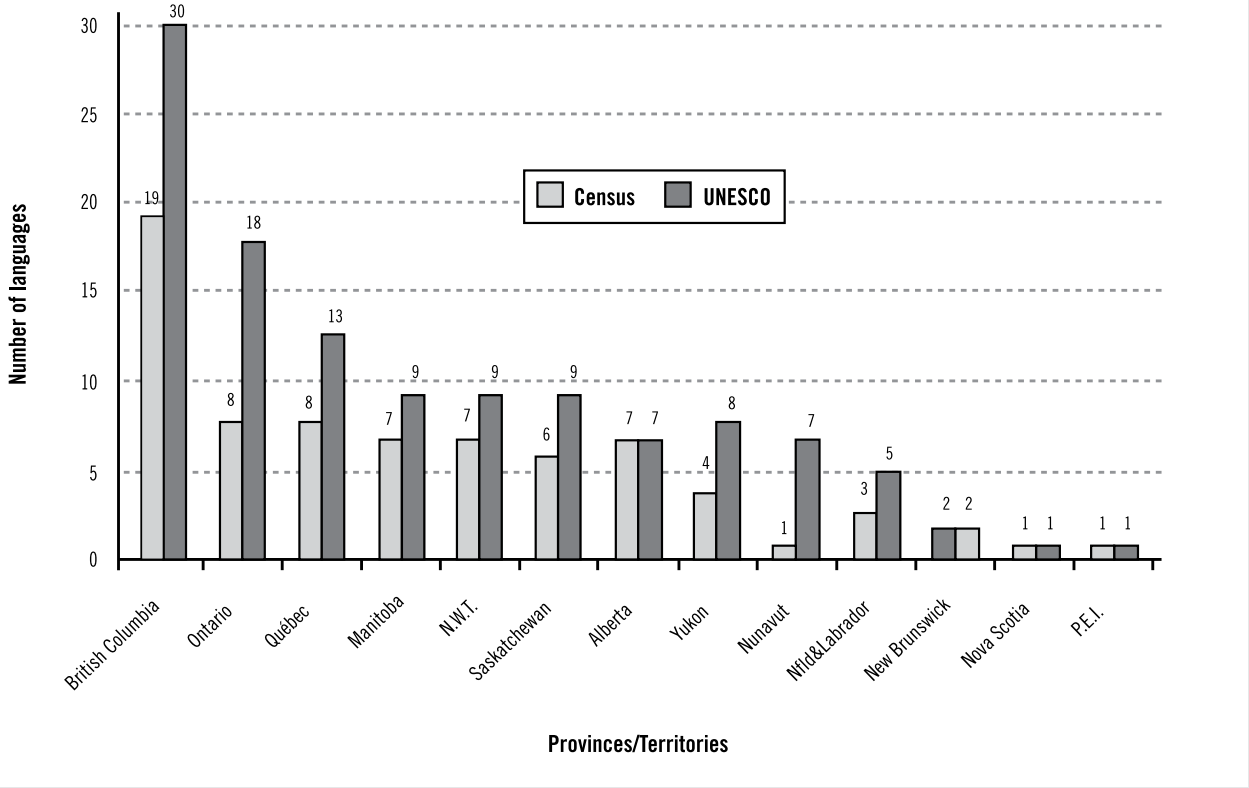


FIGURE 4: Number of Aboriginal Languages, According to Census and UNESCO Linguistic Classifications, by Provinces and Territories, 2001



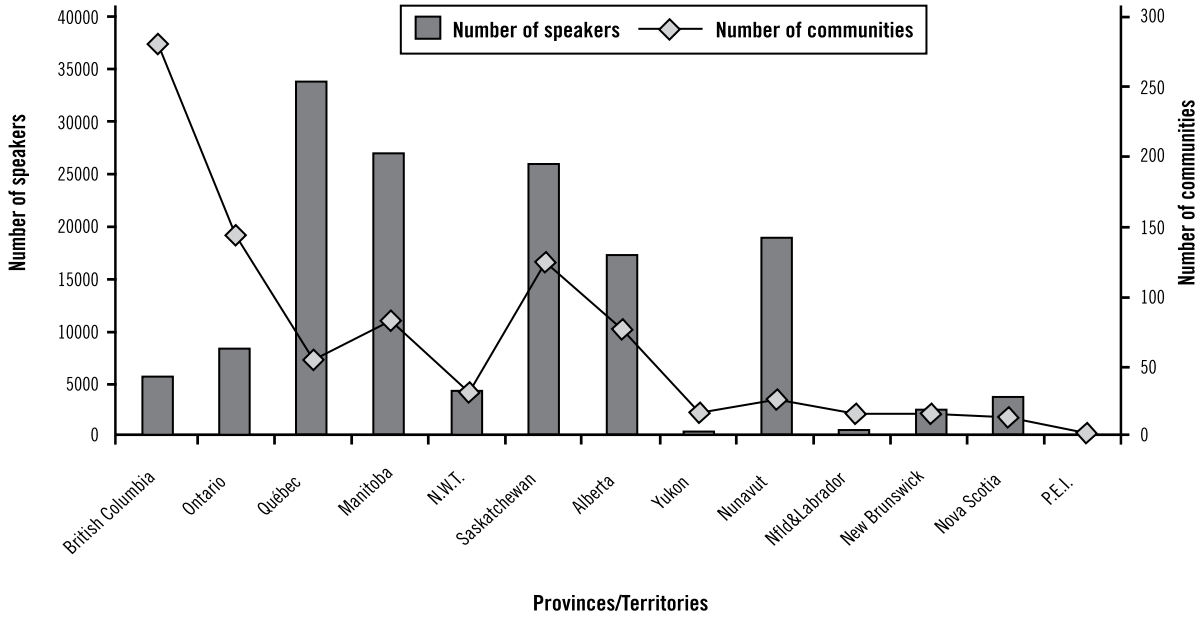
REGIONAL PATTERNS, COMPARISONS OF DIVERSITY AND ENDANGERMENT SIGNIFICANTLY DIFFERENT

The differences between the Census and UNESCO classification frameworks are most visible when looking at linguistic diversity at the provincial/territorial level. The measure of linguistic diversity is most affected in the province of British Columbia, the area of highest linguistic diversity in Canada. Under the more detailed classification, 30 of the 86 different languages in Canada are identified in British Columbia, compared to 19 out of the 35 classified under the Census classification. With the more detailed UNESCO classification the numbers of languages are also higher notably in the provinces of Ontario, Québec and the territories of Yukon and Nunavut (Figure 4).

Significant shifts occur between the two different classifications for some provinces. For example, British Columbia's share of Aboriginal languages spoken in Canada is just over half (about 55%) under the Census classification, but is lower at about a third (35%), with the UNESCO classification; Ontario's share remains more or less the same between the two classifications, at 23% and 21% respectively.

It is important to note that large numbers of languages do not necessarily correspond to large numbers of speakers. While British Columbia does have the largest number of languages (according to both linguistic classifications), as well as the largest number of Aboriginal communities (284), it has one of the smallest provincial populations in Aboriginal communities with an Aboriginal mother tongue (5,700). In contrast, the provinces of Québec and Manitoba have fewer languages, (13 and 9 respectively), and fewer Aboriginal communities (55 and 84 respectively), but the largest populations in Aboriginal communities reporting an Indigenous mother tongue, of nearly 34,000 and 27,000 respectively (Figure 5). To some extent these patterns reflect the *Atlas* observation that areas of high linguistic diversity tend to have high numbers of endangered languages, which is certainly the case with British Columbia.

FIGURE 5: Numbers of Aboriginal Language Speakers and Aboriginal Communities, by Provinces and Territories, 2001



INCREASES IN "CRITICALLY" ENDANGERED LANGUAGES FOR SOME REGIONS

Differences between linguistic classifications do have significant implications in assessing the state and endangerment of Aboriginal languages across provinces, and territories, and most notably for the areas of highest linguistic diversity. In the case of British Columbia, for example, a significantly higher number, 13, and proportion, 43%, of the province's 30 languages were categorized as critically endangered from the more detailed UNESCO classification as compared to four, or 24% of its 17 census-classified languages (two of 19 languages not classified due to insufficient Census data). Those provinces and territories that saw increased linguistic diversity with the more detailed language classification also tended to have higher numbers and proportions of their languages categorized as critically endangered (Figures 6a and 6b).

SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES IN REGIONAL SHARES OF ENDANGERED LANGUAGES

Similarly, provincial shares of endangered languages in Canada differ significantly between the two different classifications. British Columbia's provincial share of endangered languages represents the large majority (71%) of the 21 endangered languages under the Census classification – but less than half (45%) of the 62 endangered languages with the UNESCO classification.

The two language classifications also differ in the categorization of Aboriginal communities and their speakers by degree of endangerment. This reflects in part the additional non-census language information about endangerment of specific languages and their communities. For example, information for the many smaller endangered languages in Ontario from the more detailed UNESCO classification would suggest that the province's Aboriginal languages are endangered in about two-thirds of communities, as opposed to possibly 17% (including communities with insufficient Census data) or just 1% if limited to communities with Census data. In Ontario, some of the additional languages classified with UNESCO include some of the smaller Mohawk and Iroquois languages, for which 2001 Census data are unavailable.[5]

As well, with greater linguistic detail, the proportion of speakers whose language is categorized as endangered increases for some, but not all, provinces and territories; differing in some cases relatively little, such as in British Columbia (owing to the few speakers associated with the additional smaller endangered languages). In Labrador, though, when community-level

FIGURE 6A: Aboriginal Languages, by Degree of Language Endangerment, for Provinces and Territories with at Least Five Languages According to Both Census & UNESCO Linguistic Classifications, 2001

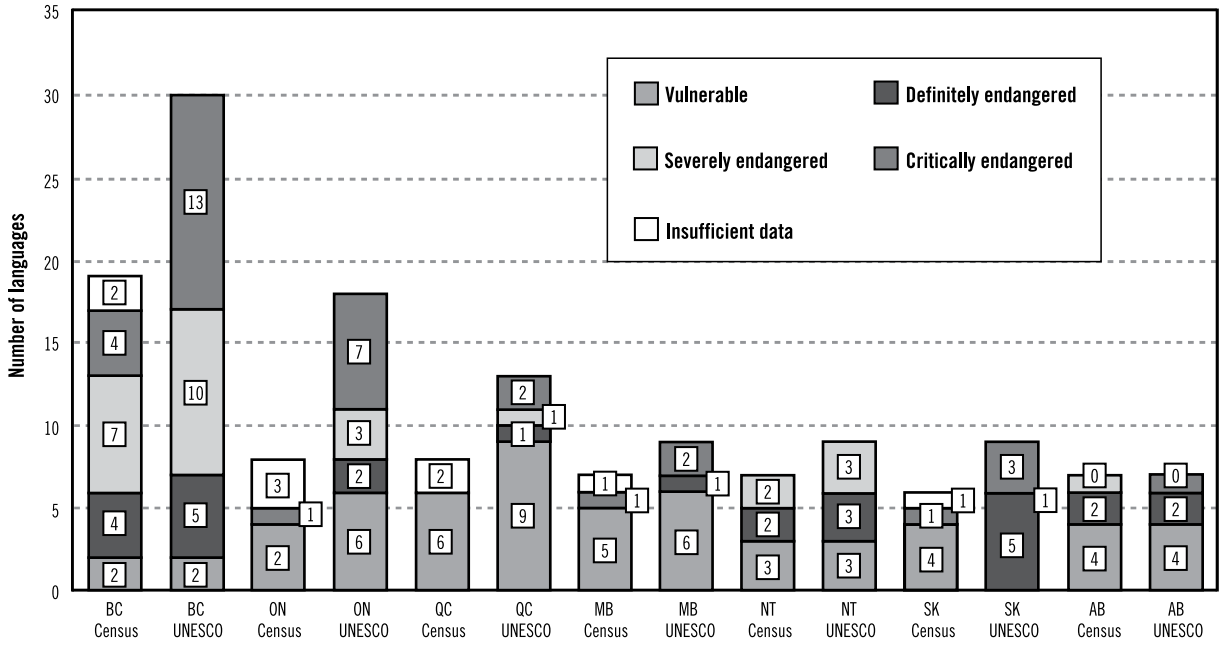


FIGURE 6B: Aboriginal Languages, by Degree of Language Endangerment, for Provinces and Territories with Less Than Five Languages According to Census Linguistic Classifications, 2001

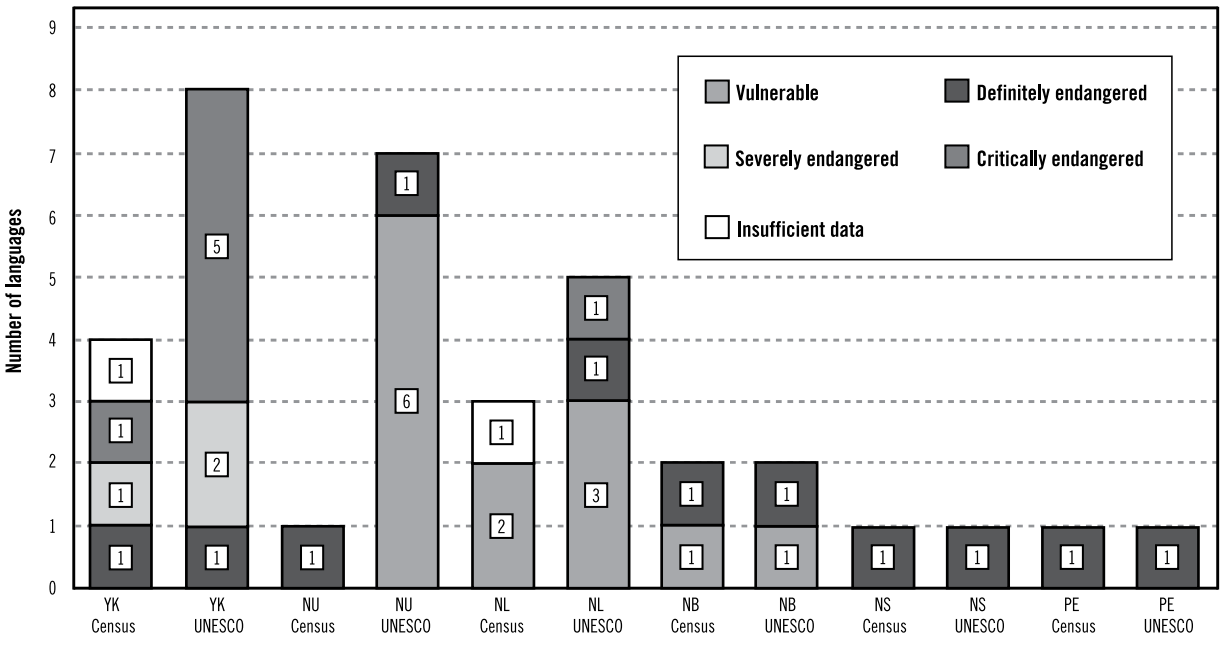




Photo by Natalie Wood. Copyright 2008.

indicators are based on the specific Inuit language of Nunatsiavummiutut, which is categorized as definitely endangered, practically all, 97%, of the Inuit speaking population of Labrador is categorized as speaking an endangered language, rather than the non-endangered (vulnerable/viable) language of Inuktitut.

REVITALIZATION, SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING AND "SECONDARILY SURVIVING" LANGUAGES

Notwithstanding widespread signs of language erosion, according to the 2001 Aboriginal Peoples Survey, learning to speak an Aboriginal language is important to all generations – youth, parents, adults – within and outside Aboriginal communities (Norris 2007; Statistics Canada 2003, 32). Census data suggest signs of revitalization among endangered languages, especially among Aboriginal youth who are showing interest in learning the languages of their parents or grandparents as second languages. Second language learning is increasingly a necessary response for endangered languages where mother tongue populations are aging beyond child-bearing years. The contribution of children and youth can be significant given that they comprise practically half of the Aboriginal population (median age of 27 in 2006).

Assessing the extent of second-language learning is especially relevant to the revitalization of endangered Aboriginal languages in Canada. The *Encyclopedia of the world's endangered languages* indicates that "…most efforts among North American Indians to preserve some knowledge of their traditional languages have focused on second language learning" (Moseley 2007); which could have some interesting implications regarding the long-term outlook for endangered languages.

The phenomenon of endangered languages surviving that would otherwise be considered extinct, due to high rates of acquisition as a second language, may be best described as "secondarily surviving" languages (Hinton 2001; Moseley 2007). It is reasonable to expect that "the number of secondarily surviving languages will grow

FIGURE 7: State of Language Learning in Aboriginal Communities by Level of Language Endangerment, Canada, 2001

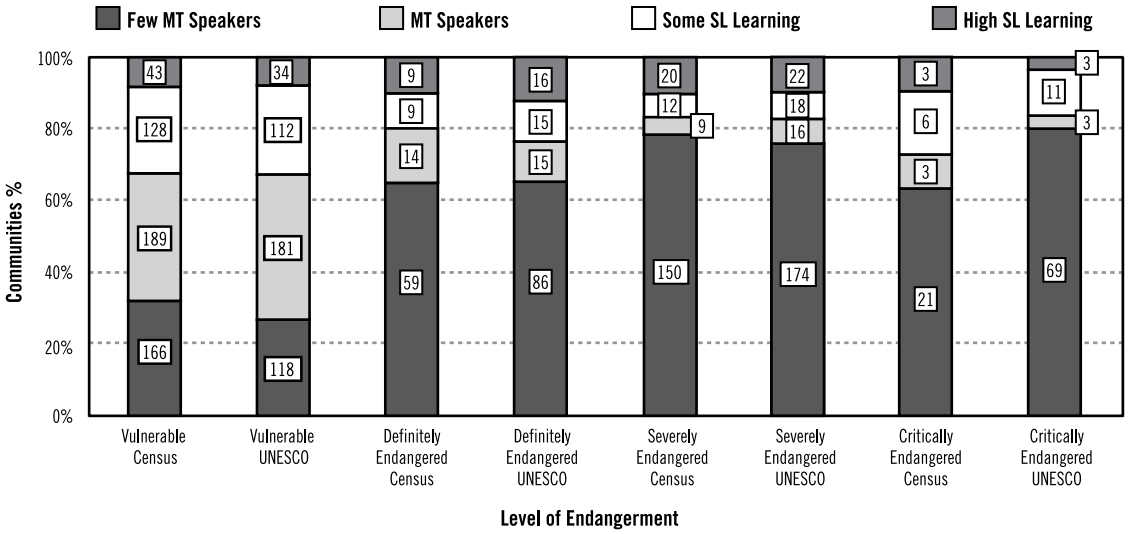
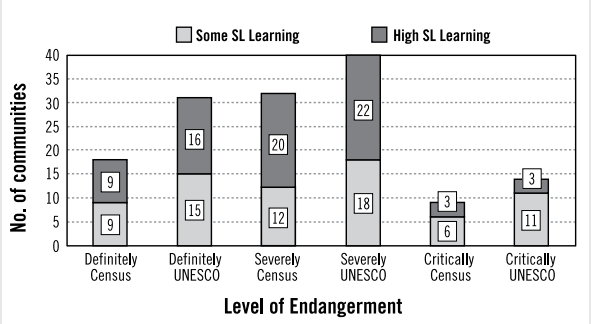


FIGURE 8: Number of Communities Where Endangered Aboriginal Languages are Being Learned as a Second Language, by Degree of Endangerment, Based on Census and UNESCO Linguistic Classifications, Canada, 2001

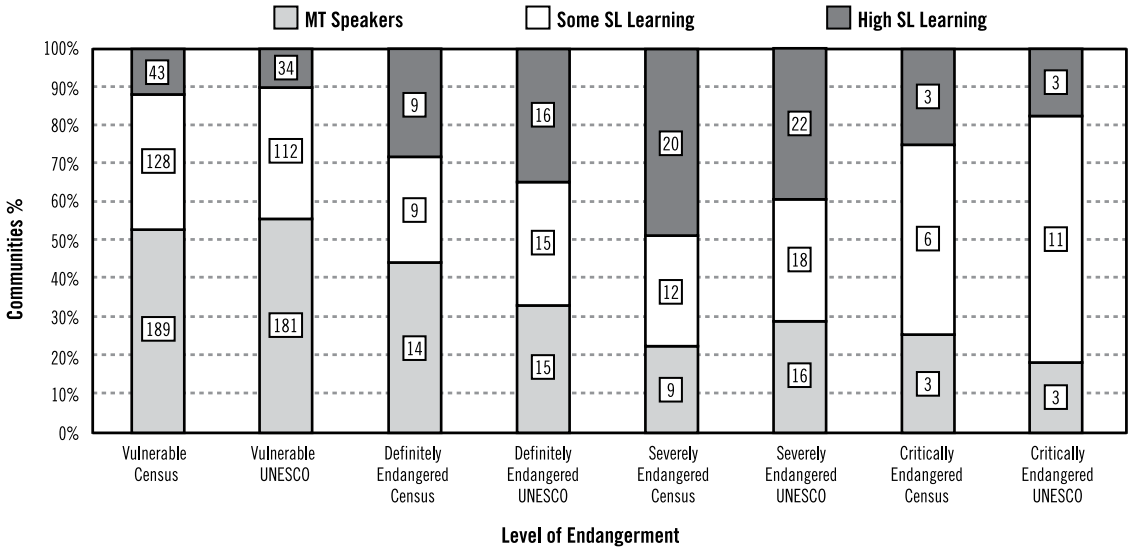


considerably in the next few decades;" further, at least "some languages that at present must be considered extinct may attain secondary survival status as communities of heritage learners create and learn codes on the extant documentation" (Moseley 2007, 9). In Canada, Huron could be an example of a "secondarily surviving" language.[6]

SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING MORE PRONOUNCED IN COMMUNITIES WHERE LANGUAGES ARE ENDANGERED

Communities where "viable" or "vulnerable" languages are the traditional language are more likely than those with endangered languages to have first-language speakers and to transmit their traditional languages as a mother tongue, regardless of the classification framework used. Conversely, the more endangered the community's traditional language, the more likely second learning will predominate among those who can speak their language. According to calculations based on the UNESCO classification, of the 445 communities with "vulnerable" or viable languages, natural transmission as a mother tongue is the main form of language acquisition in about 41% (181 of 445), with second language acquisition accounting for another 34% (146) of communities. In contrast, for the 132 "definitely endangered" language communities natural transmission accounts for only 11% of communities (15 of 132) whereas second language acquisition predominates in 23%. Similarly, natural transmission and second language acquisition account for 3% and 16% respectively of the 86 communities with "critically" endangered languages (the majority, 81%, having few if any speakers) (Figure 7).

FIGURE 9: In Communities Where Endangered Languages are Spoken, Second Language Learners Make up an Increasing Share of all Speakers, with Increasing Degree of Language Endangerment : Implications for Secondarily Surviving Languages



REVITALIZATION OF ENDANGERED LANGUAGES: GREATER EXTENT REVEALED WITH MORE DETAILED LANGUAGE CLASSIFICATION

The numbers of communities with endangered languages where second language learning is occurring differs depending on the language classification used. Overall, the more detailed UNESCO language classification yields 85 Aboriginal communities of endangered linguistic heritage where revitalization is occurring as members learn their traditional languages as second languages, 26 more than the 59 communities derived through the census-based classification (Figure 8). The more detailed language classification provides a clearer picture of the extent to which second language learning is occurring among communities where Aboriginal languages are endangered, and furthermore the extent of this contribution is seen across all levels of endangerment (definitely, severely and critically).

SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING OFFSETTING "EXTINCTION" THROUGH SECONDARILY SURVIVING LANGUAGES

Clearly the importance of the contribution of second language learning to the survival of endangered languages, including "secondarily surviving," increases the more endangered the community's language, a pattern that appears supported by both language classifications. Based on the UNESCO classification, in communities where Aboriginal languages are spoken, second language learning predominates in less than half (45%), of communities with "vulnerable"/viable languages; but represents a growing majority of communities as endangerment increases, accounting for: 56% of communities where languages are "definitely endangered"; 71% with "severely endangered" languages, and 83% with "critically endangered" languages. Patterns are somewhat similar with the census-based language classification (Figure 9).

TABLE 2: Aboriginal Languages in Canada: Selected Indicators of Diversity, Endangerment and Revitalization, by 2001 Census and UNESCO-based Linguistic Classifications

SELECTED INDICATORS	CENSUS	UNESCO
Diversity		
Number of Aboriginal languages	32	86
Endangerment		
Number of endangered languages	21	62
Proportion endangered	66%	72%
Definitely	22%	16%
Severely	28%	19%
Critically	16%	37%
Proportion of communities where traditional Aboriginal language is endangered	38%	50%
Proportion of communities where traditional Aboriginal language is critically endangered	4%	9%
Regional perspectives		
Number of languages spoken in:		
British Columbia	19	30
Ontario	8	18
Proportion of languages in Canada spoken in:		
British Columbia	55%	35%
Ontario	23%	21%
Proportion of endangered languages spoken in:		
British Columbia	71%	45%
Ontario	19%	19%
Proportion of province's languages that are endangered (includes those in "insufficient data" category of census classification):		
British Columbia	89%	93%
Ontario	50%	67%
Revitalization of endangered languages		
Number of communities with endangered languages where second language learning is occurring	59	85
Proportion of communities with some or high degree of second language learning by level of endangerment:		
Vulnerable	48%	45%
Definitely	56%	67%
Severely	78%	71%
Critically	75%	82%

CONCLUSION

This analysis demonstrates that linguistic classifications are an important consideration in assessing the diversity, state and prospects of Aboriginal languages in Canada. Furthermore, while census data do provide a valuable source of demographic and community-level data, it is also the case that the available data can be insufficient, especially for some of the smaller endangered languages and their communities. As such, a more accurate portrayal of Aboriginal languages and their communities must also be supplemented with non-census sources of language information.

As discussed, Census and UNESCO-based language measures differed along a number of key dimensions of diversity, endangerment and revitalization, as illustrated for a number of selected indicators in Table 2. Clearly, the more detailed UNESCO classification depicts not only greater diversity and degree of language endangerment, but also significant variations in regional perspectives. As well, the UNESCO classification suggests greater evidence of language resilience and revitalization across communities of endangered languages, as revealed through measures of second language learning (Table 2).

Given ongoing trends in language viability, endangerment and revitalization, it can be expected that there will be a growing need for more detailed language classifications in order to more accurately reflect across Canada's regions, not only diversity, but also endangerment and revitalization. This is especially important for endangered languages, in relation to the phenomenon of "secondarily surviving" languages. And, certainly, the more precise and detailed the linguistic classification that underlies language measures, the better informed will be language planning, policy, and programs with respect to the needs and prospects of Aboriginal languages in Canada.

Finally, while implications of language classifications are profound for Aboriginal languages across the country, it must be noted that there is no one definitive classification of Aboriginal languages in Canada. Furthermore, many factors such as historical, cultural, social and political – can enter into language classifications – in addition to the various linguistic considerations of language families, languages and dialects (including variations in spelling and naming of languages). As such, it might be anticipated that linguistic classifications of Aboriginal languages could at times possibly generate debate in their application, and in general may be expected to warrant increasing attention and importance in the areas of language planning, policy and program development.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Due to statistical considerations such as small population counts, the Census classification system does not provide counts separately for the smaller languages identified in Kinkade's linguistic classification, often grouping smaller languages together for purposes of providing data.

[2] This decline in the proportion of speakers is also affected by the high increase in the denominator of the population with Aboriginal identity between 2001 and 2006.

[3] The analysis presented in this paper is based on Statistics Canada's 2001 Census data, since the language classification of the UNESCO *Atlas* utilized 2001 Census-based indicators in assessing the degree of language endangerment.

[4] Although most first-language speakers tend to reside in predominantly Aboriginal communities, others reside outside such communities, in cities and rural areas. The 2001 Census (the principal data source) included language statistics for 886 communities across Canada, representing 149,000 persons with an Aboriginal mother tongue (first-language speakers). This accounts for nearly three quarters of the total mother tongue population of 203,000. Among first-language speakers living outside Aboriginal communities, close to 39,000 resided in major cities across Canada, while the remaining 15,000 lived in smaller towns and rural areas.

[5] Due to incomplete enumeration of their reserves in the census, speaker counts are not complete for the Iroquoian languages.

[6] "While Huron-Wendat is extinct in the sense that the last Aboriginal speakers died in the first half of the 20th Century, there are efforts to bring the language back to life…" (John Steckley, Professor, Humber College, pers. comm. 2002).

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