

AND SO FLOWS HISTORY
-Documentation vs. preservation/revitalization-

In my presentation I will attempt to address the issues of (1) the absolute priority of the documentation over the preservation and (2) failure or even harmfulness of the preservation/revitalization attempts done by outsiders.

First, I will address the myth that the loss of linguistic diversity is due to the so-called 'globalization'. I will demonstrate that the linguistic loss has always been an integral and inevitable part of the historic process, and that the world was immensely much more linguistically diverse 1,500 years ago and even 500 years ago than it is now. I will present three areal case studies to illustrate this point of view: Japan, Korea, and Inner Asia.

Second, I will discuss why there is actually only one case of a successful 'revitalization' -- Hebrew, and what mechanisms must underlie such a success, and, consequently, why it did/does not work in all other cases.

Third, I will survey three case studies of documentation vs. preservation/revitalization that are familiar to me: Ainu (extinct), Okinawan (moribund), and Hawaiian (from severely endangered to moribund) and outline the reasons of the failure.

Finally, I will survey a case study of a peripheral Japanese dialect, which is perfectly preserved without an outside intervention and will continue to be spoken and learned by children for any foreseeable future. In conclusion, weighting all pros and contras, I will argue that our task as linguists is to do solely documentation to the best possible extent, and not to meddle into the affairs of local communities and families, which may be unethical, and sometimes results in disaster.