



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

UNESCO Project

# “Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger”



*“One does not inhabit a country; one inhabits a language.”*

*E. M. Cioran*

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UNESCO “Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger”  
Published by the United Nations Educational,  
Scientific and Cultural Organization

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# UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger

UNESCO's Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger is intended to raise awareness about language endangerment and the need to safeguard the world's linguistic diversity among policy-makers, speaker communities and the general public, and to be a tool to monitor the status of endangered languages and the trends in linguistic diversity at the global level.



© Gérard Kedrebégo  
A Sillanka language class

## *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger*

Published by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, with the support of the Government of Norway

7, Place de Fontenoy

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© UNESCO 1st edition 1996, 2nd edition 2001, 3rd edition 2010

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# Why preserve language diversity?

Languages are vehicles of our cultures, collective memory and values. They are an essential component of our identities, and a building block of our diversity and living heritage.



© Discovery Communications, Inc.  
Bunuba speakers in Australia

Yet, about half of some 6,000 languages spoken today are in danger of disappearing.

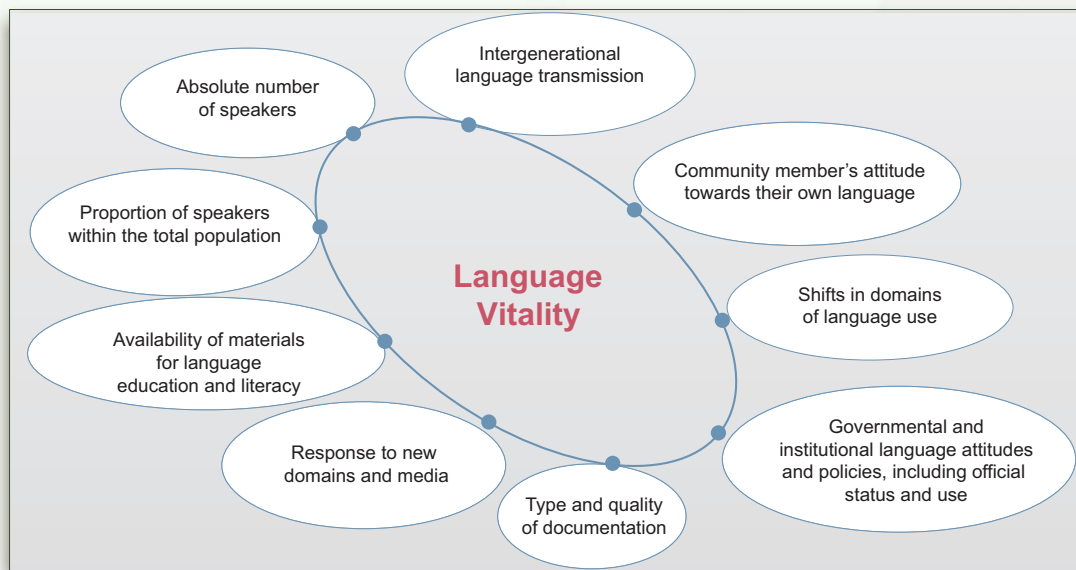
However, this process is neither inevitable nor irreversible. UNESCO aims to support communities, experts and governments by producing, coordinating and disseminating:

- Tools for monitoring, advocacy, and assessment of status and trends in linguistic diversity.
- Services such as policy advice, technical expertise and training, good practices and a platform for exchange and transfer of skills.

*A language is endangered  
when children no longer  
learn it...*

# Criteria for assessing language vitality and endangerment

In 2002 - 2003, UNESCO asked an international group of linguists to develop a framework for determining the vitality of a language in order to assist in policy development, identification of needs and appropriate safeguarding measures. This Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages elaborated a landmark concept paper entitled “Language Vitality and Endangerment”, which established the following nine criteria:



© UNESCO  
Language Vitality and Endangerment

No single factor is sufficient to assess the state of a community's language. However, taken together, these nine factors can determine the viability of a language, its function in society and the type of measures required for its maintenance or revitalization.

*“Each language is a uniquely structured world of thought, with its own associations, metaphors, ways of thinking, vocabulary, sound system and grammar – all working together in a marvellous architectural structure, which is so fragile that it could easily be lost forever”.*

*Christopher Moseley*



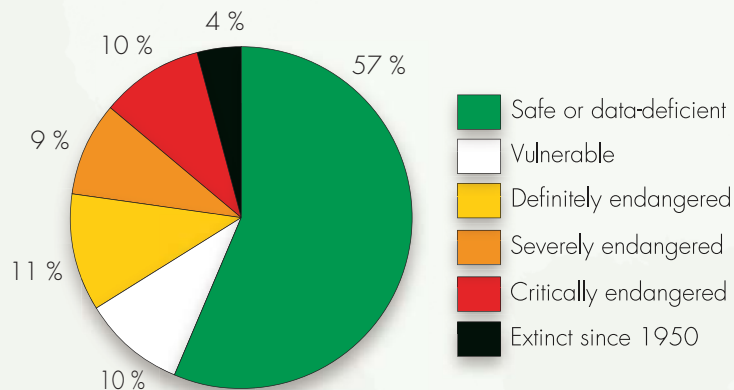
© Discovery Communications, Inc.  
Karaim speakers in Lithuania

# Degrees of endangerment

The document entitled “Language Vitality and Endangerment” (UNESCO, 2003) establishes six degrees of endangerment that ‘may be distinguished with regard to intergenerational transmission’.

Degree of endangerment	Intergenerational Language Transmission
Safe	Language is spoken by all generations; intergenerational transmission is uninterrupted
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

According to the Atlas, at least 43% of languages spoken in the world are endangered.

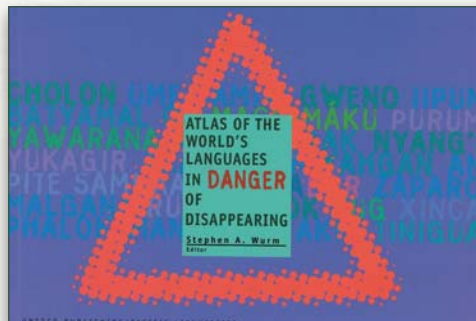


UNESCO's flagship activity in the domain of linguistic diversity is the *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger*.

# Print version of Atlas

## First edition

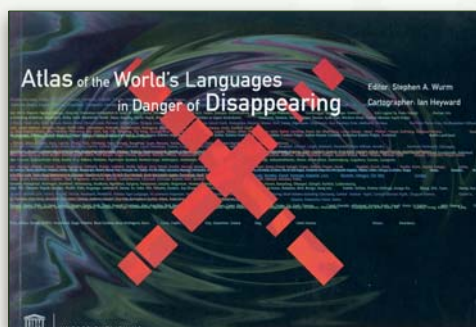
The first edition of the Atlas was edited by Stephen Wurm and published in 1996. It comprised 53 pages including 12 pages of maps showing some 600 languages. The first publication of its kind, the Atlas met with vivid scholarly and journalistic interest and soon became a valuable reference book for the wider public.



© UNESCO  
First Edition of the Atlas, 1996

## Second edition

A second, thoroughly updated edition of the Atlas was produced by UNESCO in 2001, and expanded to 90 pages including 14 pages of maps showing some 800 languages. The update reflected the fact that since the first edition of the Atlas in 1996, research on endangered languages and scientific interest and work in the field had proliferated.



© UNESCO  
Second Edition of the Atlas, 2001

Since its creation in 1996, UNESCO's Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger has emerged as a foremost awareness-raising/advocacy tool and an easily accessible mechanism to monitor trends in linguistic diversity.

*For each language, the print Atlas provides:*

- *the name;*
- *the degree of endangerment;*
- *the country or countries where it is spoken.*

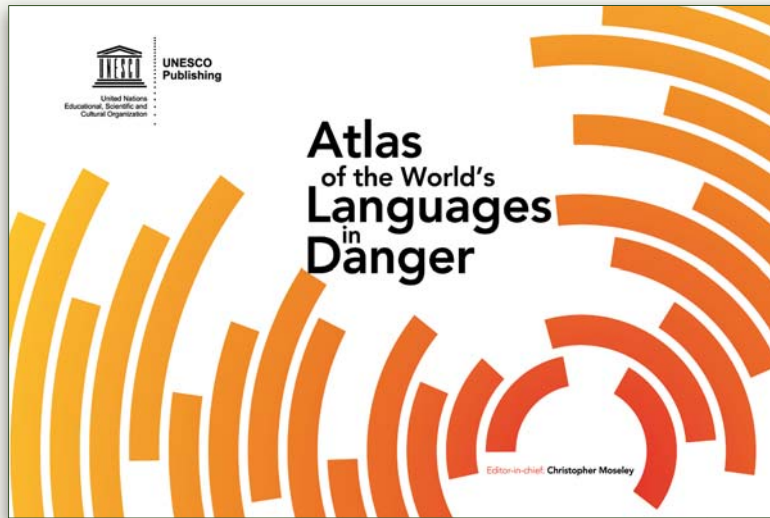


© UNESCO/Rocky Roe  
Elementary school at SAM-PUBANGIN village Markham Valley. Papua New Guinea has over 800 different languages and children can begin their learning experience in their mother-tongue.



© UNESCO/Marc Hofer  
Uganda,  
The Karamojong or Kari-  
mojong, an ethnic group of  
agro-pastoral herders living  
mainly in the north-east of  
Uganda. Nakiru, 15, learns  
how to spell everyday words  
like "Tree" and "Table" in her  
tribal language.

# Print version of Atlas



## Third edition

**2,473** *Endangered languages listed in UNESCO's Atlas, of which:*

**178** *Languages with between 10 and 50 speakers.*

**146** *Languages with fewer than 10 speakers.*

**577** *Critically endangered languages.*

**230** *Languages that have become extinct since 1950.*

The latest print edition of the Atlas was published in 2010. The Atlas lists some 2,500 endangered languages approaching the generally-accepted estimate of some 3,000 endangered languages worldwide and provides analytical reports by region. It attracted much academic, media and public attention, with hundreds of press articles in different parts of the world devoted to the Atlas, underlining its impact as an awareness-raising instrument regarding language endangerment.

Available in English, French and Spanish, this third edition achieves the high visibility of its predecessors and is the first resource for journalists, educators and policy-makers concerned with the state of the world's endangered languages.



# Editors and contributors for the third edition

This Atlas is the result of an international collaboration of more than thirty linguists from around the world.

The editor-in-chief is Christopher Moseley, whose works include the *Encyclopedia of the World's Endangered Languages* (London: Routledge 2007) and the *Atlas of the World's Languages* (London: Routledge 1994 and 2007). The cartographer of the present printed edition is Alexandre Nicolas.

A large and geographically diverse group of regional editors and contributors worked with Christopher Moseley.

## These experts are:

- North Africa and Arab States: Salem Mezhoud, Yamina El Kirat, Bonnie Stalls
- Sub-Saharan Africa: Matthias Brenzinger, Herman Batibo
- Europe and the Caucasus: Tapani Salminen, Tjeerd de Graaf
- Siberia and North-East Asia: Juha Janhunen
- South-East Asia: David Bradley, Suwilai Prensirat, Gérard Diffloth
- Pacific, Indonesia and Papua-New-Guinea: Darrell Tryon
- Australia: Michael Walsh
- North America: Lyle Campbell (with Naomi Fox and Chris Rogers),

Mary Jane Norris

- Mexico and Central America: Yolanda Lastra
- Lowland South America: Marleen Haboud, Bruna Franchetto, Denny Moore
- Highland South America and Caribbean: Willem Adelaar,

Gustavo Solis Fonseca

- West and Central Asia: Hakim Elnazarov
- India and Himalayan Chain: Stuart Blackburn, Jean Robert Opgenort,

Udaya Narayan Singh

Some specialists also accepted to provide complementary information on specific areas or languages, including Alexandre François (North Vanuatu), Sun Hongkai (China), Bruno Poizat (Aramaic), Tulio Rojas (Colombia), Jean Sibille (Aramaic) and Marie-Claude Simeone-Senelle (Southern Arabic Peninsula).



© UNESCO/Michel Ravassard  
Christopher Moseley,  
editor-in-chief of the  
UNESCO Atlas of the World's  
Languages in Danger

## ***At UNESCO:***

*Anabit Minasyan*  
editorial coordinator

*Jouriy Lysenko*  
database manager and  
developer

*Alicia Matta Gonzales*  
research assistant



# Interactive online Atlas

*“With this edition, and particularly with the ever-changing, ever-growing digital version, the Atlas has become a powerful tool for monitoring the situation of the world’s endangered languages, while continuing its proven role as an instrument for raising awareness among policy makers, the media, the general public and especially the speakers of languages in danger”.*

*Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO*

© UNESCO/Ramon Lepage  
Venezuela  
Warao Woman

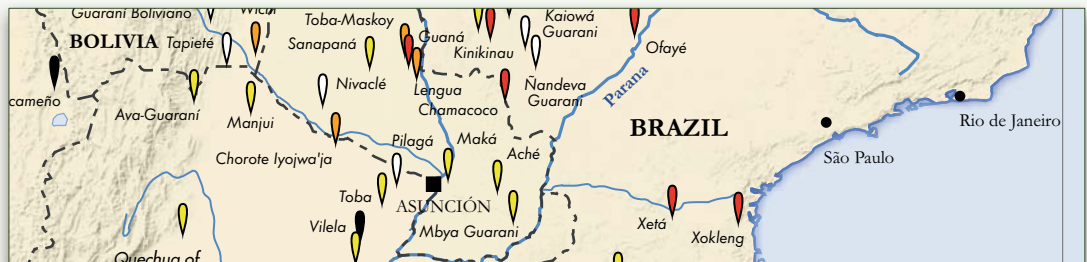
The interactive Atlas, available since 2009, provides the following data for some 2,500 languages:

- name
- degree of endangerment
- country(ies) where it is spoken
- number of speakers
- relevant projects
- sources
- ISO language codes
- geographic coordinates

## What are the advantages of the online version?

The online version shows, at the click of a mouse on the marker, the exact latitude and longitude coordinates of a language as well as a wealth of other information, and permits interactive contributions from the world’s linguists, census-takers and, most importantly, language communities.

*The online edition is enriched by contributions from many other researchers, and from speakers of endangered languages.*







© UNESCO/Maria Muinos Peru, Class of children. Primary school of an "asentamiento humano" (disadvantaged neighbourhood).

# UNESCO Atlas data have been used for projects and initiatives all over the world

## Student research projects:

- Indonesian languages (*University of Hamburg, Germany*)
- Death of languages (*University of Karachi, Pakistan*)
- Endangered Languages in New Zealand

(*University of Greenwich,*

*United Kingdom (UK)*)

- Tikuna language (*National University of Colombia, Colombia*)
- Indonesian endangered languages, culture, and identity

(*the London School of Public relations, UK*)

- Sign languages (*University of Quebec, Canada*)
- Comparison of the linguistic situations of contemporary Iran and Afghanistan

(*Uppsala University, Sweden*)

- Endangered languages in Vietnam (*University Paris VII, France*)
- Postcolonial translation theory

(*South-Western University of Finance and Economics, China*)

- Language endangerment and environmental disturbances in Brazil

(*University of Michigan, United States of America (USA)*)

- Grammatical descriptive comparison between English and Nafara, an African Gur language (*University of Bouaké, Côte d'Ivoire*)

# UNESCO Atlas data have been used for projects and initiatives all over the world

## Faculty research projects:

- Languages (*Meikai University, Japan*)
- Endangered languages (*Eastern Michigan University, USA*)
- Language revitalization (*Georgia Southern University, USA*)
- Anthropological history of the biosphere (*University of Guanajuato, Mexico*)
- A comparative study of Australian and Chinese government policies on languages (*Monash University, Australia*)
  - Teaching a Master course on endangered languages (*University of Cambridge, UK*)
  - Research in Ethnobiology on American Indian languages: the Maya area (Mexico), Amazonas (Peru) (*University of Georgia, USA*)
    - Courses for students (*Society of exploration geophysicists; Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB)*)
    - Languages of North-East India (*North-Eastern Hill University, India*)
    - Book on linguistic diversity (*University of Oxford, UK*)
    - Statistical research on endangered human/cultural populations and correlations with bio-geographical regions (*Community College, Vermont, USA*)
    - Creating a GIS data set for use in high school Advanced Placement Human Geography Course (*Virginia Beach City Public Schools, USA*)



© Discovery Communications, Inc.  
Saami speaker in Sweden

# UNESCO Atlas data have been used for projects and initiatives all over the world

## Other projects:

- Cartography (*National Geographic's College Atlas*)
- Conducting an awareness rally in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India (*Professional Group of Institutions*)
- The Chippewa/Ojibwe dialect of the Grand Portage (*Grand Portage Band of Chippewa Indians, USA*)
- Punjabi language (*Daily Times, Pakistan*)
- Creation of a map for research and educational purposes (*Globaia, Canada*)
- Research, public lectures, writing (*K. David Harrison, author of "When Languages Die"*)
- Study of languages in Mexico (*CIMMYT, Mexico*)
- Journalists' research (*www.slou.ru, Moscow, Russia; derStandard.at, Vienna, Austria; Business Standard Ltd, New Delhi, India*)
- The Telugu Speaking People (*Telugu Association of London (TAL)*)
- Series of reports on the Indian endangered languages (*HT Media, New Delhi, India*)
- Feature story on endangered languages (*News Corp, New-York, USA*)
- Preservation of Indigenous languages in North America (*Mazinaate, Inc; Canada*)



© UNESCO/Namal Kamalgoda  
Horton Plains, cultural and  
natural heritage of Sri Lanka

# Major press agency and newspaper reports on the UNESCO Atlas

The Atlas has been mentioned in some of the most renowned newspapers and press agencies, inter alia: Deutsche Welle, Die Welt, The New York Times, The Washington Post, Itar Tass, The Guardian, BBC News, El Pais, Le Monde, Le Figaro, Le Nouvel Observateur, The Daily Telegraph, The Associated Press...

«The project amazes us with the world's language diversity; it also saddens us to see so many are in danger of becoming extinct or have already disappeared» *South China Morning Post, Hong Kong, China, 21.02.2009.*

«The publication of the Atlas marks a new departure for UNESCO (...) it signals an interest in the politically loaded area of immaterial culture» *hivolda.no, Norway, 02.05.2003.*

«For the first time, the Atlas has been equipped with an interactive digital form. In the future this will facilitate the process of updating it and allow users to make their own maps by country or conduct research on categories of languages» *Itar Tass, Russia, 19.02.2009.*

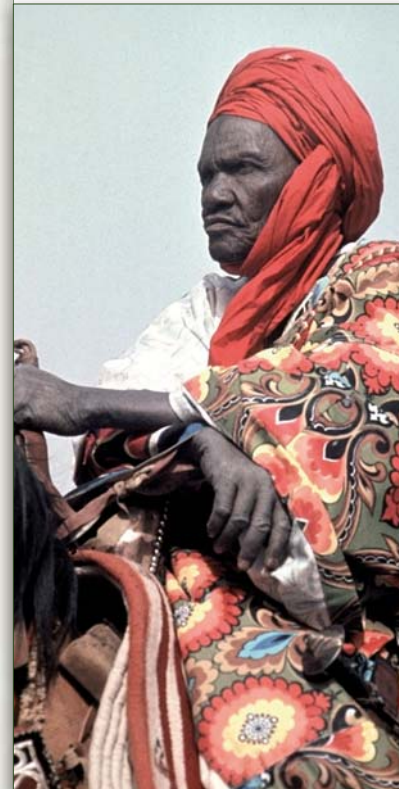
«The latest atlas of the world's languages paints a dire picture of linguistic diversity» *US News, United States of America, 25.02.2009.*

«This remarkably useful compilation not only provides information on languages, but also classifies those in terms of the risk they face over the next century» *eesti.ca, Estonia, 21.02.2009.*

«The 2009 International Atlas of endangered languages, presented at Unesco in Paris, offers a more optimistic and nuanced perspective than its title suggests» *Le Monde, France, 19.02.2009.*

«Acting as a clearing house, the Organization facilitates access to available data and maps, and serves as a forum for debate that is open to communities, specialists and national authorities» *The Sunday Observer, Sri Lanka, 21.02.2009.*

«New atlas shows dying languages around the world. Not all is bleak, however. Some endangered languages, like Latvia's Livonian, are being revived by young people and through poetry» *The Associated Press, 19.02.2009.*

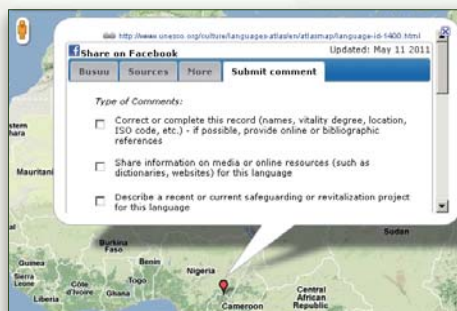


© UNESCO/Pierre Donnaint  
Niger,  
Portrait of a Hausa horseman

*He who loses his language  
loses his world.  
(Scottish Gaelic proverb)*

# Interactive Atlas user feedback

The Interactive Atlas is constantly improved and updated thanks to user feedback. This feedback is evaluated by the editorial board, and validated for updates, or addition of new content. Users are invited to submit comments through different channels.



© UNESCO  
Interactive Atlas comments tab

Each language entry in the online Atlas contains a tab for comments on any of the elements presented there. We also welcome information on safeguarding projects under way as well as complementary resources on these languages.

It is also possible for users to suggest a new language for inclusion in the Atlas. They can do so by filling out an online form.

General comments, questions and remarks may be sent by email to [atlas\(at\)unesco.org](mailto:atlas(at)unesco.org) or by post to the following address:

UNESCO  
Section for the Diversity  
of Cultural Expressions  
1, rue Miollis  
75732 Paris Cedex 15

A screenshot of the 'Endangered Languages' 'New language suggestion form'. The form includes fields for: 'Name in English', 'Original name', 'Name in French', 'Name in Spanish', 'Name in Russian', 'Name in Chinese', 'Name in Arabic', 'Number of speakers', 'Alternate names', 'Location(s)', 'Degree of vitality' (with a dropdown menu), and 'Country or area'. There is also a 'Coordinates' field. The UNESCO logo is visible in the top left corner.

© UNESCO  
New language suggestion  
form

© Discovery  
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Scotland, UK  
Scottish Gaelic speakers.  
Traditional dance class in the  
Community and Arts Center  
(Taigh Dhonnchaidh).  
(Photo by Tim Wimborne)

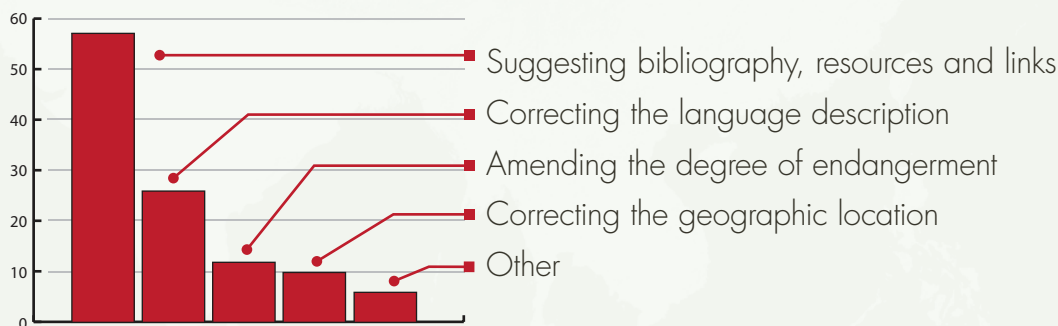


# Interactive Atlas user feedback

700 user comments and suggestions have been submitted to UNESCO since the launch of the Interactive Atlas in 2009.

In March 2011, 116 language entries had been updated in the Interactive Atlas thanks to user feedback.

User feedback by type of suggestion, in per cent, up until December 2010.



## Some comments

*«I just wanted to say how fascinating I found the interactive map of endangered languages across the world, I had no idea quite how many there were».*

*«This is certainly a wonderful resource! Thanks so much for making it available»*

*«I have been reading about your efforts in the latest edition of the UNESCO Courier and wish to congratulate you on your efforts».*

*«Negaroté and Mamaindé should be mentioned. The number of 323 speakers cannot be explained by speakers of Latundé, Lakondé and Tarwandé, who together do not number more than perhaps 20».*

*«I just looked at your atlas and am very impressed, but... I have been working on the documentation of the Tsafiki language of Ecuador for fifteen years. You say that Tsafiki means “Language of the people” and you might want to correct it (...)».*

*My language,  
my awakening.  
(Māori proverb)*



© Discovery Communications, Inc.  
India  
Yangden Lepcha and Phurjay Lepcha wearing traditional clothing walk over River Rongyong in North Sikkim

# Useful information

## Website:

<http://www.unesco.org/culture/en/endangeredlanguages>

## Interactive Atlas:

<http://www.unesco.org/culture/languages-atlas>

## How to order a copy of the print Atlas:

<http://publishing.unesco.org>

### *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger*

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*If I forget my native speech,  
And the songs that my people sing  
What use are my eyes and ears?  
What use is my mouth?*

*If I forget the smell of the earth  
And do not serve it well  
What use are my hands?  
Why am I living in the world?*

*How can I believe the foolish idea  
That my language is weak and poor  
If my mother's last words  
Were in Evenki?*

*Alitet Nemtushkin, Evenki poet*



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