

Nubian Is an Endangered Language: What Does That Mean?

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An endangered language is one that seems to be dying. This is a layperson's definition. Linguists tend to give other definitions: academic definitions.

What has been done so far to protect endangered languages in Africa is inadequate. One important factor is that the language communities concerned are not participating in the effort.

It is argued that linguists are excessively cautious not to bring politics into this sensitive area. They want to discuss the protection of languages in an academic environment rather than the political arena. Apparently they fear that governments will not welcome their contributions.

The crux of the matter is found in the following hypothesis, which is subject here to debate: Languages do not 'die'; languages are killed. A language is always killed by another language, and the speakers of the victorious language are part of the massacre. They participate either through ignorance or apathy or enjoyment of the massacre. They may even make government policies which will end up by endangering or killing African languages. Examples include many languages within the Arab League countries: Kurdish, Berber and more than 150 indigenous African languages in the Sudan.

Debate centres upon a diagnosis of the problem, whether it results from ignorance, apathy, hostility or merely inadequate management and how the present trend could most effectively be reversed.