



When Marie Smith Jones Died

— Rajesh Ranjan

Jan 21, '08 : Marie Smith Jones Died

- Death of Marie Smith Jones was not just a loss of one human being!
- She was the last surviving speaker of the Eyak language of South-central Alaska, USA.
- We lost one colour from the mosaic of our limited linguistic diversity!

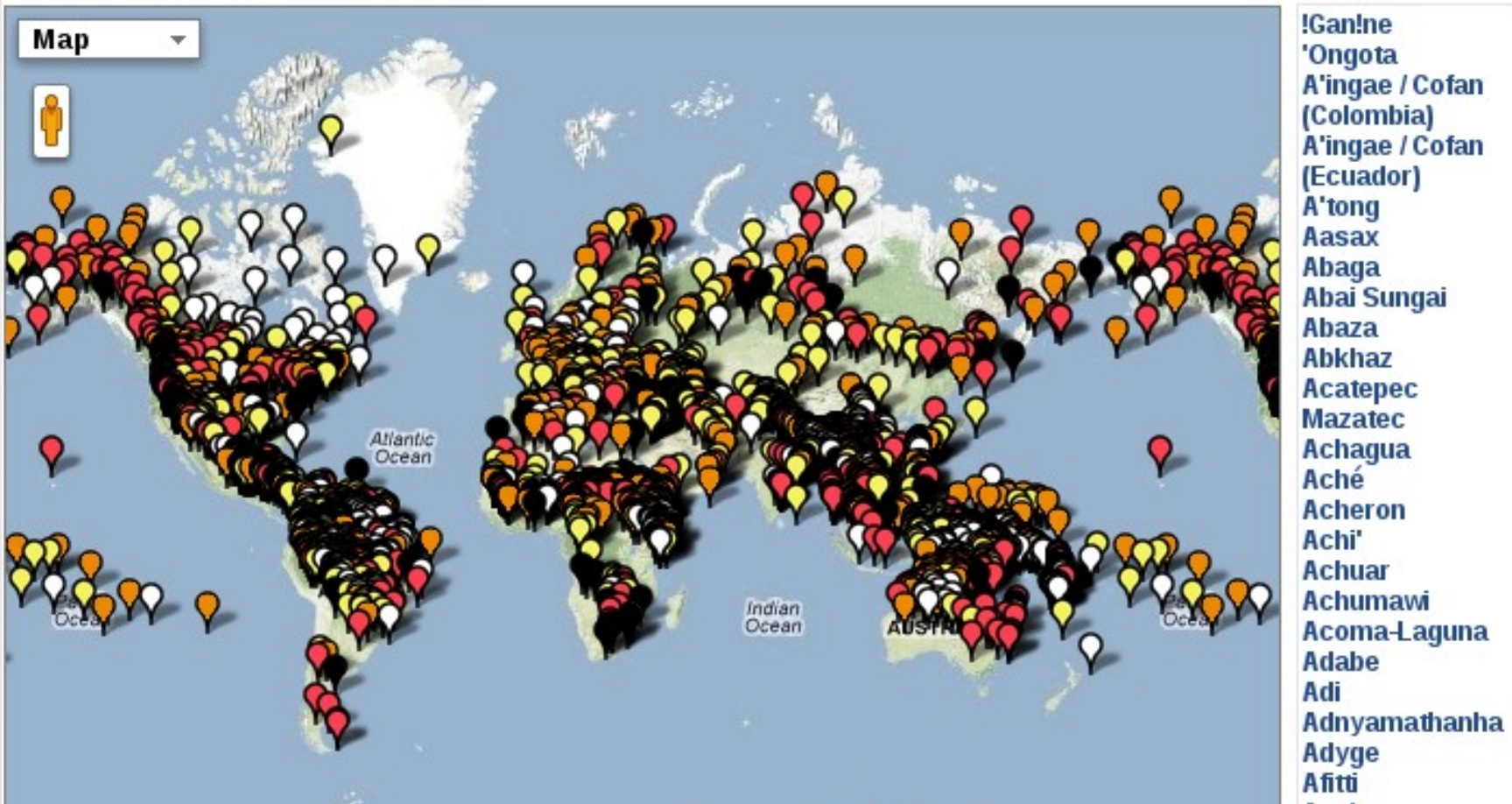


Languages Die : Nothing Unusual

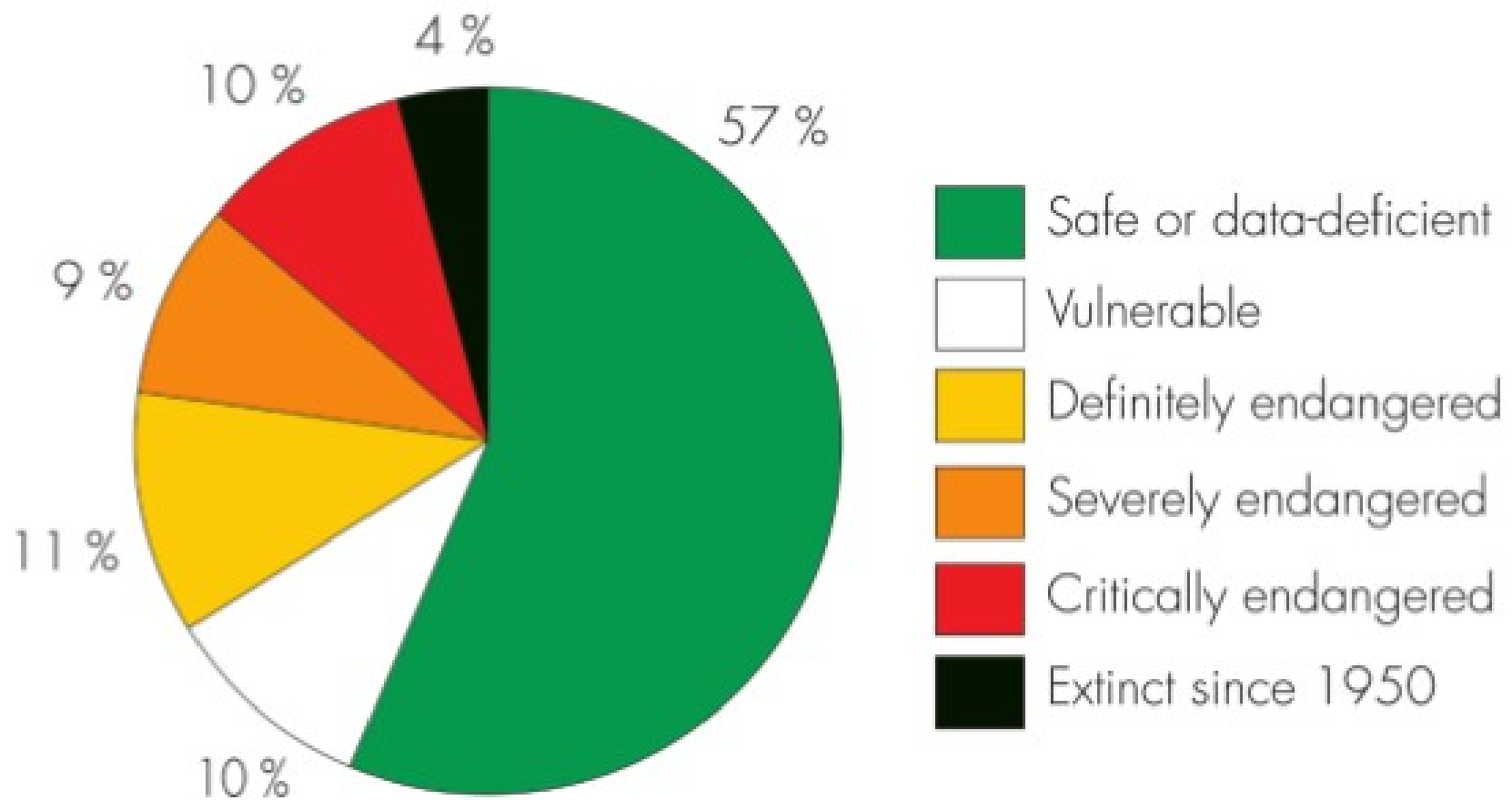
- It is a fact, though hard to digest, condition is like the species of tiger, languages also die and so lots of languages are in danger!
- 96% of world's languages are spoken by mere 4% population!
- 500 languages less than 100 speakers; 1500 languages less than 1000 speaker and 5000 languages less than 100,000 speakers

UNESCO : World's Languages in Danger

Number of languages found : 2473



UNESCO : World's Languages in Danger



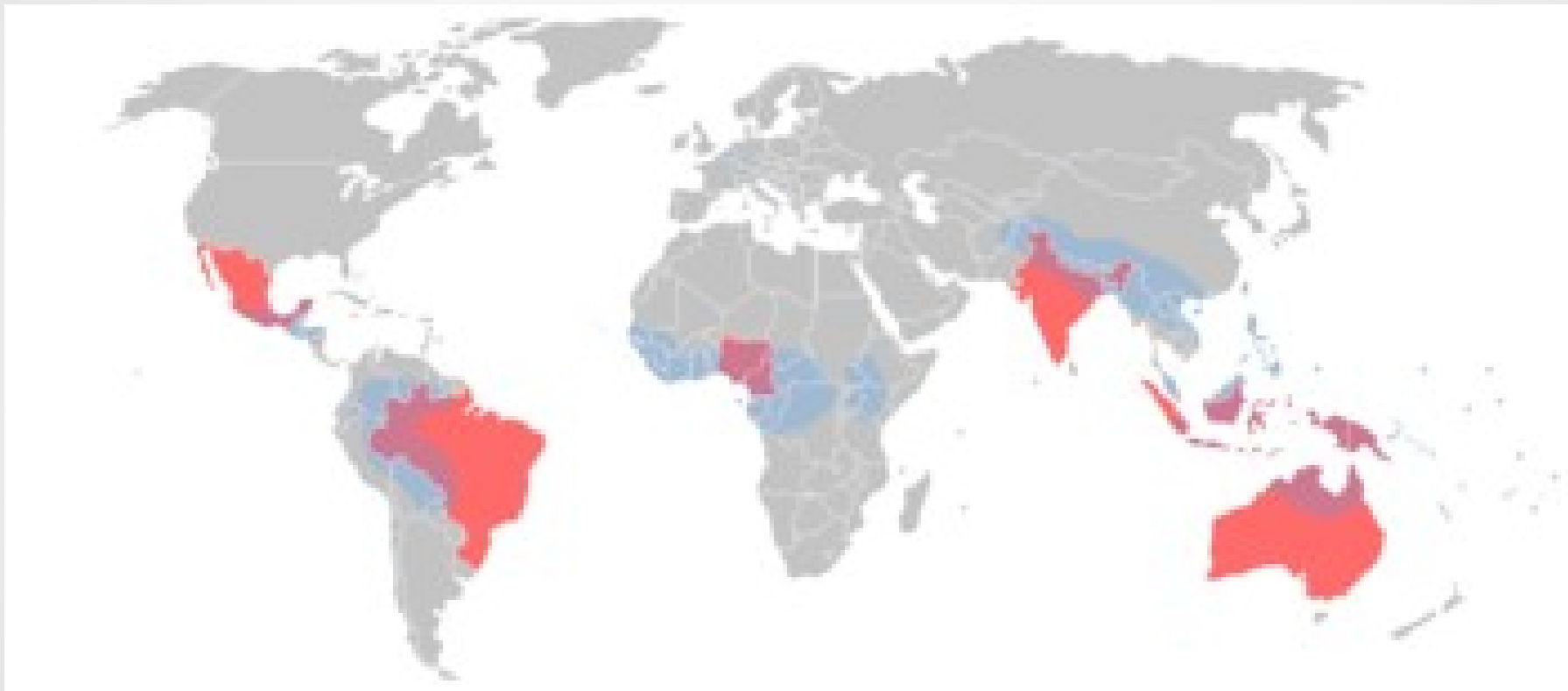
Diversity [Linguistic = Biological]

- Only c.6000 source of human language data is there
- Slowly one by one precious source is dying
- Not only a language dies; with a language community history, intellectual and cultural diversity, cultural identity die!
- Loss for all; eternal loss!

More Diversity, more danger

- Endangered languages can be found in every region
- Region with greater language diversity are the one where danger is much - Melanesia, Sub-Saharan Africa or South America
- 196 in India

UNESCO: Red – 50% of World's Language
Blue – Most linguistically diverse



One language every two weeks

- c.3000 languages will die in 100 next years
- one language every two weeks dies
- Akkala Saami (Russian Federation) - the last speaker died in 2003
- Aasax (Tanzania) – 1976
- Ubyh (Turkey) – 1992, with the death of Tefvic Esenc
- Eyak (United States, Alaska) – 2008, with the death of Marie Smith Jones

Cold to Cultural Assimilation

- Reason can be anything – just something from Cold to Cultural Assimilation. Anything!
- external forces - such as military, economic, religious, cultural or educational subjugation, Genocide, Natural Disasters, Infertility, Diseases, Cultural/political/economic marginalization/hegemony, Political repression
- Internal forces - Cultural Assimilation; community's negative attitude towards its own language. increased migration and rapid urbanization

The feeling of shame

- Three stages towards the death!
- Pressure to speak dominant language;
top down/bottom up - 'to achieve the better quality of life'
- From Emerging Bilingualism to decline of bilingualism
- Younger generation proficient in 2nd language, 1st language less relevant; towards feeling of shame; results in family dialects; outside home young one don't talk, even within a decade 'healthy bilingualism' moves towards self conscious semilingualism and finally monolingualism

But the clay is cold and hard and silent

eg. Linear_A and Harappan Script



“But the clay is cold and hard and silent – like Marie, it no longer tells us tales.”

- Granger Meador,
physics teacher and a
blogger

My Language by Alitet Nemtushkin



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?

शुक्रिया!

<http://www.unesco.org>

<http://en.wikipedia.org>

How Language Works - David Crystal

<http://meador.wordpress.com/2008/01/>