

# Endangered languages : How to fight for their preservation ?

- By Léane Brionne
  - 29th March 2023
- 



*Odawa, Pukapuka, Māori, Niuean, ... You likely don't know these words, however, they are concerned by a major issue : they are endangered.*

---

On the 15th March 2023, I attended a conference on endangered languages. It was extremely interesting because I discovered 4 of them. Nevertheless, I have learned that they are meeting some issues.

Indeed, the conference was organized in order to raise awareness on the disappearance of languages. The loss of a language often leads to the loss of a culture which impacts future generations. I am about to present several important facts I learned during the conference.

**First of all, you need to know more about these 4 languages.**

- ❖ **Odawa Dialect**, also called Ottawa (like the capital city) is spoken in Canada mainly in Ontario and in the U.S.A in Michigan and in Oklahoma. It has some similarities with French. The largest community speaking Odawa is the Isabella Reservation. In 2008, there were only 2,000 native speakers of this language around the world.

The Isabella Reservation



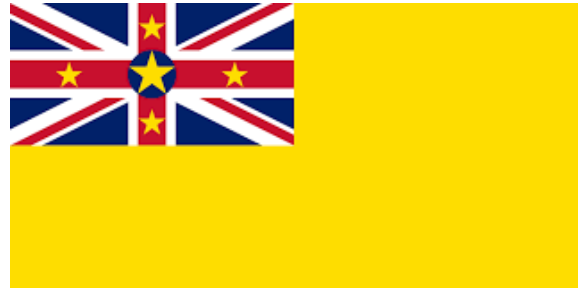
- ❖ **Pukapuka**, do not mistake it with Puka-Puka ! We can also say "Bukabukan". This one is spoken on the Cook Islands (a part of New Zealand) and in New Zealand. In 2010, there were only 840 native speakers in the world.

The flag of the Cook Islands



- ❖ **Niuean**, also called Niue as the island where it is spoken. Most of the speakers are living in Niue (associated with New Zealand) but also in New Zealand among the Niue diaspora. Niuean was threatened in 2006 with 7,300 native speakers. Fortunately, there has been a recovery of this number, consequently, in 2010, it became only vulnerable with 14,000 native speakers.

The flag of Niue



- ❖ **Māori**, maybe, is more famous than the 3 others. Again a language which comes from New Zealand ! There are more native speakers of this one and more precisely : 127,000. Because it is the official language of the country after English.

The Māori flag



**These alarming numbers of speakers make us wonder : what led to the disappearance of these 4 languages ?**

Many reasons explain the disappearance of a language. The main one is the impact of colonization which led to a fast decline of a mother tongue. For example, in 1890, there was a drop of 40% of Māori native speakers. Over the years, tourism has also forced inhabitants to speak English which prevented the development of other languages. Moreover, over the last few years, English is more used at school and to work, in everyday life in fact. The shortage of teachers of the mother tongue and school budgets are also responsible for this disappearance. Then, for Islands like Niue or Cook Islands, they are far from others, thus, they are isolated. So, the language can't spread itself. The decline of population due to a better level of life abroad also led to fast decreases of speakers. Finally, racism is another cause. Indeed, people persecuted for

their origins decided to abandon their mother tongue and didn't teach it to their children.

**Solutions : At the conference some solutions were proposed to save endangered languages. Some of them have already been effective.**

- Keeping cultural identity
- Creating a week dedicated to the language
- Teaching the language at school and between generations
- Recording native speakers
- Listening to songs (if you want to listen to a Pukapuka song, I advise you "Te vero" from Irma Porutu)
- Developing stamps with symbols and words of the language
- Raising awareness throughout radio and news
- Creating associations to enable young people to learn the language
- Selling books written in the mother tongue
- Developing mobile applications to learn the language
- Continuing to organize conferences
- ...

On a final note, since the conference, I have felt more concerned by this problem. I hope that my article has taught you a lot of things and that it was useful. It is important that conferences continue to inform people because it is essential to save endangered languages !