What If Your Language Disappeared Tomorrow?

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Good morning, everyone. Let me ask you something.
What if your language disappeared tomorrow?
Not just one word. Not just one expression. But your entire language.
What would happen to the stories, memories, and culture connected to it?

Today, I want to talk about why languages matter, and why we, as language learners, have a responsibility to protect their diversity.

When we hear the word "language," we often think about grammar, vocabulary, and communication. We study English to, work, travel, make friends, and communicate with people from different countries.

But is language really just a tool for communication?
I don't think so. Language is much more than that.
It carries people's memories, emotions, history, and culture.

Think about a special expression that your parents or grandparents often use.
Maybe it is a funny phrase, a nickname, or a word that only your family understands.
Can you translate it perfectly into another language?
You might be able to explain its meaning, but can you translate the feeling behind it?

Sometimes, a single word can remind us of a person, a place, or a moment in our lives. And that is what makes language so special.

But here is something surprising.
Did you know that there are approximately 7,000 languages spoken around the world today? And nearly 40 percent of them are endangered.
That means thousands of languages are at risk of disappearing.

Think about that.
Behind every language, there are people, families, stories, and generations of knowledge. When a language disappears, we do not simply lose a way to communicate. We lose a unique way of seeing the world.

Every language offers different ways to describe nature, express emotions, and understand our

surroundings. Some words carry meanings connected to traditions, history, and everyday life. These meanings are sometimes difficult to translate into another language.

And this is not only about languages spoken in distant countries. It can happen much closer to home.

Perhaps your grandparents use words that you do not understand. Perhaps there are expressions that your parents remember, but you have never learned.
Have you ever stopped asking them what those words mean?

Now, I would like to share something from my own experience.
As someone who is learning the languages of the islands, I have had the opportunity to meet many different people. Through these encounters, I have come to realize just how important language is.

I have learned that language is not simply a way to exchange information.
It carries people's memories, values, relationships, and connections to the land they call home.

When we visit a place, we can see its beautiful scenery, experience its traditions, and enjoy its culture. But without understanding its language, can we truly understand what makes that place special?

We may see the culture from the outside, but we might miss the deeper meanings behind it. This experience has taught me that learning a language is also a way of getting closer to the people and the places behind it.

And this brings me to an important question.
Why are we studying languages at this university?
We spend time learning new vocabulary, studying grammar, and practicing pronunciation. Of course, these skills are important.

But are we learning languages only to speak them?
Are we studying English simply to pass exams, get good jobs, or communicate internationally?

I believe there is something more important.
We are not here just to learn how to speak another language. We are here to learn how to listen to another world. Learning a language gives us an opportunity to understand people whose experiences, histories, and perspectives are different from our own.

And as language learners, I believe we have a responsibility.

We should not only focus on languages that are widely spoken.
We should also be curious about languages that are becoming less familiar, less visible, and less heard. We can listen to people who speak to them.
We can learn about their stories. We can respect their right to use their own languages.

And we can help pass their voices on to the next generation. Of course, we cannot save every endangered language by ourselves. But keeping a language alive does not always require something extraordinary. It can begin with a simple conversation.

Ask someone elderly about a word they remember. Learn how to say “thank you” in another language. Listen to a story in a language you do not understand.
Or teach someone a word that is special to you.

So, let me ask you one last question.
If you could pass just ONE word to the next generation, what would it be?

A word that makes you smile? A word that reminds you of someone you love?
Or a word that tells a story about where you come from?
I hope you can think of one, because a language is not simply something we inherited from the past.
It is something we can choose to share with the future.

The future of language diversity is not only in the hands of linguists or teachers.
It is also in our hands. We are language learners. But we can become more than that.
We can become listeners, supporters, and bridges between generations.

So, what if your language disappeared tomorrow?
Perhaps the better question is: What can we do today to make sure it is still heard tomorrow?

Thank you for listening.