A case for greater interdisciplinary collaboration in language and music revitalization

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Efforts to revitalize languages are situated within the wider context of efforts to maintain and revitalize intangible expressions of culture more broadly, from music to dance to ritual and ceremonial traditions. In some ways, language revitalization efforts are considerably further advanced in both theory and practice than those relating to other cultural expressions. Taking music as a example, this chapter draws together the scholarly field of language revitalization with the growing investigations into music sustainability, making the case for close collaboration between sociolinguists and applied ethnomusicologists on these issues. It argues three main reasons: first, that collaboration will help consolidate a common language to describe and discuss the issues; second, that it will advance theoretical frameworks and tools to support our combined efforts; and third, it will strengthen advocacy around the need for revitalisation efforts, in the community, scholarly, and public spheres.

From its beginnings in the late 19th century until the mid-20th century, the discipline of ethnomusicology (or, as it was then called, 'comparative musicology') placed key importance on capturing the sounds of 'dying' cultures before they disappeared. In this pursuit, it was informed and influenced by research activity and interest in other disciplines, including sociolinguistics and anthropology. But from around mid-century, the attitudes of music researchers toward issues of musical loss and change began to shift considerably. By the early 1990s, music preservation interests had fallen out of favor, with many ethnomusicologists holding view that 'salvage' or 'white knight' efforts to 'save' dying music genres were overly romanticized, neo-colonial and paternalistic.

By comparison, this was around the time when, in an extended article in the journal *Language*, Ken Hale and his colleagues "attempt to represent as forcefully as we can . . . the reality of language loss and decline as a condition of the modern world" (Hale et al, 1992, p. 2), and to argue for the relevance of linguistics and linguists in responding and

reacting to this reality. This article is often credited as the impetus for burgeoning subsequent sociolinguistic engagement with issues of theoretical and practical relevance to the maintenance and revitalization of languages around the world. In many ways, the breadth and depth of research in this present *Handbook* is testimony to, and a reflection of, the diverse and extensive body of knowledge on these matters that has developed since that time, including seminal works on language revitalization such as Hinton and Hale (2001) and Grenoble and Whaley (2006).

In the past decade or so, ethnomusicologists have come to re-focus some attention on the loss and maintenance of music genres. One impulse was UNESCO's *Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage* (2003a), with its call for urgent action to preserve and support performing arts and other intangible expressions of culture around the world. Another was the International Music Council report *The Protection and Promotion of Musical Diversity* (Letts 2006), which likewise called for targeted intervention in the loss of global musical heritage. A further (and perhaps related) stimulus has been an intensified ethnomusicological interest in 'applied' or 'engaged' work, in which research is designed and carried out in close collaboration with musicians and communities in a way that brings them direct benefit (Dirkson, 2012). These (and other) factors have recently led to reinvigorated theoretical and philosophical interest in 'endangered' music traditions (e.g. Grant, 2014a) – and increasingly too in initiatives aiming to improve the situation of those traditions. Perhaps the most prominent such initiative is *Sustainable Futures for Music Cultures*, a five-year Australian-led project (2009-2013) that sought to elucidate the dynamic and complex interplay of forces acting on music genres, with a view to supporting worldwide music diversity and sustainability (Schippers and Grant, 2016).

In this chapter, I draw together the field of language revitalization with that of music sustainability. Through reference to three specific concerns, I argue that greater collaboration between researchers in these fields may benefit theoretical and applied efforts in each, as well as cultural maintenance and revitalization efforts at large.

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Before making the case for stronger interdisciplinary collaboration, however, I wish to acknowledge the already long and deep existing relationship between these fields, the foundations of which were consolidated and made explicit by linguistic anthropologist Feld (1974, 1990; Feld and Fox 1994). For many decades, ethnomusicologists and sociolinguists have cooperated on an astonishing diversity of research projects, including many relating to cultural vitality and viability, and many too that have engendered meaningful and mutually beneficial cross-disciplinary fertilization. Recent examples of such work include that of ethnomusicologists Linda Barwick and Allan Marett with linguist Lysbeth Ford in the Daly River region of Australia's Northern Territory (Marett, Barwick and Ford, 2013); and of ethnomusicologist Monika Stern with linguist Alexandre François in the northern regions of Vanuatu (François and Stern, 2013). Several recent academic publications and conferences have similarly explored the potential for, and the ongoing value of, cross-disciplinary work on issues of endangerment and/or revitalization; they include a volume of the journal *Language Documentation and Description* on language, prosody and music (Svantesson et al,

2012); and the 2015 conference of the Foundation for Endangered Languages, themed 'the music of endangered languages' (FEL, 2015).

A substantial subset of this interdisciplinary work has investigated the direct interconnections between the vitality and viability of languages and of music genres. Faudree (2013), for example, explores the roles of speech and song in Indigenous cultural revival in Mexico; Johnson (2011, 2015) examines the connections between song and endangered language revitalization on the island of Jersey; and Minks (2013) traces music's role in language revitalization on the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua. Further, several applied projects have used music as a vehicle to help strengthen endangered languages, like that which used song as a way to reclaim Australian Dharug (described by Green, 2010). In turn, language maintenance efforts have flow-on benefits for the vitality of music and other forms of intangible cultural heritage: given language is typically (though not invariably) the keystone of cultural 'ecosystems', the health of musical and other cultural expressions can often be strongly predicated on its vitality (Grant, 2014a).

These *actual* links between the revitalization of languages and music traditions, however, have generated significantly more research interest than the conceptual, philosophical, and theoretical links between the two. In general, most research into language revitalization (including much of that presented in this volume) remains delimited, only occasionally making explicit its relevance to non-oral forms of intangible cultural expressions like (non-vocal) music, dance, ritual practices, and so on. And for its part, applied ethnomusicological research seems to remain – in this way, at least – largely oblivious to the decades of language revitalization research that could significantly inform efforts toward music sustainability. This is notwithstanding, of course, some considerable differences between language and music in relation to their sustainability, described and discussed at length in Grant 2014a (Chapter 2).

In this context, I wish to offer three specific rationales for stronger collaboration between these disciplines, in regards to issues of revitalization and sustainability. The first relates to the value of a shared language; the second, to advancing both theory and practice; and the third, to strengthening advocacy and activism around safeguarding and supporting languages, music, and other intangible expressions of culture.

Sharing a common language

As this chapter probably makes evident (not least through its somewhat awkward references to music 'sustainability' but language 'revitalization'), key differences in ways of framing and discussing the vitality and viability of languages and music can make cross-disciplinary endeavors challenging. One conceptual framework encompassing both areas is *intangible cultural heritage* (Smith and Akagawa, 2009; Stefano et al, 2012), which embraces "oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage" as well as the performing arts, like music (UNESCO, 2003a, Article 2). Although sociolinguists and ethnomusicologists have both engaged extensively with the concept of *heritage* (with *heritage language* developing a specific meaning; Valdes 2000), framing language and

music in this way has met with critique and opposition in both fields, not least for its emphasis on the past rather than the present (e.g. Polinsky and Kagan, 2007; Titon 2009; Grant, 2014b). For music, the notion of *heritage* arguably engenders "a defensive posture of collecting, preserving, protecting, safeguarding, through proclamations and set-asides, special spaces and sanctuaries" (Titon, 2009, p. 135) – a concern for languages too.

Partly in reaction and response to such concerns, the alternative rhetoric of sustainability has increasingly surfaced in the ethnomusicological space in the last five to ten years (e.g. Titon, 2009; Bendrups, Barney and Grant, 2013; Bendrups and Schippers, 2015; Schippers and Grant, 2016, as well as being featured thematically in several international conferences and symposia). Some scholars argue that this is helping shift the music-related discourse from safeguarding to stewardship (Titon 2009). But the rhetoric of *sustainability* has not been unanimously accepted either, one concern being that it does not sufficiently acknowledge music's remarkable – and wonderful – ability to change and grow (see Grant 2014b). A multitude of other possible terms have been suggested by ethnomusicologists, including *revitalization*, *transformation*, *cultivation*, *creative regeneration* and even *safe-gardening*, without consensus (Grant, 2014a, p. 11). Significant resistance still surrounds the term *music endangerment*, for reasons apparently mostly related to the neo-colonial paternalistic mindset perceived to plague much early research activity in this area. In regularly using the term *music endangerment* (for example, in the title of my monograph; Grant 2014a), I am in the significant minority. I do so partly out of expediency, my work being situated at the nexus of language (endangerment and revitalization) and music (endangerment and revitalization), but also because I wish to motivate closer ethnomusicological consideration of the real loss of – not only change to – music traditions across the world (see Grant 2015).

In short, the field of scholarly investigation dealing with the current and future health of music traditions and global musical diversity has not yet even definitively settled on a name for itself. This brings considerable attendant challenges for research and activism, including practicalities such as securing funding and resources for applied work, and gaining recognition and momentum both within and outside of academia for related efforts. For this reason, it is arguably hampering academic contributions to international efforts to keep music genres strong. In contrast, linguists can at least be confident of a shared understanding (even if not acceptance) of the meanings of *language maintenance* and *revitalization*, and have carefully articulated (and thoroughly critiqued) definitions of terms and concepts such as *revival*, *renewal*, *reclamation* and *restoration*, even if meanings vary between researchers, countries, and contexts.

A sustained interdisciplinary conversation around the meanings and implications of these (and other) terms may significantly advance ethnomusicological consensus and understanding of key issues in music vitality and viability, particularly at this point in its trajectory. If linguists and ethnomusicologists were to develop over time a shared terminology with which to explore the commonalities and differences of their work, this could consolidate, expedite, and enrich ethnomusicological understandings of music sustainability, and make significant headway with applied initiatives in the area.

Conversely, within the recent and ongoing ethnomusicological explorations of these issues (such as that mentioned previously around sustainability and stewardship), linguists may encounter new ways of thinking that may expand and deepen language revitalization theory and practice.

In one way, it is immaterial whether the development of a shared language between linguists and ethnomusicologists on issues of sustainability / revitalization precedes or succeeds applied interdisciplinary cooperation: no doubt the latter would motivate, even necessitate, the former. Regardless, the next obvious consideration is how such a shared language may be put to practical use. One way is by advancing theoretical frameworks and tools to support language and music revitalization.

Advancing theoretical frameworks and applied tools

Greater collaboration (and a shared language) between sociolinguists and ethnomusicologists could assist in the development of well-informed, versatile theoretical frameworks and tools for applied research. In turn, these could support revitalization efforts for both language and music (and by extension, other intangible expressions of culture).

For example, linguists have developed many tools to measure and assess language endangerment, from Fishman's Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale ('GIDS', 1991), to UNESCO's Language Endangerment and Vitality Framework (2003b), to Lewis and Simons' Expanded GIDS ('EGIDS'; 2010). While these and similar tools are admittedly imperfect and have attracted criticism, their development, testing, implementation, modification, and related research have been crucial in advancing theory of language maintenance and revitalization. Furthermore, practically, they have helped clarify the factors in language endangerment in specific contexts, helped indicate the urgency for maintenance or revitalization strategies, and at times helped direct funding and resources to languages most in need. Importantly too, they have been used diachronically to assess changes in the vitality of languages over time (for example, by comparing the data presented in the sixteen editions of *Ethnologue* since 1951; Lewis, 2009).

In contrast, ethnomusicologists have only recently begun to explore and develop such vitality assessment tools for music. Seminally, linguist Coulter modified EGIDS to assess the vitality of a music genre of an East Sepik community in Papua New Guinea (2011). Following my own generalized adaptation for music of the UNESCO language framework, I tested it first in-depth against a single music genre in north Vietnam (in Grant, 2014a). Later, using this same adapted framework and inspired by Lewis's (2006) comparable language assessment efforts, I used a survey methodology to gather vitality data for 101 music genres across the world, presenting the results on an interactive online map (at www.musicendangerment.com). Feasibly, research like this may eventually serve as the basis for a more extensive survey of music endangerment, along the lines of *Ethnologue* (Lewis, 2009) or UNESCO's Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger (Moseley, 2010).

Clearly, precedent from language maintenance is invaluable to such ethnomusicological pursuits, underscoring successes as well as the difficulties of these types of research approaches. But the benefit could be two-way. As music researchers tackle the various challenges of adapting and developing appropriate frameworks and tools for their work on music endangerment and revitalization, they may generate new creative solutions that shift perceptions and possibilities for language revitalization strategies. Consider again, for instance, the issue of mapping endangerment: the volatility and mutability of music (well beyond that of language), with its intractable propensity to leap over boundaries of genre, culture, and nation, will demand innovative approaches to tracking changes in vitality over time – not only with regard to such issues as identifying the central geographical locus of a genre (necessary for mapping purposes), but even in the very fundamental tasks of defining 'music genre' and delineating the boundaries between one genre and another, and between a genre and its subgenres. These challenges have analogues (at least to some degree) in mapping language endangerment, as the editorial introduction to UNESCO's Atlas makes evident (Moseley, 2010). Musicological advances in this regard could inform and clarify linguistic approaches, with concomitant flow-on benefit in terms of maintenance and revitalization efforts.

Assessing levels of endangerment and vitality is only one area in which linguistic-ethnomusicological collaboration may be mutually beneficial. There are many others: our negotiation of the complex ethical aspects to sustainability interventions (Grant, 2012), as well as some key areas covered in this Handbook – from documentation, policy and planning, and information and communication technologies, to the role of institutions and education in revitalization. Broadly speaking, cross-disciplinary dialogue on theoretical and practical issues related to our work may expand our thinking about endangerment and revitalization; improve ways to predict and evaluate the outcomes of any interventions; and generally help us advance our shared goal of supporting strong and sustainable languages and cultures around the world.

Strengthening advocacy

A further potential benefit of interdisciplinary collaboration lies in strengthening advocacy on the issues of language and music revitalization, and by extension, cultural revitalization more broadly. For both language and music, at least three types of advocacy are arguably needed (Grant, 2014a, pp. 79-89). Firstly, "internal advocacy" aims to raise awareness within a community about options for strengthening its language or cultural heritage. In this regard, by working together to develop and communicate to communities a range of possible approaches to supporting sustainability, linguists and ethnomusicologists can pool knowledge and resources; and, by bringing a more diverse set of approaches and experiences to the metaphorical table, they can together expand the options available to communities.

Second is the need for what might be termed "scholarly advocacy" within our institutions and respective disciplines. This kind of advocacy is needed to increase intra-disciplinary and institutional awareness and understanding about the value, importance,

and urgency of working with communities on issues relating to cultural (language and music) maintenance and revitalization. It might also agitate for proper institutional and academic recognition of such community-based work. Particularly in this undertaking, united cross-disciplinary advocacy efforts are arguably more likely to be successful in the medium term than isolated intra-disciplinary ones.

Third is "public advocacy", which involves promoting general awareness of the fact that languages and music genres are in danger (or may become so, without action), and justifying the need for intervention. For current purposes, advocacy and activism in the government and policy spheres may be considered a sub-set of public advocacy, since social and political action and change is often predicated on shifting public understanding of an issue. Linguists and ethnomusicologists working on issues of endangerment and revitalization have various messages in common to convey to the public, such as the respective implications of cultural loss and cultural strength, and the need for funding and other support. Linguists, for instance, continue to make the case that speaking one's own heritage language can have direct and substantial benefit for physical, social, and emotional wellbeing (e.g. reducing youth alcohol and drug abuse and suicide rates in Australian Indigenous communities; Nordlinger and Singer, 2014); the same is true for the practice of music, dance, and other performance traditions (Gooda and Dudgeon, 2014). A united voice on these issues could strengthen the message and increase its reach.

By working together, then, linguists and ethnomusicologists can better cooperate and communicate with the communities we work with, and more convincingly present our needs and wishes to institutions, colleagues, and the public. (Here again, the value of a shared language becomes evident.) In the academic and public arenas, experts from across disciplines presenting a consolidated message about the risks of cultural endangerment and the importance of revitalization will likely have more sway than various less consolidated attempts at advocacy. This pertains at all levels, from the single university or town through to international policy and development forums. Of the latter, a case in point is the recent transnational call by cultural networks for greater recognition of the role of culture in the post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda, where even more coordinated and vigorous advocacy across disciplinary fields could have had significant implications.

Recommendations and future directions

As intangible manifestations and expressions of culture, the vitality and viability of languages and music genres are intimately connected; so too then is the work of those sociolinguists and applied ethnomusicologists working in areas of endangerment and revitalization. As researchers in both fields strive to support local and global efforts in cultural sustainability, the opportunity seems ripe to expand the collaborative aspects of our work – moving beyond the direct links, which have to date been the main basis for interdisciplinary collaboration, to include the theoretical and philosophical parallels between our fields, many of which have practical implications.

This shift will not be without its challenges and risks. In growing interdisciplinary capacity, we will need to negotiate various scholarly and practical challenges of cross-disciplinary work, such as the necessary investment of time to build firmer bridges between our disciplines, and the institutional policies and procedures that favor intra-disciplinary research (described and discussed at length in the literature; e.g. Lyall and Fletcher, 2013; Siedlok and Hibbert, 2014). Also, in working together, we should remain carefully vigilant to the differences between language and music in relation to their sustainability – some of them significant – and the consequent implications for maintenance and revitalization strategies (Grant 2014a).

Yet, as I have argued, the returns could be high. Greater collaboration between ethnomusicologists and sociolinguists would both necessitate and stimulate the shared language that could, in turn, facilitate further interdisciplinary dialogue. In addition to being intellectually rewarding, such dialogue and collaboration could bring about significant advances in the theoretical frameworks and practical tools within and between our respective disciplines, across several aspects of our work. As described, it could also strengthen support and action within communities, academia, and generally, thereby increasing the likelihood of success in approaches to language and music revitalization. Importantly, such collaboration would lay the groundwork for greater cooperation with scholars working in other areas of intangible cultural heritage too. With these potentially substantial benefits in store, making the effort to work together more deeply in these ways seems, I would suggest, a very worthwhile endeavor.

Related topics
Chapter 21. Peter Austin and Julia Sallabank. Language Documentation and Revitalization - Some Methodological Considerations.

Chapter 23. Christopher Kaliko Baker. Language Revitalization and the Arts.

Chapter 45. Julien Meyer. Revitalization of Whistled Languages.

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Further Reading

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       Weaving together approaches from ethnomusicology, anthropology, and linguistics, this landmark ethnography points to the interconnectedness of the forest environment with Kaluli cultural expressions, including language and song.

Grant, Catherine. 2014. *Music endangerment: How language maintenance can help.* NY: Oxford University Press.
       Using a comparative framework and situated within the growing field of 'applied ethnomusicology', this book explores ways in which language maintenance might (and might not) illuminate new pathways to keeping music genres strong, locally and globally.

Marett, Allan. 2010. Vanishing songs: How musical extinctions threaten the planet. The Laurence Picken Memorial Lecture 2009. *Ethnomusicology Forum* 19(2): 249-262.
       Drawing on language endangerment and musicological research, and the author's own experience as a performer in an Australian Aboriginal ceremonial tradition, Marett argues that the repercussions of "vanished" music genres extend far beyond the communities in which the losses occur.

Marett, Allan, and Linda Barwick. 2003. Endangered songs and endangered languages." In R. McKenna Brown and Joe Blythe (eds) *Maintaining the Links: Language, Identity and the Land*, proceedings of Seventh FEL Conference, Broome, Western Australia, 22–24 September 2003, 144–151. Bath, UK: Foundation for Endangered Languages.
       Through case studies of Australian Indigenous song genres, this paper argues for the urgency of documenting song language, and suggests that researcher-community collaborations to this end can revitalize a community's interest in, and practice of, song repertoires.

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       This special issue of *World of Music* explores issues relating to cultural and musical viability; the relevance of ecological models is a salient theme.