

# OGMIOS

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*Examples of elegant calligraphy in the Eastern variety of the Aramaic language. The words read, from top to bottom, **mlelutha** “Eloquence”, **msekha’uta** “Expressiveness”, **khila d-mella** “Power of words”, **augmius** “Ogmios”. Calligrapher: George Stifo. Kindly contributed by Eden Naby Frye.*

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## 1. Editorial

In this issue you will find details of our forthcoming Eleventh Conference, to be held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, from 26 to 28 October 2007. This issue of *Ogmios* is once again severely delayed, for which I apologise, beyond the date for conference registration, but you may already know the timetable of the conference anyway, from the announcement below, which is reproduced from our web-site, [www.ogmios.Org](http://www.ogmios.Org).

Chris Moseley

## 2. Development of the Foundation

### The Eleventh Conference of the Foundation for Endangered Languages: Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Working Together for Endangered Languages: Research Challenges and Social Impacts

University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Dates: 26-28 October 2007

#### FEL XI

Globalisation has an impact on societies on various levels. One of its implications is the further endangerment of languages, especially those of minority communities. The looming threat of language loss and death is due to the hegemony of more dominant languages in sociopolitical and economic domains. Linguists therefore have an important role in documenting, projecting, and providing information on, languages which face extinction.

Linguists undertaking such research must tread carefully in any community which faces language endangerment. The researcher by his or her very presence can disturb the established social relations, the socio-economic organisation, and the power relations within a community, bringing in more globalisation, and more awareness of and exchange with the outside world. Researchers must be made aware of the impact of their presence.

Communities facing language endangerment may not be cooperative towards outsiders and may view them with suspicion. In some communities breaking such barriers requires tact, effort, and strategic planning. Members of the community facing endangerment should be perceived and treated by the researchers as experts in their heritage language. Such a view inevitably reduces the power inequality between researchers and members of the endangered language and eases collaboration. Cooperation and collaboration may be impeded if the linguist sees him/herself or is seen as someone who is more authoritative and linguistically more 'correct' than members of the community facing endangerment. Such a perception may result in the infamous observer's paradox where subjects become less natural in the presence of the researcher.

When researchers do not take members of the studied communities seriously, collaborative work is impeded as the input provided may be distorted due to the researchers' belief that they are the language experts. Linguists must be objective and this can be a challenge as prior knowledge may interfere in their objectivity. Lack of trust and collaboration may result in information not being provided. One way of combating the failure to share information is to ensure that researchers are aware that different members of the community facing language shift are responsible for different kinds of information.

If communities are informed of the dangers of losing their languages, they may be inclined to collaborate with the linguists to provide information of the language they speak as on them is entrusted the onus of transmitting their heritage to family members. Promoting the popularity of an endangered language in domains such as the workplace, at home and at school may prove to be difficult, as endangered languages face many obstacles namely from the economic functionalities of more dominant languages and the attitudes of younger speakers. At worst, linguists could be seen as counter-productive by the very community whose language they want to save, because the shift away from an endangered language is at times motivated by upward economic and social mobility.

The task of the linguist in this is by no means simple. To penetrate and immerse oneself in an ethnolinguistic speech community whose language may be on the verge of death provides the linguist many challenges on the social and relationship levels. While the linguist is required to collect data as a researcher, s/he must also form a relationship with the members of the community so as to collaborate with them in efforts to promote and preserve the language, in ensuring its revival, in establishing devices and procedures to stop endangerment etc. Given that the endangerment of languages can be han-

dled sensitively through collaboration between researchers and members of a community facing language extinction, this Conference will address the research challenges and social impacts of such collaborations. Amongst the questions raised in this Conference are:

What can researchers do to ensure collaboration with members of the language community? What should the researcher do to find a way into the community through proper and accepted channels? What benefits can a language community expect from such collaboration?

What are the boundaries that the researcher should not cross in order to protect the rights and privacy of the subjects and to safeguard collaborative ties between community and researcher? What are the limits of researchers' duties to the language community, and vice versa?

What is 'best practice' for researchers in order to be accepted and trusted as in-group members of the community? Does this require the linguist to reduce his/her role as an expert, in order to build trust and collaboration with the community? Can cultural immersion act as a collaborative means in data collection, creating the notion that the researcher is part of the community's in-group? Are there any advantages in maintaining distance between researcher and community?

What options do researchers have if they encounter non-collaborative behaviour from their target subjects?

Can support for maintenance of an endangered language actually be socially counter-productive, when the shift away from an endangered language is seen as progress in economic and social mobility? In such conditions, can the community be made aware of the importance of language maintenance? How can the researcher convince the community of the negative impact of language loss on their culture and history and, conversely, of the benefits of recovery, preservation, promotion?

How can language documentation work, and its fruits, be integrated into community activities and community development? In what other ways can linguistic research benefit language maintenance and revitalization?

How can the researcher guard against personally causing damage to existing social and political structures? In particular, how can the researcher avoid disturbing established social relations and organization by seemingly conferring favours on specific members of the community?

How can the researcher ensure that s/he is not unwittingly the agent of globalisation within the community and thereby the cause of further socio-economic and cultural disruption?

The aim of the conference is to pool experience, to discuss and to learn from it, not to theorize in the abstract about inter-cultural relations.

Each standard presentation at the Conference will last twenty minutes, with a further ten minutes for discussion and questions and answers. Plenary lectures will last forty-five minutes each; these are awarded by invitation only.

**Conference dates:** 26-28 October 2007

**The site** for the 2007 conference of the Foundation of Endangered Languages, hosted jointly this year with SKET, University of Malaya, will be Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

**University of Malaya** is the oldest university in Malaysia, and SKET, i.e. the Section for Co-Curricular Activities, Elective Courses by Other Faculties and TITAS, is responsible for the teaching of 80 co-curricular courses, and the compulsory course "Ethnic Relations." (For more information, visit <http://www.um.edu.my>).

## The *Ogmios* web-site

The Foundation is seeking a skilled new Web-Master to maintain its web-site [www.ogmios.org](http://www.ogmios.org). This responsible post on our committee has been ably filled up to now by Paul Baker of the University of Lancaster in the UK. Paul is finding that the increasing burden of his other responsibilities means that he needs to relinquish the post as soon as possible. Since we are a charity, the position is voluntary and unpaid, so we require someone with the necessary computer skills, a modest amount of time available, and above all the ability to maintain a web-site, to step forward as soon as possible. The ideal candidate need not like in the UK, but would preferably be able to attend committee meetings in the UK. If you feel you have the skill and commitment, please contact your editor. You can also contact Paul at [bakerjrp@lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:bakerjrp@lancaster.ac.uk)

## 3. Endangered Languages in the News

### Finnic languages being oppressed in Russia

From *Helsingin Sanomat*, Helsinki, Finland 26 July 2007

*Support for the Finnic peoples of Russia ought to be an essential part of Finland's policy toward Russia, writes Janne Saarikivi in the first item of our 'Guest Pen' series*

Finnish identity is built on the tension between European and Finno-Ugrian qualities. We like to emphasise our eligibility for the *salons* of Europe. On the other hand we have to justify our poor head for booze or our lack of small talk by saying that we are "Ugrians" from the forests.

There are three Finno-Ugrian states in Europe: Finland, Hungary and Estonia. In outward appearance their cultures are Western, but in language, folk poetry, folk music and mythology they are connected more to Eurasia than to Europe.

The Finno-Ugrian link with Russia extends Finnish identity. It makes us more than mere Europeans and gives stimuli to Finnish culture. So it is natural that in Finland there is interest in the Finno-Ugrians of Russia.

There are more than two and a half million Finno-Ugrians in Russia. At least four of its peoples – the Mordvin, the Mari, the Udmurt and the Komi – are so large that in principle their languages possess the preconditions for becoming real languages of culture.

In the early twentieth century, orthographies were created for the Finno-Ugrian languages of Russia. However, Stalin's purges destroyed the intelligentsia that used them. During the Thaw of the Khrushchev period, education in the minority languages began, in all secrecy, its downward spiral.

For a brief while *perestroika* and Yeltsin's Russia protected the minority nations, but in Putin's Russia the extension of linguistic and cultural autonomy does not seem possible.

The situation is well illustrated by the numerical decline of the minority nationalities. For example, according to the 1989 census, 1.15 million people declared themselves as Mordvin, but in the 2002 census, only 840,000.

Use of minority languages in writing has also declined in Russia. In the nineteen-thirties, 200 books a year appeared in Komi, including some translations from world literature. In the past few years only a score or so have appeared, and even those mostly with subsidies from abroad.

Present-day Russia is to a large extent a Slav nation-state. Minority languages in administration, education and the media are often not available even where Russian law stipulates them.

The decay of agricultural structures, alcoholism and unemployment affect national minorities painfully. The decline of living conditions in the countryside means the Russification of the Finno-Ugrian minorities, because minority languages do not survive in towns.

One fifth of Russia's population, or 30 millions of people, belong to national minorities. The Russia of the future will also be multinational. Many minorities are not merging with the majority, but rather are becoming stronger, especially in the Caucasus. Nevertheless, the future looks bleak for the Finno-Ugrians.

Many European minority languages, such as Northern Saami, Welsh and Basque, have developed into the vehicles for a modern culture. This has been possible because of an investment in minority-language education and media.

The Finno-Ugrian peoples of Russia need both money and cultural exchange in order to be preserved in their present form. In the spheres of research and education the EU and Russia ought to try to create technologies together whereby minority-language education and media can be extended and the cultures modernised.

What is at least as important is that attitudes to the cultural heritage of minorities must change. In Finland, for example, the majority population's interest is one of the most important factors in supporting Saami culture.

For the intelligentsia of Russia's Finno-Ugrian nations Finland is an example of a modern Finno-Ugrian nation which has handled its minorities policy well. Therefore it is important that our decision-makers realise their responsibility in preserving the world's Finno-

Ugrian cultural heritage. Support for Russia's Finno-Ugrians ought to be a fundamental part of Finland's policy toward Russia.

*The writer is a researcher in the Department of Finno-Ugrian Studies at the University of Helsinki. Translated by Chris Moseley*

### Finnish national epic into Aunus Karelian

By Topi Nykänen, *Turun Sanomat*, Turku, Finland (26 July 2007)

When Zinaida Dubinina, from Aunus in Karelia, visited Finland for the first time in 1991 with a choir of schoolteachers, her hosts in Mikkeli [eastern Finland] decided to show their welcome by demonstrating how well they made *karjalanpiirakat* (Karelian pirogue pastries).

"They baked closed pastries, and I was – well, that's not the way to make them. Nor is a rice pastry even a Karelian pastry. For me that's a Finnish pastry," laughs Dubinina.

Born at Kotkatjärvi in Aunus district in 1934, Dubinina learned as a child that the filling for Karelian pastries is millet, potato or barley. And the whole beauty is finished off by baking it golden-brown in the oven with a mixture of egg, butter and cream.

Although Dubinina's pirogues taste at least as good as they look, her greatest gift to Karelian culture was not made in the kitchen.

Over the past twelve years Zinaida's translations from Finnish into Aunus Karelian, or *Livvi*, of the New Testament, the 'Children's Bible' and the Psalms have been published.

The most ambitious work, the Livvi version of the *Kalevala*, the Finnish national epic, is currently being edited by Jelena Bogdanova, lecturer in Karelian at the Pedagogical University in Petrozavodsk.

Dubinina doesn't dare guess when it will appear, because Bogdanova is also busily engaged in the government of the Republic of Karelia.

But if the translation work lasted over fifteen years in all, she can afford to wait a bit for the published result.

When Zinaida Dubinina graduated in 1954 as a teacher, the language of instruction in Karelian schools was changed abruptly from Finnish to Russian. Since Karelian was not a written language, it was never taught in schools.

"In many places children didn't want to go to school any more. The boys would rather go to work in the forests and the girls would look after children."

The position for minority languages began to slowly improve at the end of the nineteen-eighties in the Soviet Union. Dubinina recalls how even at Kotkatjärvi they had to start teaching Karelian from scratch.

"The Russian head teacher wondered what we were going to do without any teaching material. I replied that we have it in our heads!" Inspired with a new enthusiasm for the language, Dubinina began looking for suitable teaching materials. The *Kalevala* seemed closely related. Sung repetitions of those same poems had been preserved in her own home village.

In passing she mentions that her favourite parts of the *Kalevala* are the stories of those famous women, Lemminkäinen's mother and Aino.

"That *Kalevala* metre – I tend to think in the same way. But the Finnish version of the *Kalevala* was far too difficult for the children, so I translated those poems into my own language. Every evening after work I'd sit for ages in my study, writing," says Dubinina.

Although the appearance of the *Kalevala* in the Livvi language is of great symbolic value, the Karelian literary language is still in a confused state. Actually it doesn't exist; rather, writers and translators publish works in their own dialects, of which the main ones are "Karelian proper" [or Viena] and Aunus Karelian, or Livvi.

Zinaida Dubinina is not worried about the situation. She knows from experience that a lasting language policy is not created by force.

"People speak Karelian, regardless of dialect differences, and they feel they belong to the Karelian nation. You don't need an artificial language for that."

Dubinina believes that a literary language will develop if it is allowed to. New indigenous and translated literature is being published in Karelian all the time. Both Aunus and Viena Karelians publish newspapers in their own dialects and Dubinina believes the dialogue between the dialects is fruitful.

She believes that the exchange will eventually lead to a common literary language. The biggest obstacles to the development of the language are hidden in the school system. After the initial enthusiasm of less than twenty years ago, many people are tired for fighting against bureaucracy.

"At the moment Karelian is being taught, but very little. The teaching programme for schools comes straight from Moscow, and there is no room for the language. It's frustrating, because we have nothing against Russian. A child can be brought up bilingually," says Dubinina.

So the future is still uncertain, but as a gesture of conciliation the translator quotes a Russian proverb: "Hope is the last to die."

### **Some facts about Karelian**

*The Karelian language, spoken in the Karelian Republic of Russia, or Eastern Karelia to Finns, as well as in the Tver Karelian region, is the closest relative to Finnish.*

*It is the third most widely spoken Baltic Finnic language after Finnish and Estonian.*

*About 100,000 people speak Karelian.*

*It is divided into several dialects, the main ones being Karelian Proper and Aunus Karelian (Livvi), as well as Lude (Finn. Lyydi), which is considerably smaller.*

It should not be confused with the Karelian dialects of Finnish, which were spoken in Finnish Karelia before the war and are still spoken in the Finnish province of Southern Karelia.

## Russia's Babel

By Scott Spires, from Languages Policy list, 1 August 2007

### **Linguistic Heritage under Threat**

It is an interesting paradox: as the earth's population expands, the number of languages decreases. The language you are reading in now is one of the causes of this situation. English rolls over other, weaker languages like a tidal wave, obliterating the smallest ones and leaving even some of the larger tongues gasping for breath. But it is not the only such killer languages-Spanish, French, Chinese, and Portuguese have been doing deadly work as well, and Russian definitely belongs in this formidable company.

Languages die for any number of reasons. They die because a few languages, led by English, dominate the Internet, science and business. They die because you can't take a test, get a driver's license, book a hotel room, or watch a movie in Ladakhi, or Huron or Ainu. They die because the Beatles sang in English (not Cornish or Manx), and because Alexander Pushkin wrote in Russian (not Vepsian or Karakalpak). They die because their speakers see no use for them, or are ashamed of them. They die because their speakers do.

In spite of factors like these, the Russian Federation has remained one of the world's greatest preserves of linguistic diversity. Here you will find specimens of Indo-European, Uralic, Altaic, Caucasian and many other families in their natural habitat. There are oddities to amuse you: The Caucasian language Ubykh, recently extinct, contained a jaw-breaking 81 consonants and only three vowels; the Chukchi language maintains different sound systems depending on whether a man or a woman is doing the talking; Izhor, with fewer than 500 speakers, is nonetheless divided into three separate dialects. Surveys indicate that over 100 languages have indigenous speech communities within Russia.

Yet this "nature preserve" is under severe threat of turning effectively monoglot within a few decades. Many of these languages are, like Ubykh, already extinct; others are in the process of extinction or are barely holding on. The process of extinction has, in fact, been going on for centuries; place names attest to this. Northern Russia, for instance, is studded with toponyms from Finno-Ugric dialects that died out long ago--the most famous example being Moskva, which probably means something like "dark water."

### **Siberia's Loss**

Siberia, in particular, can be seen as the ground zero of these trends in Russia. Many of the phenomena that lead to the demise of minority languages are especially apparent there. Geography, politics, and culture all interact to create a space in which it is difficult for such languages to thrive.

The lack of linguistic compactness, for example, is a problem that especially affects Siberia. "Many of the peoples of the North are non-compact peoples," says Vida Mikhailchenko of the Russian Academy of Sciences' Institute of Linguistics. They live sparsely scattered across a vast territory, which makes communication as sizable communities difficult. This contrasts with, for example, the situation in the Northern Caucasus. It remains, in an expression that goes back to

Roman times, "the mountain of languages," a region of densely packed and clearly demarcated tongues. Linguist Irina Samarina points to Archi, a language in Dagestan, as an extreme example of compactness: It is spoken in a single village of 1,200 people, but everyone in the village speaks it. As long as this situation persists, it is likely to survive.

Policy choices have contributed to the situation. The family is one of the most important forces in ensuring the survival of a language--if parents are able to hand it down to their children, it will continue for at least another generation. In the last century, however, it was common for children of minority-language speakers to be taken away from their parents and raised in boarding schools together with children of other small nationalities. The inevitable result of this situation was that everyone grew up fluent only in Russian. In many cases, only people born before approximately 1940 have preserved knowledge of a language. Once that happens, language death becomes almost inevitable--when the younger generation drops the baton, the race is over.

Standardization can also present a problem. If a language has never been equipped for use in any official sphere, deciding where the standard ends and dialects begin can be problematic. The Nenets language, for example, comes in two distinct varieties--Forest and Tundra. Should one of these be chosen as the basis for the standard; should a hybrid language be created; or should each be recognized as a separate language and treated accordingly?

These are the sort of questions that can keep a language out of classrooms, radio stations, and newspapers, and promote its eventual extinction. Even standardization does not guarantee a continued use, since elderly or longtime speakers rebel against using the new standard.

### **The Stigmatizing Effect**

And there is the important issue of will. Much depends simply on the desire of speakers to maintain their language, a factor that is typically independent of both official support and official suppression. If the will to speak a language exists, it can survive neglect and repression; conversely, if the will isn't there, no amount of support will save it.

While outsiders may perceive small languages as something romantic or exotic, speakers of small languages often view their native tongues from a very different perspective. Frequently, they associate such languages with poverty, illiteracy and backwardness. Sheer utility is a

powerful argument in favor of switching to a few mega-languages, and many people who might speak indigenous languages follow that pragmatic argument to its logical end in their own lives.

Linguists know that the effectiveness of outside forces is limited. "We can't stop the process of disappearance," Mikhailchenko says. "And it's not good to try to decide things from above." The important thing is to gather data, create detailed descriptions of those languages threatened with extinction, make information widely available, and support those initiatives that promise success.

Laws can also play a role. According to Mikhailchenko, Russia may soon ratify the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. The charter sets out a series of measures to promote the use of minority languages in education, the media and other spheres.

At this point a skeptic might ask if there is any point in trying to preserve these languages at all. Language death is a normal phenomenon of history. Linguist Andrew Dalby estimates that a language dies every two weeks. Why put so much effort into recording, teaching and preserving dialects that might be limited to a handful of villages? A novel line of reasoning, laid out in Daniel Nettle and Suzanne Romaine's 2000 book *Vanishing Voices*, treats linguistic diversity as analogous to biodiversity. Languages, the argument goes, are like species in an ecosystem. Just as the extinction of species leads to the degradation of the natural environment, so the extinction of languages degrades the human environment. Thus, systems of local knowledge are somehow dependent on the languages in which they were originally developed.

One can find echoes of this in Russia. Some languages have highly developed vocabularies for locally specific activities, such as reindeer-herding. People who usually speak Russian in their everyday lives will switch to the local language whenever they pursue local practices. The problem with this view is that every language is capable of expanding and changing to meet new challenges. There are no recorded instances of a language dying out because it confronted a world it couldn't describe. If it is necessary to invent reindeer-herding terminology for Russian, that will be done.

### **A Cultural Preserve**

In fact there are good reasons to preserve minority languages, although those reasons are rather prosaic and may not appeal to people who perceive endangered tongues as something exotic and magical. Culture is really the key factor. Mark Abley, in his book *Spoken*

Here, quotes an activist for the Celtic Manx language as saying: "the language is almost like a peg to hang the culture on. The music, the Gaelic way of storytelling, the folklore--all these things come out of the Manx language."

Cultures can survive the translation to a new language, but in the process they lose something unique and essential. Poetry, folklore, songs and customs have a unique sound and shape, and possibly a unique meaning, in one language that they don't have in another.

Abley also quotes the graphic words of MIT linguist Ken Hale, who says that losing a language is like "dropping a bomb on the Louvre."

The outside world tends to take little notice of the small peoples of Siberia. Japanese film director Akira Kurosawa's Siberian epic *Dersu Uzala* featured a Goldi hunter who befriends a Russian explorer; the Tuvan throat-singing group *Huun-Huur-Tu* has enjoyed success around the globe, singing songs in their native language that simply couldn't produce the same effect in Russian--or any other language. But it is hard to think of much beyond these admittedly esoteric examples that have made it into the wider world. Linguistic homogenization is one of the factors that could blur the peoples' distinctive cultural profile. While language death, as Mikhalchenko notes, is something that is largely beyond prevention by outside forces, the disappearance of even the smallest dialect represents a loss of a cultural treasure-house.

## UN preserves hybrid language of the Bounty mutineers

By Nick Squires in Sydney for the Daily Telegraph, London 22 August 2007-08-26

A campaign to preserve a unique hybrid language spoken by the descendants of the Bounty mutineers on an isolated South Pacific island has been given a boost by the United Nations.

Norfolk Island's blend of 18<sup>th</sup> century English and Tahitian, known as *Norfolk* or *Norfolk*, will be featured by UNESCO in the next edition of its *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger of Disappearing*.

The language, one of the world's rarest, is under threat because Norfolk Islanders are increasingly marrying outsiders and because of the influence of television and radio from neighbouring Australia and New Zealand.

The tiny subtropical island, which is part of Australia but maintains a fiercely separate identity, including a different flag and national anthem, is determined that the language should not become extinct.

A Norfolk government spokesman, Peter Maywald, said the UNESCO listing would enable the island to apply for funds to encourage the teaching of Norfolk. "It gives us more clout in terms of protecting the language," he said yesterday.

Nursery rhymes and word games are used to teach the 310 children in Norfolk's only school. In the past children were punished for speaking Norfolk, which was regarded as an embarrassingly backward patois.

"It's now undergoing a renaissance. People are more interested in their culture and historical roots than they were before," Mr. Maywald said. A few pages from the island's newspaper are translated from English into Norfolk and there a plans to build a cultural centre which will showcase the language.

"The advice from UNESCO is a significant step in building recognition of the unique language and culture of Norfolk Island," said the chief minister, Andre Nobbs. "It is one of the rarest languages in the world."

The creole evolved between the Bounty mutineers and the Tahitians. After rebelling against Capt. William Blich, the mutineers settled in 1790 on Pitcairn Island. But by 1856 the island was overcrowded and population was relocated to Norfolk. Today around half of Norfolk Island's 2,000 inhabitants are descended from the Pitcairners and speak Norfolk.

Its broad burr evokes West Country English, but it is peppered with Tahitian and other Polynesian words incomprehensible to English speakers.

Norfolk Island was uninhabited when it was first sighted by Captain Cook in 1774, although it had previously been settled. Until 1855 it was used by the British as a South Seas Gulag for the most recalcitrant convicts, notorious for its cruelty.

### Let's speak Norfolk

Some words and phrases

**Watawieh** Hello

**All yorlye gwen?** How are you all?

**Kushu** I'm fine

**I car foot** I don't know

**I gut ar hillie** I'm in a lazy mood

**Hui-hui** Appallingly dirty and smelly

**Fut you ally comey diffy and do daffy?** Why are you behaving that way?

**Yu bin pat aut wan piis a' kiek f'Berel?** Did you put out a piece of cake for Beryl?

**Car do far dorg et** Not good enough even for a dog's meal

**I gwen out yena f'porpieh** I'm going out yonder to get some guavas

**Da nufka se two in em moo'oo** That kingfisher has settled in the flax

**Sup musa dan** The soup's nearly cooked

**Wan kau f'mais bradhas s'orf aut** My brother's cow has escaped

**Hi es kain a' huihuiwan** He's somewhat dirty

**Dem hihi andasaid em stoen** The periwinkles are under the rocks

**Kat krors aa paedak aafta tii en wi gu sing** Cut across the paddock after tea and come for a singsong

**Ori em allan haendikraaft iin a' shoe hau god des iya!** How good the island handicrafts are in this year's show!

Source: *Speak Norfolk Today* by Alice Buffett 1999

## Lost language of Pitmatic gets its lexicon

Martin Wainwright, The Guardian (London) 30 July 2007

A dialect so dense that it held up social reforms has been rescued from obscurity by the publication of its first dictionary.

Thousands of terms used in Pitmatic, the oddly-named argot of north-east [English] miners for more than 150 years, have been compiled through detailed research in archives and interviews with the last generation to talk of kips, corf-batters and arse-loops.

First recorded in Victorian newspapers, the language was part of the intense camaraderie of underground working which excluded even friendly outsiders such as the parliamentary commissioners pressing for better conditions in the pits in 1842. "The barriers to our intercourse were formidable," they wrote in their report on encountering the Pitmatic dialect. "Numerous mining technicalities, northern provincialisms, peculiar intonation and accents and rapid and indistinct utterance rendered it essential for us to devote time to the study of these peculiarities ere we could translate and write the evidence."

The first Pitmatic dictionary, including pit recollections and analysis of the origins of the dialect's words, has been compiled by Bill Griffiths, the country's foremost Geordie scholar, whose previous work includes the standard *Dictionary of North East Dialect*. His new book reveals an exceptionally rich combination of borrowings from Old Norse, Dutch and a score of other languages, with inventive usages dreamed up by the miners themselves. "There's been an urgency to the project, copying the handwritten diaries and songs stored away in family homes," said Mr. Griffiths, who also collected booklets, pit newspapers and magazines and spent hours interviewing ex-miners.

Although the north-east was once the world capital of mining – hence the phrase carrying coals to Newcastle – the last major pit closed in 2005 and the industry's traces are vanishing.

"The golden age of writing about the pits by working pitmen for working pitmen and their families is over," said Mr. Griffiths. "It is time to save and share what we can."

Part financed by the Heritage Lottery Fund, in a three-stage dialect study of the north-east called *Wor Language*, the dictionary reveals the deeply practical nature of Pitmatic. The dialect was original called Pitmatical, and its curious name was a parallel to mathematics, intended to stress the skill, precision and craft of the colliers' work.

Term after term is related to mining practices, such as stappil, a shaft with steps beside the coal seam, or corf-batters, boys who scraped out filthy baskets used for hauling coal to the pithead.

Other words are more earthy: arse-loop is a rope chair used when repairing shafts and a candyman or bum-bailiff is a despised official who evicts strikers from company-owned homes.

*Pitmatic: The Talk of the North-East Coalfield* is published by Northumbria University Press, £9.99

## Cymru: Welsh media developments

The Welsh language scene has lately been a hive of dynamism and should be held up as an example to the other Celtic language move-

ments as providing possible future pathways of development for the other languages.

Many of these developments have taken place within the field of media and technology and have been an inspiration to see. The advances signal a renewed spurt of confidence among the Welsh people and the use of their native language, even among non Welsh speakers. Gains are being made despite some major obstacles and inadequate resources when compared to the seemingly privileged situation of other lesser used languages of Europe, such as Euskera (in the Spanish state) and Friesian.

Some of the developments that have taken place and are planned for the near future in Wales have been:

#### Internet TV

In April an internet television channel was launched called Siaradog. It is broadcast once a week and shows interviews and music and is hosted by Welsh rapper Aneirin Karadog. The show is 16 minute long, but looks likely to herald a new wave of similar programmes in the future.

#### Welsh Language Daily Newspaper

An official launch date of 3 March 2008 has now been set for the first daily newspaper in Welsh to be issued. After some public grant funding difficulties the Y Byd (The World) newspaper has succeeded in raising 445 000 Euros worth of public shares.

Currently only Eire has its own daily newspaper (Lá Nua) among the six Celtic countries and the Celtic languages are among the few languages in the EU without their own daily. (The launch of a daily newspaper in the Breton language failed some years ago). In Wales the reason for this, according to the Chairman of Y Byd publishers, is a lack of investment and confidence.

Y Byd will be available in printed format and also online.

#### Language Control Centre

June saw the launch of a new computer application that will allow users to choose either Welsh or English as an interface language for Windows XP and Office 2003 at home or in the workplace.

Bwrdd Yr Iaith Gymraeg is asking for users to provide feedback by writing to post@...

#### Dime Goch

A new and novel internet idea that encourages both Welsh and non-Welsh speakers who want to encourage companies to offer their services in the Welsh language, has been launched called Dime Goch.

The website asks supporters to subscribe from one pound a month to an email list of people who are willing to apply pressure on giant companies by stating they will definitely switch suppliers if services are provided in Welsh.

The Welsh language internet community consumer revolution has begun! See [\[Voir le site\]](#) for further details.

#### Predictive texting in Welsh

This is a free downloadable programme to allow Welsh speakers to use 'predictive texting' in Welsh on their mobile phones. The company called 'Tecstico' was a design idea thought up by a Welsh university student and initially launched at the Welsh National Eisteddfod in 2006.

#### Internet Chat rooms, Forums and Young people

The Internet was claimed last week, by one of the worlds leading linguists to be a saviour of the Welsh language. Professor David Crystal of Bangor University said that the Welsh language (along with Breton) is now considered to be 'cool' to use by young people, because of its presence on the internet.

Professor Crystal said:

**« It doesn't matter how much activism you engage in on behalf of a language if you don't attract the teenagers, the parents of the next generation of children.**

»And what turns teenagers on more than the internet these days? If you can get a language out there, the youngsters are much more likely to think it's cool."

Professor Crystal's comments follow in the wake of the Bwrdd Yr Iaith Gymraeg/Welsh Language Board strategy document for IT and the Welsh language. The Strategy aims to provide a framework for Welsh language Information Technology (IT) work in the future and hopes to lead the way in innovative IT development.

#### Final Remarks

Of course not one of the language situations in the Celtic countries is the same and comparisons are indeed not always useful or helpful. In addition, the Welsh language is probably the most strongly supported of all the Celtic languages. It is nevertheless beneficial at times to make cursory glances at recent language developments in the different countries, if only to provide inspiration and share ideas for future possible action

*(Report compiled for Celtic News by Celtic League Secretary General, Rhisiart Tal-e-bot)*

*J B Moffatt Director of Information Celtic League  
24/05/07*

## Young Chilean keeps nearly extinct languages alive

*San Francisco Chronicle. 12 August 2007*

*Jen Ross, Chronicle Foreign Service*

Santiago, Chile: While most 16-year-old boys are busy playing video games or worrying about girls, Joubert Yanten spends most of his spare time reading dictionaries and singing tribal songs.

In the heart of Chile's bustling capital, this teen finds a place to meditate amid the plants on the patio of his family's modest home. He hums to himself, in the high-pitched tone of a pubescent boy. Minutes later, his voice deepens, and he seems to enter a sort of trance. Guttural sounds escape his mouth, as he pronounces the inflections of this native tongue with obvious ease.

Yanten is speaking Selk'nam, the language of an extinct aboriginal group that lived in the Tierra del Fuego islands off southern Chile and Argentina. They were among the last native communities in South America to be settled, in the late 19th century.

When the Spaniards arrived in Chile, 11 languages were in widespread use: Quechua, Aymara, Rapanui, Chango, Kunza, Diaguita, Mapudungun, Chono, Kawesqar, Yagan and Selk'nam. Today, only the first three remain.

Experts now consider Yanten to be the only living speaker of a language that died with the last ethnic Selk'nam in the 1970s.

His obsession began at age 8, when he wrote an elementary school project on Chile's native groups. "It frustrated me that no one really saw the magnitude of the extinction of an entire race in the south," he said. "Now you'll only find a couple of indigenous faces; it's really sad."

But learning a language when there is no one to speak it with is no small task. Yanten used dictionaries and audiocassettes of interviews and shamanic chants, recorded by Jesuit missionaries.

The teen leafs through the photocopied pages of a Selk'nam dictionary he borrowed from the library, which includes special sections on grammar and sentence structure. He explains that Selk'nam differs from Spanish in that the object comes at the beginning of a sentence,

followed by the subject and the verb.

He then pulls out a worn CD and plops it into his player. The low-pitched chant of a medicine woman fills the room, while Yanten sings along in perfect harmony.

Experts say there are precedents for reviving extinct languages, and the use of songs is key to the process of learning pitch and intonation.

"Through recordings, people can understand the mechanics and grammar of a language," said Arturo Hernandez, a language professor with the Catholic University of Temuco, in southern Chile.

"Listeners can imitate sounds and learn to speak in a less technical way, just like someone who learns a language using a CD or DVD. ...

What's surprising in this case is that this is not a professional, but a boy who began learning at the age of 8."

In an age when more than half of the world's 6,000 languages are nearing extinction, Hernandez says Yanten's quest to revive Selk'nam won't be easy, but could make waves with the right media coverage.

A straight-A student, Yanten is something of a child prodigy. Besides Selk'nam and Spanish, he also speaks fluent Mapudungun – the language of Chile's largest indigenous group – the Mapuche. He considers himself only semi-versed in the native languages of Onikenk, Haush, Kawesqar, and Quechua – not to mention English.

He's also learning Yagan – a nearly extinct language from Chile's far south. He's been learning from its last living speaker, Christina Calderon, for three years, on the phone and by Internet messages. She has sent him recordings of songs and tribal stories. Yanten has also

Travelled to visit her in remote Tierra del Fuego, most recently on a trip financed by a Chilean television station.

But Yanten's love affair with language doesn't end with words; he is also composing songs in Selk'nam. In an effort to popularize traditional native music, he is fusing it with modern electronic beats, and working on a demo CD with friends.

"Music uses language to connect people in a communication community," said Rodrigo Torres, an ethno-musicologist from the Universidad de Chile. "Music has the power to penetrate where logic and

reason don't, creating a type of emotional connection, which is very positive."

Yanten's mother, Ivonne Gomez, a housewife, believes there may be a mystical element to his exceptional linguistic abilities.

"I've always believed that the spirits of his ancestors are with him," he said. "He goes through many changes of voice and of mental state."

Her great-grandfather was Selk'nam, something she hid from her son when he was younger.

"I never wanted to say anything because when I was in school, kids used to tease me and call me 'Indian,'" she explained. "That made me sad, so I said to myself, 'Why should I tell that to my son?'"

But by the time Yanten was 12, his linguistic abilities were confirmed by a university professor. So his mother told him about his ancestry, and started recording his singing and encouraging him to perform. He now gives performances every two or three months at universities and museums in Santiago.

Yanten has recorded two CDs of Selk'nam music, using his own savings from part-time work at a grocery store. His father is an artisan, and his lower-middle-class family had to take out loans to finance his unusual passion. Yanten applied for cultural grants from the government, but was rejected because he's younger than the minimum age of 18.

So Yanten has teamed up with a cultural group called Fuego Ancestral (Ancestral Fire), which promotes the culture of Tierra del Fuego indigenes, through documentaries, musical presentations, talks, and workshops on traditional medicine.

"People can identify with the spirituality of indigenous cultures, and their knowledge, culture and language are all an important part of connecting ourselves with nature and with our past," said Oscar

Galleguillos, director of Fuego Ancestral. "And I don't think you have to be of native ancestry. We're all members of a tribe. There's

the French tribe. the North American tribe. the Chilean."

Yet lack of financial support has frustrated Yanten and those who work to preserve Chile's indigenous heritage.

"It's unfortunate that in our country, culture gets no support," said Juan Carlos Avilez, an anthropologist from the rural town of Curacavi, who recently came to see Yanten perform at a Santiago museum. "Not only should the state be helping this special boy, but a university should study and work with him."

## Against preserving endangered languages

In his column in *The Guardian* (UK) on 26 September, the columnist Marcel Berlins had this to say about endangered languages:

The Living Tongues Institute and the National Geographic Institute have revealed new research showing that a language is dying every two weeks, and that 40% of the world's 7,000 or so languages can be considered endangered. I know I should care, but I can't. An unwritten, undocumented language expires with the death of the second-last person to speak it. The last survivor may mutter it to himself, or explain it to a researcher, but it is no longer a living language. One may regret its loss because it had a vivid vocabulary or because it was the last link to a community that is no more. But does it matter?

Languages decline because members of the societies that sustained them adopt other options. They move from villages to towns or cities. Having jobs obliges them to speak the language of the workplace. The children watch television, and go to schools that don't teach their native tongue. Soon the only people who speak it are the elderly; they die off. A language cannot be separated from the society that nurtures it. When that society goes, so – inevitably and rightly – does its means of communication, and I do not see the point of trying to keep it alive artificially.

It is different, of course, where substantial written records of the language survive the demise of the community that used it, but that is rarely the case with the tongues said to be endangered. So I am not sad that we may be losing a couple of small, hardly used, languages. We will still have several thousand left.

## "Brain Dead Language" - Labour Party researcher quits

*Penygroes, Monday, 17 September 2007 by Huw Jones*

A Labour Party researcher who made comments in a blog calling Welsh a "brain-dead language" has been forced to hand in his resignation.

David Collins, who was employed by Ann Jones an elected Welsh Assembly representative, said on his blog, "Personally I share the view of [the 19th Century politician] Daniel O'Connell when he said, 'I can witness without a sigh the decline of the Irish language', was apt for Welsh as well. In a letter to Ann Jones, Collins apologised to the Party for the embarrassment caused. "Having returned to the UK last night and for the first time properly seen the coverage in Friday and Saturday's papers, it is clear to me that it is untenable for me to remain in your employment. As you know, the comments I left were personal and in no way reflective of your opinions or the policy of Wales Labour Party. On reflection I deeply regret having written them."

The controversy has also been an embarrassment to Plaid Cymru (Party of Wales) who have recently formed a coalition with Labour to govern the Welsh Assembly and are pressing for legislation that would give further rights to use the language. Other political parties were quick to respond with the Welsh Conservatives calling for "an unreserved apology to the Welsh nation" whilst Eleanor Burnham of the Liberal Democrats called the remarks "typical of the appalling attitude of many Labour activists towards the Welsh language", adding, "Many of them resent the prominent and growing role that Welsh plays in Welsh life".

Labour has been the dominant political force in Wales for almost a century and is committed to promote and support the Welsh language.

However, a wide range of opinion exists within the Party's ranks, from enthusiastic supporters of Welsh to those who are steadfastly opposed.

The electoral map of Wales shows that the Party is now without a single Assembly seat in Wales' western areas where the language is strongest. (Euroalang 2007)

## This dying Philippine language needs to be saved

*From the (Sunday) Manila Times, 11 August 2007 By Fred S. Cabuang*

On July 15, 1997, then-President Fidel Ramos signed Proclamation 1041, designating August as the "Buwan ng Wikang Pambansa." Celebrating the "Month of the National Language" should not mean the celebration of "one national language" but of "all languages of the nationals." That way, the country will be able to help in saving the threatened and dying languages. The Philippines is a multi-ethnic nation, where about 180 languages are spoken by Filipinos. According to linguistic experts, about two languages die every month in the world because people are either lazy to speak their language or forced to reject their mother tongue. Many endangered languages can be found here in the Philippines.

Take the case of the Butuanon language. Research shows that Butuanon is one of the dying languages of the Philippines. As far back as the 9th century, some old Chinese documents recorded Butuanon as the "mother tongue" or lingua franca in the Philippine archipelago specifically in the Kingdom of Butuan. The Kingdom of Butuan encompassed much of what is now known as Region 13, or Caraga Region, of the Philippines. The Butuanon language has defined the Butuanon people for more than a thousand years.

Dr. Joey Dacudao, president of SOLFED Foundation, Inc., and a practicing surgeon at Butuan City says, "Since the gauge of a language's viability is its usage by the younger generation, and because probably less than 500 teenagers and children in Butuan City speak this language as first tongue, Butuanon would be regarded as a moribund language by international linguists. A moribund language is a language that has ceased to be the lingua franca in its traditional linguistic areas, usually spoken by less than 300,000 persons, and would die out without government support."

Dr. Dacudao further says, "The non-Tagalog languages of the Philippines become more endangered because of the Tagalog policy of the government."

Sometime in 2005, Save Our Languages through Federalism

(SOLFED)—Butuan chapter embarked on a concrete project to try to save the Butuanon language. Two major steps of the project were undertaken.

Step 1. In June 2005, SOLFED Butuan Chapter started creating a Butuanon syllabus or grammar book, designed to be used by any classroom teacher with a working knowledge of English. Since Butuanon did not have any existing piece of literature in 2005, SOLFED used an existing grammar book (made by the Maryknoll Institute of Language and Culture in Davao), designed to teach Cebuano Visayan, as a guide. Cebuano Visayan is a close linguistic relative of Butuanon. SOLFED-Butuan members who were native Butuanon speakers and Dr. Dacudao collaborated in making this syllabus which took three months to complete a total of 11 chapters by September 2005.

Right after the completion of the written syllabus, SOLFED recorded the whole syllabus in cassette tapes which was later copied to a computer hard disc, from where more copies were made. Native Butuanon speakers from the SOLFED youth members made the recording, in order to ensure that the accent and phonation were correctly Butuanon. The recordings could be played in classrooms.

Step 2. SOLFED Butuan chapter solicited assistance from two NGOs to fund the teaching of Butuanon in public schools. The Butuan Charities of Southern California headed by Dr. Lorenz Alaán, and the Butuan Ivory Charities headed by Dr. Rene Vargas, supported the project in conjunction with their ongoing project called "I Love Butuan," a value oriented program for children. The two NGOs signed a Memorandum of Agreement with Caraga Department of Education to teach Butuanon Language in public schools beginning school year 2006.

According to Dr. Dacudao, since the start of school year 2006, the Butuanon language has been taught to select SPED school students in Butuan Central School, using the Butuanon Syllabus.

Although there has been positive feedback from teachers and students to teach and to learn Butuanon, the project may not continue in the future due to lack of funding and support from government. Only private NGOs are exhibiting keen interest in Butuan's native identity and culture.

If the Philippines will not help save Butuanon language, perhaps not killing it with a national policy favoring "one language" only is good enough.

*(Prof. Fred S. Cabuang is the spokesman and vice-president for Congressional Relations of SOLFED Foundation Inc., an NGO engaged in saving all languages in the Philippines. He is also the founder of the Institute for Linguistic Minority, an NGO to save the endangered languages of Indigenous Peoples of Mindanao. For comments, please send email to [linguisticminority@gmail.com](mailto:linguisticminority@gmail.com))♦*

## 4. Appeals, News and Views from Endangered Communities

### Hurricane damage to Miskitu and Mayangna communities in Nicaragua

Dear FEL members in the UK

You will have heard about Hurricane Felix which hit Nicaragua earlier in September. This is a good cause which is not primarily linguistic, but which may touch you because it affects a community which we have been following for some years. They are the Mayangna people, whose languages (Tuahka, Paramahka, Ulwa) Elena Benedicto has been telling us about (FEL VIII, FEL X and indeed this year, at the upcoming FEL XI). Also affected are the Mayangna's neighbours the Miskitu. Jane Freeland, another FEL member and in the UK, is also very active with the linguists in this region.

Aid is evidently being co-ordinated on the ground through URAC-CAN, Universidad de las Regiones Autónomas de la Costa Caribe Nicaragüense, the grass-roots university in Bluefields with which Elena and Jane have been working.) It will be wonderful if FEL members can make a difference in this way to help these friends of ours in Nicaragua in their hour of particular need. I encourage you to donate as I shall, through NSC.

Yours ever Nicholas Ostler

### Saving an Endangered Language of Southern Brazil: Laklänö

Greg Urban, Prof. of Anthropology, University of Pennsylvania

Nanblá Gakran, Sociologist/Linguist, Terra Indígena Laklänö Ibirama

January 23, 2007

This project seeks to aid the preservation of an endangered language in the southern Brazilian state of Santa Catarina. The language, today known as Laklänö (formerly Xokleng, Shokleng, Kaingang of Santa Catarina, or Botocudo), is spoken by no more than a few hundred individuals living on the Terra Indígena Laklänö Ibirama reserve. The project involves the audio and video digitization of the speech of elder members of the community, as well as the further training of a native speaker of the language who has been producing instructional materials for use in schools, and who also seeks to assemble a dictionary.

The Laklänö community first established peaceful contact with a Brazilian government attraction team in 1914. Professor Greg Urban, a linguistic anthropologist, now at the University of Pennsylvania, conducted field research in the community from 1974 to 1976 and then again in 1981 and 1982. He was able to make audio recordings of a considerable portion of the mythology and historical narratives of the community from speakers who had grown up prior to contact with Brazilian national society. Unfortunately, all of those speakers are now dead.

During his 1981-82 research, he trained a young native research assistant, Nanblá Gakran, to write the language and to transcribe audio recordings. After Urban's departure in 1982, missionaries of the Summer Institute of Linguistics enlisted Gakran's aid in translating the New Testament into the native language.

Subsequently, Gakran pursued his own education. Despite personal hardships, in 2005 he became the first Brazilian Indian to be awarded an M.A. degree in linguistics, having researched his own language.

His thesis, entitled *Aspectos morfosintáticos da língua Laklänö (Xokleng) - Jê* ("Morphosyntactic Aspects of the Laklänö (Xokleng) Language — Jê [linguistic family]"), was awarded a pass with "distinction." A brief write-up on Gakran in Portuguese can be found at <http://listserv.linguistlist.org/cgi-bin/wa?A2=ind0508e&L=etnolingustica&D=1&P=95>.

His accomplishments have also been reported in major national newspapers.

When Urban began research in 1974, the Laklänö language was almost universally spoken in the community. By 1981, there was a marked shift in the community, as families were emphasizing Portuguese inside the household. That trend accelerated in the 1980s and 1990s. A 2004 report, prepared by the Summer Institute of Linguistics, noted that people "over 35 usually spoke to each other in Xokleng [Laklänö] and people under 35 usually spoke to each other in Portuguese" (Anonby and Anonby 2004:10). The report concluded that "the possibility of language maintenance among the Xokleng [Laklänö] is low."

From 1992 on, Gakran has been involved in projects aimed at revitalizing the Laklänö language (see the brief write-up at <http://www.socioambiental.org/pib/epienglish/xokleng/lingua.shtm>).

While it may not prove possible to maintain a critical mass of fluent native speakers, if the language is to survive, Gakran is the one who has the talent and is positioned to make this happen. And if the language is on the road to extinction, then it is all the more imperative that it be adequately documented now.

The project we propose has two parts. The first is to make digital video recordings of native speakers. The recordings would be archived and preserved for future generations who might be interested in learning or studying the language, but they could also be actively used in the school system in the community — where Gakran serves as teacher. This project requires funding for equipment and materials, as well as for support of the project leader (Gakran) and any community participants.

The second aspect of this project is further training of Gakran as a linguist and social researcher. To this end, he wishes to return to graduate school to complete a PhD on the Laklänö language, with the aim of producing a comprehensive dictionary, perhaps along with a set of texts. This will go a long way towards preserving the Laklänö language — creating a set of materials that would allow future generations access to it.

Gakran is also endeavoring to establish a Casa de Memória or "House of Memories" for the Laklänö community — a local museum that would preserve the language and culture of the community for the future, simultaneously as it would help to valorize the language and culture in the present. Materials produced in the course of the present project would contribute to this museum.

There are presently more than 6.5 billion people on earth, and of that population the community of Laklänö speakers makes up an almost infinitesimally small fraction. However, Laklänö is a fully distinct language, one of at most 7,200 or so remaining on the planet. If it dies, a significant portion of the earth's cultural patrimony will die

with it. However, it is possible to take steps now that would prevent the latter eventuality. The projects described herein are designed to maintain and preserve this precious part of our linguistic and cultural diversity.

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## 5. Allied Societies and Activities

*The web-site [languagespeak.wordpress.com](http://languagespeak.wordpress.com) is dedicated to the interests of practising linguists. In late May it ran the following 'blog' which got some interesting responses:*

### What are linguists good for?

**May 31st, 2007: About two weeks ago our entire group attended the Workshop for American Indigenous Languages (WAIL) in Santa Barbara. There are 8 linguists on our team and 4 community language activists, making 'our entire group' a rather overwhelming, but nonetheless easy-going crew.**

We gave a group presentation on collaborative linguistics. What our presentation stressed was the necessity of forming a collaborative partnership between academics and communities in efforts to maintain and revitalize endangered languages.

Our talk was the last one of the session on the last day of the conference. Now of course, the audience was hardly impressed with the linguists on the team, but the community language activists were literally pummeled with questions after the talk was over.

One woman asked the language activists something like, "What one aspect of linguistics has been crucial to the development of your project?" She said she wanted to know because she was interested in teaching linguistics to community activists and would like to know where to start. (I know that she was looking for an answer like, "Oh it was morphology! Once I understood the morphology and how to break words apart into meaningful units everything else made sense!" I know that she really wanted to hear what part of linguistics was actually useful to people doing language work.)

However, the answer she got from our community language activists was not like this at all. Instead they responded by mentioning how enthusiastic the linguists always were about doing language work (they said something like, "they keep showing up"), and how much they enjoyed meeting with us, and ultimately how much they trusted us. Later on at the party I heard someone fondly summarize their answer as "Trust and love. What are linguists really good for? Trust and love."

At first, after hearing this, the academic in me was disappointed. There has to be something from my discipline which is more useful to language revitalization, right? I mean, I've been studying linguistics for over 5 years ... was it all a waste of time? But then I got to thinking about how many negative things linguists have done throughout history ... when it comes down to it, I ought to be overjoyed that there is a community that likes me and thinks I'm a trustworthy academic. In fact, in the end, maybe it's not so bad to be known for that.

But the question still remains: what are linguists good for? I'm interested now to hear from other community language activists. Is the best thing we have going for us not so much our knowledge of language structure, but rather just our enthusiasm for language, and our willingness to assist in some way?

And what do the linguists think? Did you ever think you would be appreciated merely because you showed up? How does this influence the way you work on language projects?

I've been thinking about this issue for a few weeks now and I'd really like to hear from everyone.

From **Kwahwi**:

Thank you for this delightful posting! We should listen to those community language activists. If our interactions with language communities are not about "trust and love" then we are missing an opportunity. What, after all, leads to voluntary language shift in the first place but a lack of that stuff? So if we do it right, our work can serve as a sort of corrective, just by the fact that we are doing it. I have come to this conclusion after reflecting on my fieldwork in Papua New Guinea, with villagers who have a sense of abandonment by outsiders. I would be curious to know how your situation is (and is not) parallel.

From **tsindipovi**:

It's great to hear from you! I'm glad you enjoyed my post.

In my experience with Native American communities, there isn't so much a sense of abandonment as there is a sense of distrust of outsiders. Of course, this distrust exists because many academics in the past have unmercifully exploited and used the communities (their resources, their culture, their language, you name it), taking much and leaving very little. As a result of these types of practices, often community members are really wary of any outsider coming into the community. In response to this, what our group has done from the very beginning is make sure that the community language activists take on leadership roles in our project. The linguists working on the project acknowledge that the language and the culture belong to the community, and that as outsiders we have no claim over it. As such, the language activists determine the direction and the goals of all of our work. The linguists are more like assistants or consultants than anything else.

And while I believe very strongly in the validity of this approach, I still wrestle with the idea of how it can be instituted in cases where a linguist has set out to do fieldwork in a particular community. Obviously, fieldwork is a necessary part of linguistic study, and we are all expected to do it at some point or another, so how can we go about it and still maintain that the community itself has control and ownership over the language? Should linguists doing fieldwork submit to the authority of community language activists? What if there are no language activists when the linguist arrives in the community? Is it possible for linguists to work under the authority of an indigenous community and still meet the requirements of academic institutions?

These are not necessarily questions you have to answer, they are just the thoughts that plague my mind as I lie awake at night contemplating my place in the discipline I have chosen.

Please tell us more about your experiences in Papua New Guinea. We'd love to hear from you! Perhaps you'd consider becoming an author on this blog?

From **Sophie**:

This is a great post! I think this is something that linguists have to struggle with (to do community work or research work?!), when ideally we should be able to manage both. In the community I work in, in Australia, I think we were managing to do both, though in that case there was a language centre and a full time linguist devoted to language projects in the community. After working there I had some ideas for a PhD and with the help of a good friend and colleague now sadly passed away, I think we struck up a good balance. Though I am sure this is different for every situation, I think it would help if universities recognised community based work as important and 'value adding', and would offer some acknowledgement or support of this work to linguists... I was also very struck in that talk by the very same thing- that trust was the most important thing you have built together- and I think you guys should all be very proud- you are changing the landscape of 'linguist' 'language speaker' relations in the US. Go Tewa language group!

From **nanatay**:

Thank you all for your wonderful posts. I agree that we should be very proud that trust has been established between the Nambé language activists and the linguists at UNM. I was totally flattered that the question was answered in that way, instead of the classic/expected "morphology answer". I also agree with Sophie that academic institutions should support this type of work more than they do. Without establishing a positive and trustworthy relationship with the communities around the university, the university (from a university perspective) loses out in many ways: low student enrollment from those communities, little or no grant money coming in for research purposes, eventual loss of potential research material to further theoretical academic study. We all know this already, but it is apparent to me that what we need to do is convince universities that quality community work is economically beneficial to the

institution. Universities are businesses, unfortunately, and they are not always modeled in a fair trade framework. What seems appropriate is something to the effect of a shift from free trade to fair trade.

From **Wamut**:

Interesting questions:

Should linguists doing fieldwork submit to the authority of community language activists? What if there are no language activists when the linguist arrives in the community?

One way around it is for linguists to work with communities that have expressed a desire for whatever work to be done on their language(s). That way the linguist is just responding to a need or request for help. Having a language centre or a body representing the interests of language and culture can be a great tool for this - hopefully they'd have project ideas ready to go and then the linguist can go to a community knowing they will be doing something the community has said they would like to see happen.

As for 'submitting' to language activists, fieldwork is always about two-way negotiating, both the activists and linguists should clearly understand that both parties have outcomes in mind and will need to negotiate how to best achieve each other's outcomes (that is, if they clash - as they usually seem to!).

The left-wing passionate middle-class linguist can sometimes fall into the trap of 'submitting' to the needs of the needier, casting your own privileged needs aside. We can still do a great deal of good, without losing focus on our own social, cultural and vocational needs.

My two cents... feel free to disagree!

## 6. Letters to the Editor

From Dr Nicholas Anderson.

Dear Nicholas,

Remembering the prominence the Foundation has given in the past to the plight of the Sorbs in Germany, I wonder if you are aware of the current situation. According to the current agreement, the German Federal Government has undertaken to provide 8.2 million euros per annum for the promotion of Sorbian language and culture, while the states of Brandenburg and Saxony have agreed to provide an equal amount shared between them, making a total of 16.4 million euros. Brandenburg and Saxony have agreed to maintain their level of support, but, according to media and other reports, the Federal Government is proposing "drastic" cuts in funding in that, instead of providing the agreed funding of 8.2 million euros, the Federal Government will now only fund specific projects. Such a policy seems to conflict with the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ratified by Germany on 16 September 1998).

Would it be possible for the FEL to make representations to the German Federal Government on this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Nicholas.

From Dafydd Gibbon 6 July 2007

Dafydd Gibbon wrote:

Dear Nick,

I am pleased to pass on the following information from my colleague Prof. Firmin Ahoua at the Université de Cocody, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, about the Ega language, on which he, Bruce Connell and I have been working for many years:

"Good news: The Ivorian government has developed a new interest in the Ega tribe and the language. indeed President Gbagbo (whose wife is a linguist) has signed an official decree for the creation of a prefecture (district) exclusively composed of Ega to encourage the survival of the culture and the language. So the language is definitely saved! The new district is allowed to bear an EGA name: Dairo-Didizo and is located in the Southern Dies region. The names are those of the locations of Egas."

We sincerely congratulate the Ega people on their remarkable political success. We also hope and believe that the fact that we have published extensively on Ega in journals (e.g. the Journal of the International Phonetic Association), at international conferences, and on the internet, may have provided positive publicity from the scientific side in support of this development. Perhaps this will encourage others to persevere in the same direction!

With all good wishes,

Dafydd

From Menan du Plessis

Dear Nicholas (if you don't mind the informality) -

Raj Mesthrie (University of Cape Town) has just sent me your call for papers for the conference that SOAS will be hosting in December. Although it looks as though I will probably not be attending, I just wanted to let you know that there is by no means a lack of interest here. Indeed, the whole subject is something about which I myself feel intensely passionate.

My field is the area of Khoisan languages, in which I have largely a theoretical and comparative interest, grounded in Linguistics. (This is coupled, however, with an interest in the associated narratives and poetry.) Although my studies have been essentially library-based, I have also inevitably become acutely aware of the broader range of pressing research needs, not only in South Africa but across the region as a whole. These needs cover the spectrum from support for community-led activism in precisely the area of language conservation, to theoretical work on such aspects as the morphology and syntax of these languages (still almost astonishingly understudied and underdocumented).

There are two groups of South African languages on the brink of extinction: these are the N/uu dialects (belonging to the !Uu group and related to the /Xam language famously documented by Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd); and a range of Khoekhoe dialects variously identified as Richtersveld Nama, !Ora (the language of the 'Koranna') or !Xiri (the language of the Griqua). Both languages are now only imperfectly spoken by perhaps just two dozen speakers in each case. The urgent documentation of !Ora ~ !Xiri is being undertaken by a team of field-workers under the leadership of Mike Besten, who is an historian based at the University of the Free State. For the rest, we South Africans are doing nothing! (Fortunately for us, the last surviving speakers of N/uu are currently being recorded by American researchers, including Bonny Sands and Amanda Miller-Ockhuizen, who are working flat-out to document as much possible.)

The other Khoisan languages have a varying degree of vitality. Khoekhoegowab has perhaps the best position, enjoying official status in Namibia. Some of the other Khoe languages mainly spoken in Botswana fare rather less well - as do the so-called 'non-Khoe' languages of the Ju group (spoken mainly in Angola, Namibia and Botswana), eastern #Hoan (Botswana), and Taa (Botswana). While the Ju languages are perhaps currently the most viable of the non-Khoe languages - with the communities who speak them having taken an active role in trying to secure them - there is still undoubtedly a need for academics to continue supporting these efforts. On the purely theoretical side, what is more, there are still many aspects of the syntax and morphology that need further investigation. It is quite surprisingly difficult even to obtain 'texts' (i.e. representative samples of extended discourse) for these languages.

In between these two groups of the highly imperilled and the perhaps just viable languages, there is another group consisting of various languages spoken by rather small communities, and only poorly documented. The small set of dialects making up the Eastern #Hoan cluster, and the !Xoon dialects (famously studied by the late Tony Traill) seem to fall into this category. Right now it is impossible to obtain any texts for these languages (although I believe that a set for !Xoo is currently in preparation by Tom Gueldemann, who was working on this project with Tony Traill).

It seems to me that one of the things we ought to be doing here (I mean, apart from generally re-skilling ourselves and getting down to some seriously hard research) is to start building up as a matter of urgency a representative corpus of some kind, with texts (transcripts, audio records ... and so forth), preferably in the form of an electronic database that could be accessible to everyone. I'm thinking that, since we have been so idle and tardy in getting something like this off the ground, the best thing we can do now is to try and ensure - at the very least - that whatever we do finally put together is the best that it can possibly be. This is where I think we could benefit enormously from the kind of expertise you have already built up at SOAS.

I am also pretty interested to find out more about new techniques of documentation. I'm curious to know whether there are ways of interfacing programmes designed primarily to assist on the phonetic side of transcription - with programmes that are meant to help more with the morphological analysis. (I have played around a little with the self-tutorials for Toolbox - but have not yet applied the system in practice.) Some of the material that we have here for the 'archive languages' exists only in the form of audio recordings, and often this is not accompanied by any translations (I mean even of a relatively

free kind, such as might have been obtained at the time from consultants).

At the moment I have so little confidence in my own ability that I'm nervous even to go and listen to these recordings! (The librarians are not keen to release copies, in the amiable but firmly bulldog-like custodial way of librarians everywhere, I suppose.)

This letter must have seemed rather rambling – for which I apologize – but perhaps you can see why I didn't just want to let things go without at least some communication. (Also, to be honest, apart from Mike Besten and his team at UOFS, with whom I correspond regularly and avidly, there are very few people here who share my passion.)

Thank you – very much indeed – not only for listening, but for everything that you and your colleagues are doing in the area of language conservation – something that surely matters profoundly, for all of us.

Very best wishes  
Menan du Plessis

## 7. Overheard on the Web

### Researchers say many languages are dying

*By Randolph E. Schmid, Associated Press Writer*

When every known speaker of the language Amurdag gets together, there's still no one to talk to. Native Australian Charlie Mangulda is the only person alive known to speak that language, one of thousands around the world on the brink of extinction. From rural Australia to Siberia to Oklahoma, languages that embody the history and traditions of people are dying, researchers said Tuesday. While there are an estimated 7,000 languages spoken around the world today, one of them dies out about every two weeks, according to linguistic experts struggling to save at least some of them.

Five hotspots where languages are most endangered were listed Tuesday [18 September] the Living Tongues Institute for Endangered Languages and the National Geographic Society. In addition to northern Australia, eastern Siberia and Oklahoma and the U.S. Southwest, many native languages are endangered in South America — Ecuador, Colombia, Peru, Brazil and Bolivia — as well as the area including British Columbia, and the states of Washington and Oregon. Losing languages means losing knowledge, says K. David Harrison, an assistant professor of linguistics at Swarthmore College. "When we lose a language, we lose centuries of human thinking about time, seasons, sea creatures, reindeer, edible flowers, mathematics, landscapes, myths, music, the unknown and the everyday."

As many as half of the current languages have never been written down, he estimated. That means, if the last speaker of many of these vanished tomorrow, the language would be lost because there is no dictionary, no literature, no text of any kind, he said. Harrison is associate director of the Living Tongues Institute based in Salem, Ore. He and institute director Gregory D.S. Anderson analyzed the top regions for disappearing languages. Anderson said languages become endangered when a community decides that its language is an impediment. The children may be first to do this, he explained, realizing that other more widely spoken languages are more useful. The key to getting a language revitalized, he said, is getting a new generation of speakers. He said the institute worked with local communities and tries to help by developing teaching materials and by recording the endangered language.

Harrison said that the 83 most widely spoken languages account for about 80 percent of the world's population while the 3,500 smallest languages account for just 0.2 percent of the world's people. Languages are more endangered than plant and animal species, he said. The hot spots listed at Tuesday's briefing:

- Northern Australia, 153 languages. The researchers said aboriginal Australia holds some of the world's most endangered languages, in part because aboriginal groups splintered during conflicts with white settlers. Researchers have documented such small language communities as the three known speakers of Magati Ke, the three Yawuru speakers and the lone speaker of Amurdag.

- Central South America including Ecuador, Colombia, Peru, Brazil and Bolivia — 113 languages. The area has extremely high diversity, very little documentation and several immediate threats. Small and socially less-valued indigenous languages are being knocked out by

Spanish or more dominant indigenous languages in most of the region, and by Portuguese in Brazil.

- Northwest Pacific Plateau, including British Columbia in Canada and the states of Washington and Oregon in the U.S., 54 languages. Every language in the American part of this hotspot is endangered or moribund, meaning the youngest speaker is over age 60. An extremely endangered language, with just one speaker, is Siletz Dee-ni, the last of 27 languages once spoken on the Siletz reservation in Oregon.

- Eastern Siberian Russia, China, Japan — 23 languages. Government policies in the region have forced speakers of minority languages to use the national and regional languages and, as a result, some have only a few elderly speakers.

- Oklahoma, Texas and New Mexico — 40 languages. Oklahoma has one of the highest densities of indigenous languages in the United States. A moribund language of the area is Yuchi, which may be unrelated to any other language in the world. As of 2005, only five elderly members of the Yuchi tribe were fluent.

The research is funded by the Australian government, U.S. National Science Foundation, National Geographic Society and grants from foundations.

## 8. Obituary

### Last fluent speaker of Lardil is no more

*On 1 September 2007, Norvin Richards of the Massachusetts Institute of technology reported to David Nash in Australia:*

I'm sorry to have to report that Lindsay Roughsey died, a few days before I got there (after spending months apparently unable to speak-sounded like he'd had a stroke). As far as I can tell, this means that Lardil's lost its last fully fluent speaker, though there are still the "New Lardil" speakers, of course.

*Ed. note: Lardil is a language spoken on Mornington Island in the southeastern corner of the Gulf of Carpentaria, Queensland, Australia. It is a member of the Tangkic group within the vast Pama-Nyungan family. Limited written materials exist in it, for use in the local school. By 1981 possibly fifty speakers were recorded. The speakers use more English than Lardil, a tendency which has been increasing over the years because the missionaries had been discouraging the use of the language. Children do not know the language. I am writing to Norvin Richards for more detail.*

### Conference on the Reclamation of Tribal Languages

*From the Linguist List*

Date: 20-Feb-2008 - 22-Feb-2008

Location: Mashantucket, CT, USA

Contact Person: Deborah Gregoire

Meeting Email: LanguageConference [mptn.org](mailto:mptn.org) <<http://mptn.org>>

Web Site: <http://MPTNlanguageConference.org>

<<http://mptnlanguageconference.org/>>

This biennial Native - sponsored conference supports the reclamation and preservation of indigenous languages worldwide with predominant focus on Native North American languages. The 2008 meeting will address the following themes: Instructional Techniques, Linguistics in the Context of Preservation and Reconstruction, Technological Innovations, and Artistic Application of Language. The Call for Papers is closed however proposals welcome for two Roundtables: Community Language Project Policy Development, and Dictionary Development. Most of participants' expenses paid. Submit 2-3 paragraphs for Roundtable consideration to Language Conference: Conference [mptn.org](http://mptn.org)

<<http://mptn.org>> or call (860) 396-6104 or 396-2052.

Please include contact information. Conference URL

<http://www.MPTNlanguageConference.org>

<<http://www.mptnlanguageconference.org/>> up and running soon.

The Call for Papers is closed but we are still accepting proposals for the Roundtables (Dictionary Development, and Community Language Project Policy Development).

This will be the fourth biennial Conference on the Reclamation of Indigenous Languages hosted by the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation. Our conference series serves to bring together those who work to maintain and reclaim the indigenous languages of Native North America. We believe that our ancestral languages can and should be spoken in our communities and we continuously seek and support efforts toward this end. The conference planning committee, in their selection of presenters strives to balance linguistic research, instructional techniques, technological innovations and most recently, indigenous languages in the context of the visual, written and performing arts.

We invite you to share your work and in so doing, further efforts to reclaim, perpetuate and celebrate Native North America's unique and precious languages of heritage.

#### Conference Topics:

A. Instructional Techniques, such as those that focus on producing first and second language speakers, workbooks, CDs, computer-interactive programs, videos, TPR, the Silent Way, Immersion Nests, etc.

B. Artistic Application of Language, such as storytelling, performing artists, authors and playwrights for all age groups, visual artists, etc.

C. Linguistics in the Context of Language Preservation and Reconstruction, such as historical linguistics of Native - North America, preferably but not limited to Algonquian languages and those of Southern New England. Papers addressing methodologies and sources used in preservation and reclamation projects as well as place-names' analyses sought.

D. Technological Innovations in the areas of language documentation, databases and dictionary software, educational and instructional software, etc.

Roundtable 1: Dictionary Development, participants and moderator sought for this session

Roundtable 2: Language Project Policies and Protocol, participants and moderator sought for this session

#### Session Specifics:

Additional questions may be sent to [LanguageConferencemtpn.org](mailto:LanguageConferencemtpn.org)

<<http://mptn.org>> or

[dregoire@mptn.org](mailto:dregoire@mptn.org) <<http://mptn.org>> (phone: 860-396-2052). A URL

entitled "Conference on

the Reclamation of Indigenous Languages"

<http://www.MPTNLanguageConference.org>

<<http://www.mptnlanguageconference.org/>>

will be accessible by end of September 2007.

If you are not planning to submit an abstract but would like to receive information on conference registration please send your contact information via e-mail to [cseifartmptn.org](mailto:cseifartmptn.org) <<http://mptn.org>> or mail to Language Conference Team, PO Box 3060, Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation,

CT 06338.

Registration forms will also be available via the conference Web page in September.

## Second International Conference on Language Development, Language Revitalization and Multilingual Education in Ethnic Minority Communities

1-3 July, 2008 and 4 July, 2008

Bangkok, Thailand

#### Background

Over the past decade, ethnolinguistic communities, supported by governments and NGOs in several countries of Asia and the Pacific, have begun implementing mother tongue-based multilingual education programs. Also during that time, a number of NGOs and universities have begun supporting ethnolinguistic communities in their efforts to develop, revitalize and maintain their heritage languages.

In spite of these efforts, the purposes and benefits of language development, language revitalization and multilingual education are still not widely understood or accepted. Many efforts remain weak and do not build on what has been learned through research and experiences elsewhere. More information is needed about what is involved

in planning, implementing and sustaining strong language development and multilingual education programs.

#### Purposes

This conference is meant to address those information needs. Its purposes are to:

Raise awareness about the purposes and benefits of mother tongue-based multilingual education (MT-Based MLE) programs,

Share information about good practices in language development, language revitalization and MT-Based MLE in ethnolinguistic communities, especially from the people who are actively engaged in such programs,

Develop and expand networks of individuals and organizations engaged in these efforts.

#### Tracks

The conference will include the following tracks (all focusing on languages in multilingual settings):

1. Language development and language revitalization of non-dominant languages

*Topics include indigenous people's efforts to revitalize and sustain their heritage languages and cultures; linguistic and sociolinguistic research; orthography development and orthography testing; preservation of oral literature and development of written literature in previously unwritten languages.*

Language and language-in-education policy and policy implementation

*Topics include the role of ethnic or indigenous (non-dominant) languages in society and education; language and language-in-education policies and their implementation in multilingual contexts; comparisons of policies across nations; the ways that languages are promoted by written and unwritten policies and practices and the factors that support or hinder the use of local languages in society and education.*

Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual education (MT-Based MLE)

*Topics include planning, implementing, evaluating and sustaining MT-Based MLE for children and adults in formal and non-formal education systems, including case studies and good practices in preliminary research, advocacy and mobilization for MT-Based MLE at local, district, national and international levels; developing teaching and learning materials; teacher recruitment and training; research and evaluation.*

Community efforts to preserve their intangible cultural heritage

*Topics include community-centered efforts to analyze and maintain oral literature, traditional dance and music and traditional medicines. Theoretical links between folk and traditional arts revitalization and language development are especially relevant. This topic also will include ethnographic studies of informal music education practices, as well as case studies demonstrating the integration of traditional music and arts into formal educational settings.*

Information and communication technology that support MT-Based MLE

*Topics include using appropriate ICT tools to develop, produce and communicate information and relevant materials in the Mother Tongue.*

Types of sessions

Plenary sessions

Parallel sessions

Policy sessions (specifically for policy makers)

General overview

The international conference will be 3 days from 1-3 July 2008.

Following the 3-day conference, 4 July 2008; there will be a one day symposium on *Planning Research and Evaluation Studies of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education Programs*.

The purpose of this symposium will be to produce clear principles and guidelines for developing longitudinal evaluation studies of MLE programs that can be adapted to a variety of country situations.

Venue: Royal River Hotel, Bangkok

Supporting agencies: SIL International, UNESCO, UNICEF, SEAMEO, Mahidol University, CARE International and Save children UK.

For more information, please contact [langdevelbkk\\_info@sil.org](mailto:langdevelbkk_info@sil.org)

## 10. Recent Publications

From B.Clayre

SIL-PNG is happy to announce the recent publication of: *Mussau Grammar Essentials* by John and Marjo Brownie (Data Papers on Papua New Guinea Languages, volume 52). 2007. Ukarumpa: SIL. iv + 221 pages.

Mussau is a first-order Oceanic (Austronesian) language, spoken on islands at the northern tip of New Ireland Province in Papua New Guinea. Its unique position within Oceanic makes this description all the more important for comparative linguists.

Interesting features of the language include geminate vowels and consonants, various types of reduplication, a complex number-classifier system, several tense-aspect-mood markers, serial verb constructions, and an unusual equative clause (in which the subject is marked with an object pronoun following a transitive marker on the noun). Two interlinearised texts complete the description.

A pdf version of the book is available on the SIL-PNG website at <http://www.sil.org/pacific/png/abstract.asp?id=538>.

This website also contains many other interesting documents, including language maps, brief phonologies, grammatical descriptions, as well as dictionaries in various formats.

Bound paper copies of the Mussau grammar can be obtained from [lr-dats@sil.org.pg](mailto:lr-dats@sil.org.pg) at

US\$15. Postage from PNG is unfortunately rather high: \$15 for Australia and \$20 for the rest of the world.

Other Data Papers scheduled to appear in 2007:

Fuyug Grammar Sketch by Robert Bradshaw.

Lote Grammar Sketch by Greg and Mary Pearson.

## Anvita Abbi: Endangered Languages of the Andaman Islands

Lincom Studies in Asian Linguistics (ISBN 3 89586 866 3). München: Lincom 2006. 117 pp. + CD ROM. US\$ 78.08; € 64; UK£ 44.89

Anvita Abbi's sketch of three major indigenous languages of the Andamans, Great Andamanese (GA), Jarawa and Onge, was launched at the FEL conference at Mysore on 27 October 2006, to some acclaim. The book offers a wide-ranging introduction to the languages of these islands in the Bay of Bengal, with a brief geographical and historical background to the islanders, a narrative of the hair-raising field-trip on which the Onge language data was gathered, a chapter each on the three languages, introducing their grammars and lexicons, and a final typological chapter, where Abbi makes the radical suggestion that the Andamans, rather than containing one language family unrelated to anywhere in India or southeast Asia, actually contains two – GA being distinct from Jarawa-Onge. The book concludes with a section of maps and social snapshots in colour, and comes packaged with a CD-ROM, which contains pictures, sound files (including songs) and some video clips featuring speakers of each of the three languages. Hence it is much more than a set of sketch grammars, and conveys the atmosphere of Andaman life.

The languages of the Andamans are a classic example of languages that are endangered by the fact of first contact with humanity as organized in the vast surrounding states. In fact, one group of islanders, the Sentinelese, have continued to resist all contact by spearing all who come too close to the shore. Their language – whatever it may be – is therefore no more endangered than the islanders themselves. (Abbi conjectures that they had some 250 people in 1998, well up from 50 in 1931.) But the three groups profiled, and recorded, here are in regular touch with Indian settlers. Although their numbers seem to be increasing, they correlate inversely with the time since contact: GA 40 (once in the early nineteenth century with a population of 3,500 covering the whole north of Great Andaman, but now since 1968 confined by government action to a small offshore is-

land), Onge 94, Jarawa 300 (contacted in 1997, as a result of building a Grand Trunk Road). Compare this with a population for the Andaman Islands as a whole of some 197,000. Among these groups, it is the Great Andamanese, with a way of life totally disrupted, whose language is the most endangered, no-one under 15 years of age speaking anything but Hindi. Although the Onge are the most isolated, living on their own island beyond crocodile infested waters, it is the go-it-alone Jarawa, who are closest to their traditional hunter-gatherer life, which they live naked.

The chapters of individual languages raise in their titles the salient issues of each community: GA "Where have all the speakers gone?"; Jarawa "Touch me not"; Onge "Lost in their own jungle". All have a 'basic word list' of between 350 and 250 items. Great Andamanese, despite its few speakers, is characterized by Abbi less as a language than as a collection of partial speakers of ten related tongues, making it difficult for individual speakers to understand one another, or indeed to cohere as a single language community, but now moving toward a single *koiné*. Except in respect of phonology, the coverage of GA is much the fullest, with particular attention to body-parts, kinship terms, pronouns and deixis.

The GA speakers' exposure to Hindi has blighted the future of their language, but at least it meant that Abbi and her team could communicate effectively with them. For Jarawa and Onge, by contrast, all informants had rather low competence in Hindi, and so the range of language that could be elicited was restricted: for Onge, this meant no evidence at all from women speakers, and no verbs in the lexicon section. They do, however, provide evidence of cognates in the two southern languages, Jarawa and Onge; and this is reinforced by a narrative (source unstated) of an invasion of Great Andaman 3000-3500 years ago by the Jarawa, who had previously shared the southern island, Little Andaman, with the Onge. All the languages have same gross typology (SOV, with head-modifier order and postposed case-markers) but the evidence for separating GA from Jarawa-Onge is the phonological repertoire, the different system of verb inflexion and the absence of cognates.

Abbi is pessimistic about the future of the languages, and cries out that the need for further documentation is urgent, not least because such remote people can provide evidence of the first importance for the ancient history of humanity. For the people themselves, the last sentence of the book is poignant: "Each of the speakers we interviewed expressed the desire to turn the clock backwards, resuming life in the jungles where all they needed was plentiful and they lived in a very harmonious world."

# Foundation for Endangered Languages

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## 1. Preamble 1.1. The Present Situation

At this point in human history, most human languages are spoken by exceedingly few people. And that majority, the majority of languages, is about to vanish.

The most authoritative source on the languages of the world (Ethnologue, Gordon 2005) lists just over 6,900 living languages. Population figures are available for just over 6,600 of them (or 94.5%). Of these 6,600, it may be noted that:

56% are spoken by fewer than 10,000 people; 28% by fewer than 1,000; and 83% are restricted to single countries, and so are particularly exposed to the policies of a single government. At the other end of the scale, 10 major languages, each spoken by over 100 million people, are the mother tongues of almost half (49%) of the world's population.

More important than this snapshot of proportions and populations is the outlook for survival of the languages we have. Hard comparable data here are scarce or absent, often because of the sheer variety of the human condition: a small community, isolated or bilingual, may continue for centuries to speak a unique language, while in another place a populous language may for social or political reasons die out in little more than a generation. Another reason is that the period in which records have been kept is too short to document a trend: e.g. the Ethnologue has been issued only since 1951. However, it is difficult to imagine many communities sustaining serious daily use of a language for even a generation with fewer than 100 speakers: yet at least 10% of the world's living languages are now in this position.

Some of the forces which make for language loss are clear: the impacts of urbanization, Westernization and global communications grow daily, all serving to diminish the self-sufficiency and self-confidence of small and traditional communities. Discriminatory policies, and population movements also take their toll of languages.

In our era, the preponderance of tiny language communities means that the majority of the world's languages are vulnerable not just to decline but to extinction.

## 1.2. The Likely Prospect

There is agreement among linguists who have considered the situation that over half of the world's languages are moribund, i.e. not effectively being passed on to the next generation. We and our children, then, are living at the point in human history where, within perhaps two generations, most languages in the world will die out.

This mass extinction of languages may not appear immediately life-threatening. Some will feel that a reduction in numbers of languages will ease communication, and perhaps help build nations, even global solidarity. But it has been well pointed out that the success of humanity in colonizing the planet has been due to our ability to develop cultures suited for survival in a variety of environments. These cultures have everywhere been transmitted by languages, in oral traditions and latterly in written literatures. So when language transmission itself breaks down, especially before the advent of literacy in a culture, there is always a large loss of inherited knowledge.

Valued or not, that knowledge is lost, and humanity is the poorer. Along with it may go a large part of the pride and self-identity of the community of former speakers. And there is another kind of loss, of a different type of knowledge. As each language dies, science, in linguistics, anthropology, prehistory and psychology, loses one more precious source of data, one more of the diverse and unique ways that the human mind can express itself through a language's structure and vocabulary.

We cannot now assess the full effect of the massive simplification of the world's linguistic diversity now occurring. But language loss, when it occurs, is sheer loss, irreversible and not in itself creative. Speakers of an endangered language may well resist the extinction of their traditions, and of their linguistic identity. They have every right to do so. And we, as scientists, or concerned human beings, will applaud them in trying to preserve part of the diversity which is one of our greatest strengths and treasures.

## 1.3. The Need for an Organization

We cannot stem the global forces which are at the root of language decline and loss.

But we can work to lessen the ignorance which sees language loss as inevitable when it is not, and does not properly value all that will go when a language itself vanishes.

We can work to see technological developments, such as computing and telecommunications, used to support small communities and their traditions rather than to supplant them. And we can work to lessen the damage:

by recording as much as possible of the languages of communities which seem to be in terminal decline;

- by emphasizing particular benefits of the diversity still remaining; and
- by promoting literacy and language maintenance programmes, to increase the strength and morale of the users of languages in danger.

In order to further these aims, there is a need for an autonomous international organization which is not constrained or influenced by matters of race, politics, gender or religion. This organization will recognise in language issues the principles of self-determination, and group and individual rights. It will pay due regard to economic, social, cultural, community and humanitarian considerations. Although it may work with any international, regional or local Authority, it will retain its independence throughout. Membership will be open to those in all walks of life.

## 2. Aims and Objectives

The Foundation for Endangered Languages exists to support, enable and assist the documentation, protection and promotion of endangered languages. In order to do this, it aims:

- To raise awareness of endangered languages, both inside and outside the communities where they are spoken, through all media;
- To support the use of endangered languages in all contexts: at home, in education, in the media, and in social, cultural and economic life;
- To monitor linguistic policies and practices, and to seek to influence the appropriate authorities where necessary;
- To support the documentation of endangered languages, by offering financial assistance, training, or facilities for the publication of results;
- To collect together and make available information of use in the preservation of endangered languages;
- To disseminate information on all of the above activities as widely as possible.

