1. **Editorial**

2. **Development of the Foundation**

   The Ogmios web-site

3. **Endangered Languages in the News**

   - Finnish languages being oppressed in Russia
   - Finnish national epic into Aunus Karelian
   - Russia's Babel
   - UN preserves hybrid language of the Bounty mutineers
   - Lost language of Pitmatic gets its lexicon
   - Cymru: Welsh media developments
   - Young Chilean keeps nearly extinct languages alive
   - Against preserving endangered languages
   - "Brain Dead Language" - Labour Party researcher quits
   - This dying Philippine language needs to be saved
   - Last speaker of Lardil is no more

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

5. **Allied Societies and Activities**

6. **Letters to the Editor**

7. **Overheard on the Web**

8. **Obituary**

9. **Forthcoming Meetings**

   - Linguistic Association of Nigeria: 21st Annual Conference

10. **Recent Publications**

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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. 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 about 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 handled 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 socialized by means of plenary lectures and workshops 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 provide experience, to discuss and to learn from it, not to theorise 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. 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 bakerpj@lancaster.ac.uk
3. Endangered Languages in the News

Finnish languages being oppressed in Russia

From Helsingsin Sanomat, Helsinki, Finland 26 July 2007

Support for the Finnish 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 languages, 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 prerequisites 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 Khrušchev period, education in the minority languages began, in all secrecy, in a 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 nineteenth-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 million of people, belong to national minorities. The Russia of the future will also be multina
tional. 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.

At 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 karjalansirakat (Karelian piiru
gastric) pastries.

“Though 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 piiru
gastrics taste 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, Lemminkiäinen’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 believe the dialogue be
tween 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.
OGMIOS
Newsletter of Foundation for Endangered Languages
Spring 2007

“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 Dubinin. 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. Yyddi), 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 with 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 a 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 stuffed with toponyms from Finno-Ugric dialects that died out long ago—the most famous example being Maivi, 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 sizeable 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 pontificates on 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 Nenet languages, for example, are distributed in everything from reindeer ranching to radio stations, 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 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 whose success might save them. 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 the heart of 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 Ro- maine’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 environment and reduces our collective knowledge. And 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.

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 Abey, 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.

Also be lazy 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 Tuva throat-singing group Hunt-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 homogenisation is one of the factors that could blur the peoples’ distinctive cultural profile. While language death, as Mikhailenko 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 18th century English and Tahitian, known as Norf’k or Norfuk, 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 sub-tropical 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 Norfuk. “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 Norfuk, 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 Norfuk 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 Nobs. “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 Bligh, the mutineers settled in 1788 on Pitcairn Island. But by 1866 the island was overcrowded and population was relocated to Norfolk. Today about half of Norfolk Island’s 2,000 inhabitants are descended from the Pitcairners and speak Norfuk.

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 Norfuk

Some words and phrases

Watawich Hello

All yorlye gwen? How are you all?

Kushu I’m fine

Lost language of Pitmatic gets its lexicon


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-battlers 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 using 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 way 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 coal 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 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 Pitmational, 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 stapple, a shaft with steps beside the coal seam, or corf-battlers, boys who scraped out filthy baskets used for hauling coal to the pithead.

Other words are more earthly: 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-
mments 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 ad-
vances signal a renewed spurt of confidence among the Welsh people and the use of their native language, even among non Welsh speak-
ers. Gains are being made despite some major obstacles and inade-
quately sources 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 fund-
ing 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 languages and the Celtic languages are among the few lan-
guages 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.

Bwrd 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 ser-
cices in the Welsh language, has been launched called Dime Goch.
This website asks supporters to subscribe from one pound a month to
an email list of people who are willing to apply pressure on giant com-
panies 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 com-
pany called ‘Teicstico’ was a design idea thought up by a Welsh uni-
versity student and initially launched at the Welsh National Eist-
edfaol 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 Bwrd 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
the all Celtic languages. It is nevertheless beneficial at times to
make cursory glances at recent language developments in the differ-
cent countries, if only to provide inspiration and share ideas for future possi-
ble action.

(Report compiled for Celtic News by Celtic League Secretary Gen-
eral, Rhisiart Tal-e-bot)
“Brain Dead Language” - Labour Party researcher quits

Penygros, 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 sighing 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. (Euro2007)

This dying Philippine language needs to be saved

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

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 nation.” That way, the country will be able to help in saving the threatened and dying languages. The Philippines is a multi-ethnological 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.”

Sometimes 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 Altaan, 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)

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 (Tuwan, Paramahka, Ulwa) Elena Benedicto has been teaching us about (FEL VII, FEL XI and under this year, at the upcoming FEL XI). Also affected are the Mayanagna’s neighbours the Miskitu. Jane Freeland, another FEL member in the UK, is also very active with the linguists in this region.

Aid is evidently being co-ordinated on the ground through URAC. - NG (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: Laklânô

Greg Urban, Prof. of Anthropology, University of Pennsylvania

Nañblá Gañkar, Sociologist/Linguist, Terra Indígena Laklânô Ibirâma

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 Laklânô (formerly Xokleng, Shokleng, Kaingang of Santa Catarina, or Botocudo), is spoken by no more than a few hundred individuals living on the Terra Indígena Laklânô Ibirâma 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 Laklânô 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, Nañblá Gañkar, to write the language and to transcribe audio recordings. After Urban’s departure in 1982, missionaries of the Summer Institute of Linguistics enlisted Gañkar’s aid in translating the New Testament into the native language.

Subsequently, Gañkar 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 dissertation, entitled Aspectos Morfossintáticos da Língua Laklânô (Xokleng) - Jê (“Morphosyntactic Aspects of the Laklânô Language — Jê [linguistic family]”), was awarded a pass with “distinction.” A brief write-up on Gañkar in Portuguese can be found at http://listserv.linguistlist.org/cgi- bin/wa?A2=ind0506ekx=linguisticminority&D=1&P=95. His accomplishments have also been reported in major national newspapers.

When Urban began research in 1974, the Laklânô 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 house and Yawalapiti outside. By the late 1990s. A 2004 report, prepared by the Summer Institute of Linguistics, noted that people “over 35 usually spoke to each other in Xokleng [Laklânô] and people under 35 usually spoke to each other in Portuguese” (Anonym and Anonym 2004:10). The report concluded that “the possibility of language maintenance among the Xokleng [Laklânô] is low.”

From 1992 on, Gañkar has been involved in projects aimed at revitalizing the Laklânô language (see the brief write-up at http://www.socioambiental.org/pb/seg/laklano/laklano.htm). While it may not prove possible to maintain a critical mass of fluent native speakers, if the language is to survive, Gañkar is the one who has the talent and is positioned to make this happen. 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 Gañkar serves as teacher. This project requires funding for equipment and materials, as well as support of the project leader (Gañkar) and any community participants.

The second aspect of this project is further training of Gañkar as a linguist and social researcher. To this end, he wishes to return to graduate school to complete a PhD on the Laklânô 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 Laklânô language — creating a set of materials that would allow future generations access to it.

Gañkar is also endeavoring to establish a Casa de Memória or “House of Memories” for the Laklânô community — a local museum that would preserve the language and culture of the community for the future. Simultaneously, 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 million people on earth, and of that population the community of Laklânô speakers makes up an almost insignificantly small fraction. However, it is a fully formed 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.
REFERENCES
Anonby, Stan and Sandy Anonby
Greg Urban
Arthur Hobson Quinn Professor of Anthropology
University of Pennsylvania
325 University Museum
3260 South Street
Philadelphia, PA 19104
Nanßá Gakran
Terra Indígena Laklânô Íbrahim
Aldeia Palmerinha
CEP 89.145-000
José Boiteux/SC, Brazil

5. Allied Societies and Activities

The web-site languagespeak.wordpress.com is dedicated to the
interests of practising linguists. In late May it ran
the following ’blog’ which got some interesting re-
sponses:

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 commu-
nity language activists, making ‘our entire group’ a rather over-
whelming, 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 pummelled 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 pro-
ject?” 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 was nothing to hear from my new partner 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.

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” in the end 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 tsindipovic:
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 kinds 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 work with
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
expected to do what we can to help the community. But 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 lay 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 activist devoted to language projects. But in the community
I’m 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 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 would all be very pleased 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 concerned that trust has been established between the Native
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 and practical work. And just a note: it is simply
to me that what we need to do is convince universities that
quality community work is economically beneficial to the
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 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 30th September 1998).

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

Yours sincerely,

Nicholas.

From Me nan du Plessis 6 July 2007

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 Ega."

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 Gibbon wrote:

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With all good wishes,

Dafydd"
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 not an estimated 7,000 languages spoken around the world today, one of them dies out 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] in 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 tried 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 top hotspots 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 Manjike, 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

10 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 understandable 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 UOPS, 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
The Call for Papers is closed but we are still accepting proposals for the Roundtables (Dictionary Development, and Community Languages Project/Policies 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 LanguageConference@mptn.org or dgregoire.mptn.org http://mptn.org (phone: 860-396-2052). A URL entitled "Conference on the Reclamation of Indigenous Languages" 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 conference@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, ethnoindigenous 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 ethnoindigenous 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 ethnoindigenous 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 langdevelkkk_info@sil.org

10. Recent Publications

From B.Clayre

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-clasifier 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 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 Broadbent.
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 Andaman, 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 Andamaners, 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 on 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 Andaman 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 island), 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 koit. 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

### 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 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 on absence or absence, 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 recognize 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.
“Please enrol me as a member of the Foundation for Endangered Languages. I enclose my subscription for the full year 2006. I expect all the year’s Ogmios newsletters, details of meetings etc.”

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