

FOUNDATION FOR ENDANGERED LANGUAGES

# OGMIOS



*Tiki tere Mihi – Chieftain of the Clan Ngati Uenukukopako.*

Tiki tere Mihi was painted in 1908 by Charles Goldie, who is famous for his portrayal of Māori dignitaries. Goldie sketched him at Rotorua in 1907. This painting now hangs in the Maori section of Auckland Museum.

Tikitere Mihi lived at Te Nge on the shore of Lake Rotorua. Described by James Cowan as "a Hercules of a man", he stood 6 feet 2 inches, one of the last tattooed warriors in Rotorua district.

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Māori Kite – manu

## 1. Editorial

On the cover of this issue you see a wise old face, one that we who attended our annual conference in Auckland, New Zealand, in 2012 might vividly remember: a Maori in traditional dress, appearing in a painting shown to our excursion group at the War Memorial museum on a hilltop above Auckland. Those of us who attended will have happy memories of the warm reception we received, and the traditional *marae*, or meeting house, on the campus of the Auckland University of Technology where we convened for our conference. And now preparations are well under way for our next annual conference, in Ottawa, Canada in September 2013.

This issue contains news from all over the world, a veritable Reader's Digest of endangered languages. But although I hope you find all this news interesting – and I thank our several keen-eyed contributors for alerting me to these articles – it would be nice to include some original writing by our own members. Please come forward with your own accounts of your experiences with endangered languages. It doesn't have to be too academic, so long as it relates to the cause of preserving and encouraging the use of threatened languages. You are welcome to send me articles, with or without illustrations, in any convenient form.

Chris Moseley

## 2. Development of the Foundation

*FEL XVI: 12-15 Sept 2013:  
AUT University, Auckland, Aotearoa:  
Language Endangerment in the 21<sup>st</sup>  
Century: Globalisation, Technology  
and New Media*

Since the beginning of the present millennium unprecedented social changes have been taking place across the world driven by technology, new media and social media networking. Cultural commentaries remind us of the global diffusion of ideas and values that has become synonymous with the weakening of historical and traditional linguistic ties and their replacement by loose connections to consumerism and capitalism. Old traditions perish and new ones evolve.

Any discussion and questions of technology and new media in endangered language contexts must be grounded and framed within the realities of access. Although the digital divide continues to exist, there is evidence, however, of increased access to new wireless media among endangered and minority language users.

Over the years technology from the tape recorder to digital archiving has become increasingly used, and clearly useful, for the documentation and revitalisation of endangered languages. At the same time, many endangered languages appear to making a successful transition to new media. Questions,

however, remain as to how technology and new media be exploited in the following:

- i the teaching / learning of endangered languages;
- ii the development of learning materials;
- iii the creation of new opportunities, including economic ones;
- iv the creation of new spaces for endangered language and their communities.

As always, we hope that the shared experience of discussions of these reports at the conference has stimulated new insights on our theme, insights which may cross boundaries of language, country and continent. While FEL endeavours to hold a comparable conference in very different parts of the world every year, each turns out to have a unique character. We are all in this together, but nonetheless FEL is dedicated to the belief that, while coming from all over the world, we have much to learn from particular traditions established in deep-rooted communities.

The Committee of FEL, on behalf of its membership, expresses deep gratitude to our friends at *Te Ipukarea*, The National Māori Language Institute, AUT University, for their exertions to make this event a reality. Now we have had the fascination of learning so much that is new from each other, even as we face the struggle to perpetuate our languages. It is a struggle to keep hope alive, often in adversity but always in joy.

Be brave, be strong, be persevering.

## 3. Endangered Languages in the News

**Pope Benedict to open new Latin Academy in the Vatican**

*The Guardian, London, 31 August 2012*

Alarmed by a decline in the use of Latin within the Catholic church, Pope Benedict is planning to set up a Vatican academy to breathe new life into the dead language.

Long used by the Vatican as its lingua franca, Latin is currently promoted by a small team within the office of the Holy See's secretary of state, which runs a Latin poetry competition and puts out a magazine.

But Benedict – a staunch traditionalist – is backing a plan for a new academy which would team up with academics to better "promote the knowledge and speaking of Latin, particularly inside the church," Vatican spokesman Fr. Ciro Benedettini said.

The academy, added one Vatican official, would be "livelier and more open to scholars, seminars and new media" than the existing set-up.

As the study of Latin dwindles in schools, it is also on the wane in the church, where seminarians no longer carry out

their studies in Latin and priests from around the world no longer use it to chat to each other. Until the 1960s Vatican documents were only published in Latin, which remained the language of the liturgy.

Today cash machines in the Vatican bank give instructions in Latin and the pope's encyclicals are still translated into the language, but the new academy could provide much needed help to those charged with translating Latin words for 21st-century buzzwords such as delocalisation, which appeared in Benedict's 2009 document on the economic crisis as *delocalizatio*.

That choice was criticised by Jesuit experts, reported Italy's *La Stampa* newspaper.

"Some don't like that kind of translation because it simply makes Italian and English words sound Latin, rather than being more creative with the language, although both ways are valid," said father Roberto Spataro, a lecturer at the Salesian Pontifical University in Rome, who described the idea of the academy as "very opportune".

Jesuit critics were more impressed with the more elaborate translation of liberalisation in the encyclical as *plenior libertas* and fanaticism as *fanaticus furor*.

### Lost in translation?

Vatican officials tasked with finding Latin words for new English words call the internet *inter rete* and emails *inscriptio cursus electronici*. The 2003 Lexicon Recentis Latinitatis also offers the following translations:

- Photocopy *exemplar luce expressum*
- Basketball *foliis canistraque ludus*
- Bestseller *liber maxime divenditus*
- Blue jeans *bracae linteae caeruleae*
- Goal *retis violatio*
- Hot pants *brevissimae bracae femineae*
- VAT *fiscale pretii additamentum*
- Mountain bike *birota montana*
- Parachute *umbrella descensoria*

## Breakthrough in world's oldest undeciphered writing

By Sean Coughlan, BBC News on-line web-site, 23 October 2012

The world's oldest undeciphered writing system, which has so far defied attempts to uncover its 5,000-year-old secrets, could be about to be decoded by Oxford University academics.

This international research project is already casting light on a lost bronze age middle eastern society where enslaved workers lived on rations close to the starvation level.

"I think we are finally on the point of making a breakthrough," says Jacob Dahl, fellow of Wolfson College, Oxford and director of the Ancient World Research Cluster.

Dr Dahl's secret weapon is being able to see this writing more clearly than ever before.

In a room high up in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, above the Egyptian mummies and fragments of early civilisations, a big black dome is clicking away and flashing out light.

This device, part sci-fi, part-DIY, is providing the most detailed and high quality images ever taken of these elusive symbols cut into clay tablets. This is Indiana Jones with software.

This way of capturing images, developed by academics in Oxford and Southampton, is being used to help decode a writing system called proto-Elamite, used between around 3200BC and 2900BC in a region now in the south west of modern Iran.

And the Oxford team think that they could be on the brink of understanding this last great remaining cache of undeciphered texts from the ancient world.

### Tablet computer

Dr Dahl, from the Oriental Studies Faculty, shipped his image-making device on the Eurostar to the Louvre Museum in Paris, which holds the most important collection of this writing.

The clay tablets were put inside this machine, the Reflectance Transformation Imaging System, which uses a combination of 76 separate photographic lights and computer processing to capture every groove and notch on the surface of the clay tablets.

It allows a virtual image to be turned around, as though being held up to the light at every possible angle.

These images will be publicly available online, with the aim of using a kind of academic crowdsourcing.

He says it's misleading to think that codebreaking is about some lonely genius suddenly understanding the meaning of a word. What works more often is patient teamwork and the sharing of theories. Putting the images online should accelerate this process.

But this is painstaking work. So far Dr Dahl has deciphered 1,200 separate signs, but he says that after more than 10 years study much remains unknown, even such basic words as "cow" or "cattle".

He admits to being "bitten" by this challenge. "It's an unknown, uncharted territory of human history," he says.

### Extinct language

But why has this writing proved so difficult to interpret?

Dr Dahl suspects he might have part of the answer. He's discovered that the original texts seem to contain many mistakes - and this makes it extremely tricky for anyone trying to find consistent patterns.

He believes this was not just a case of the scribes having a bad day at the office. There seems to have been an unusual absence of scholarship, with no evidence of any lists of symbols or learning exercises for scribes to preserve the accuracy of the writing.

This first case of educational underinvestment proved fatal for the writing system, which was corrupted and then completely disappeared after only a couple of hundred years. "It's an early example of a technology being lost," he says.

"The lack of a scholarly tradition meant that a lot of mistakes were made and the writing system may eventually have become useless."

Making it even harder to decode is the fact that it's unlike any other ancient writing style. There are no bi-lingual texts and few helpful overlaps to provide a key to these otherwise arbitrary looking dashes and circles and symbols.

This is a writing system - and not a spoken language - so there's no way of knowing how words sounded, which might have provided some phonetic clues.

Dr Dahl says that one of the really important historical significances of this proto-Elamite writing is that it was the first ever recorded case of one society adopting writing from another neighbouring group.

But infuriatingly for the codebreakers, when these proto-Elamites borrowed the concept of writing from the Mesopotamians, they made up an entirely different set of symbols.

Why they should make the intellectual leap to embrace writing and then at the same time re-invent it in a different local form remains a puzzle.

But it provides a fascinating snapshot of how ideas can both spread and change.

### Mr One Hundred

In terms of written history, this is the very remote past. But there is also something very direct and almost intimate about it too.

You can see fingernail marks in the clay. These neat little symbols and drawings are clearly the work of an intelligent mind.

These were among the first attempts by our human ancestors to try to make a permanent record of their surroundings. What we're doing now - my writing and your reading - is a direct continuation.

But there are glimpses of their lives to suggest that these were tough times. It wasn't so much a land of milk and honey, but porridge and weak beer.

Even without knowing all the symbols, Dr Dahl says it's possible to work out the context of many of the messages on these tablets.

The numbering system is also understood, making it possible to see that much of this information is about accounts of the ownership and yields from land and people. They are about property and status, not poetry.

This was a simple agricultural society, with a ruling household. Below them was a tier of powerful middle-ranking figures and further below were the majority of workers, who were treated like "cattle with names".

Their rulers have titles or names which reflect this status - the equivalent of being called "Mr One Hundred", he says - to show the number of people below him.

It's possible to work out the rations given to these farm labourers.

Dr Dahl says they had a diet of barley, which might have been crushed into a form of porridge, and they drank weak beer.

The amount of food received by these farm workers hovered barely above the starvation level.

However the higher status people might have enjoyed yoghurt, cheese and honey. They also kept goats, sheep and cattle.

For the "upper echelons, life expectancy for some might have been as long as now", he says. For the poor, he says it might have been as low as in today's poorest countries.

The tablets also have surprises. Even though there are plenty of pictures of animals and mythical creatures, Dr Dahl says there are no representations of the human form of any kind. Not even a hand or an eye.

Was this some kind of cultural or religious taboo?

Dr Dahl remains passionate about what this work says about such societies, digging into the deepest roots of civilisation. This is about where so much begins. For instance, proto-Elamite was the first writing ever to use syllables.

If Macbeth talked about the "last syllable of recorded time", the proto-Elamites were there for the first.

And with sufficient support, Dr Dahl says that within two years this last great lost writing could be fully understood.

## Native American Language Teacher certification

*From the Arizona Department of Education web-site, 28 August 2012*

(Phoenix, AZ—August 28, 2012) Arizona Superintendent of Public Instruction John Huppenthal announced today that a new *Native American Language Certification Policy R7-2-614J*, developed jointly by the Arizona Department of Education and the Native American Tribes, was unanimously adopted by the State Board of Education.

In discussions at the State Superintendent Huppenthal's *Native American Advisory Group*, members of various Native American tribes, communities and nations came together to voice their concern with an education bureaucracy that challenged their ability to pass on their native language and culture to future generations of Native American students. These discussions led to a partnership between the Arizona Department of Education and Arizona's Tribal Governments. This partnership has now enabled Native Language speakers to be certified to teach their Native languages in Arizona classrooms.

The Native American Advisory Committee to Superintendent Huppenthal made recommendations to establish a Native Language Teacher Certificate on September 21, 2011. In rapid response to the committee's recommendation a proposed rule to establish a Native Language teacher certificate was drafted. On October 5th this draft rule was considered by the Certification Advisory Committee which unanimously voted to forward the proposed rule to be considered for adoption by the

State Board of Education. It was officially adopted today and now goes into immediate effect. The Navajo Nation is already a participating Tribal government. Other tribes in Arizona are currently taking action to draft proficiency assessments and have declared intentions to participate in this government to government partnership. There are 22 tribal governments in Arizona.

"I am pleased with the unwavering support of the State Board of Education in supporting this new policy. These Native American languages are in danger of becoming extinct. It is imperative that we

work to support Native American communities in their efforts to preserve their languages through the generations," stated Superintendent of Public Instruction John Huppenthal.

"I'd like to thank the Department of Education and Superintendent Huppenthal for supporting Native American language programs and its traditional teachers," said State Board member Jacob Moore. "This is a historical event that honors the recognition of Native American languages in our education system and will be well received by Tribal Nations and Communities throughout the state."

The new policy allows for individuals with Native American language proficiency, whose proficiency is verified by their own tribal assessments, to apply for a Native Language Teacher Certificate at the Arizona Department of Education. Other requirements would include a finger print clearance card, an application fee and be subject to renewal requirements consistent with other teacher certificates under section R7-2-614. The policy goes into immediate effect and is anticipated as a new avenue for elders and other non-degreed language experts to teach only native language(s) to students in Arizona schools. Many of these languages are critically endangered and at risk for extinction if not taught to Native American Youth.

"The new Native American Language Certification will help us preserve and maintain our language," said Kathy Kitcheyan, Apache language mentor teacher at San Carlos Unified School District. "I'd like to thank the Superintendent and State Board for having the Native American Advisory Committee and for moving this forward. This was a long time coming."

## Linguistics lab documents refugee languages

*By Timothy Russow, from the Arbiter Online, Boise State University (Idaho), 4 September 2012*

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## Fight to save indigenous languages topic of summit

*By Kristi Eaton, Associated Press, from the North Jersey.com web-site, 15 November 2012*

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The founder of a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting the Lakota language says the alcoholism, high suicide rates and rampant drug use plaguing young people on South Dakota's Pine Ridge Indian Reservation stem from a lack of identity and a loss of culture.

Those troubling issues are what inspired Mike Carlow to create Tusweca Tiospaye, which hosts an annual summit focused on revitalizing tribal languages. This year's event is to run from Thursday to Saturday in Rapid City.

"I associate a lot of the social problems today, especially with our youth — the gangs, alcohol and drug abuse, drop-out rates, suicide rates — I associate those things with a lack of identity, a loss of cul-

ture, loss of language, loss of traditions," Carlow said. "And so I created this organization to kind of combat all of those things — to bring our language and culture back to our youth and hopefully create better lives for them as well."

Soon after forming the group, he started traveling to different reservations around the country learning about and promoting language revitalization as a way to help young people. When he realized there were several small groups working to fight the loss of the language, he decided to bring them together as one organization.

Carlow and his group's annual Lakota, Dakota, Nakota Language Summit brings together hundreds of tribal members and tribal educators from all over the U.S. to share best practices and techniques for improving language fluency. The summit is expected to draw as many as 800 people this year.

This is the fifth year for the event. Participants include Sioux tribes from North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, Nebraska, Montana and Canada, as well as tribes from other parts of the country.

The effort expands beyond the Oglala Sioux. More than 20 tribes are represented, including the Standing Rock Sioux, the Winnebago, the Cree and the Dine Nation.

"It's not to push one way or one method or one orthography or one curriculum. (It's) to bring everyone together to share so that we can all be exposed to what's out there — what strategies, what methods, what resources, technologies are out there," Carlow said.

Tribal members can take the different approaches back home and add to what they are already doing successfully, he added.

Peter Hill, who is opening up a language immersion day care for infants on the Pine Ridge reservation later this month, was to be one of the keynote speakers Thursday at the conference. Hill, who learned the language as an adult, said the various tribes and reservations need to come together as one to save the language.

## Radio Free Cherokee: Endangered languages take to the airwaves

By Alexis Hauk, *The Atlantic* on-line edition, 15 August 2012

Loris Taylor, the CEO and president of Native Public Media, still has the scars on her hands from when she was caught speaking Hopi in school and got the sharp end of the ruler as a result. "They hit so hard, the flesh was taken off," she remembers. "Deep down inside, it builds some resistance in you."

Now, she's at the forefront of a movement to revive dead and dying languages using an old medium: radio. As CEO and president of Native Public Media, she's lobbied the FCC and overseen projects to get increasingly rare tongues like Hopi onto airwaves so that Native Americans can keep their ancestors' ways of speaking alive—and pass those ways of speaking to new generations.

Similar efforts are taking place worldwide. In Ireland, Dublin's youthful Top-40 Raidió Rí-Ra and Belfast's eclectic indie Raidió Fáilte have been broadcasting entirely in Irish for several years. In Washington, D.C. earlier this month, indigenous radio producers from Peru, Mexico, Canada, El Salvador, and a handful of other countries gathered for the "Our Voices on the Air" conference, organized by the 40-year-old nonprofit Cultural Survival and the Smithsonian's Recovering Voices program.

Following centuries of oppression that have marginalized minority languages, radio represents a modest but surprisingly promising way to reinvigorate the traditions keeping those languages alive. In the Maori community of New Zealand, for example, the combination of 21 radio stations and rigorous early childhood immersion programs have brought Maori-language speakers from an all-time low of 24,000 in the 1980s to 131,000 in 2006, according to Mark Camp, deputy executive director at Cultural Survival.

"It's not a silver bullet, but it's an important piece," Camp says of radio. "If you don't have some sort of media—and radio is the best in our opinion—to counterbalance the predominant commercial media that is all in Spanish or in English, it makes language less of a modern, living thing. It becomes something that you might do with your grandparents."

As Kaimana Barcase, the producer and lead DJ for KWXX (FM)'s Hawaiian-language radio show *Alana I Kai Hikina*, puts it, radio provides a way to ensure "the normalization of our language in our homelands. ... Broadcasting in our language allows us to share our paradigms, our worldviews, and the essence of our being."

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The swift and sure loss of indigenous language in the U.S. was hardly an accident. From the latter part of the 19th century to the latter part of the 20th, the Bureau of Indian Affairs systematically sent generations of Native American kids into boarding schools that were more focused on punishment and assimilation than on education. In a piece for NPR in 2008, Charla Bear reported on the terrible conditions that persisted at these schools for a century—how kids were given Anglo names, bathed in kerosene, and forced to shave their heads.

In recent years, the government has taken steps to reverse some of the damage. In 1990, the Native American Languages Act was passed, recognizing the right of indigenous populations to speak their own language. And Taylor's lobbying helped lead to the creation in 2009 of the FCC's "Tribal Priority" for broadcasting and then, a year later, to the establishment of the FCC Office of Native Affairs and Policy, which promotes technology and communication access on tribal lands.

Still, the effects of centuries of forced assimilation run deep. Richard Alun Davis, station manager for Arizona Hopi station KUYI 88.1 FM, says that the disappearing vocabulary creates a "complex tapestry of shame" in the approximately 9,000-person population his station reaches.

"Even if they can speak, they usually do not do it outside of the home for fear of being corrected," he says. Because the Hopi religious tradition is firmly rooted in the language, "It's not only a moment of discomfort with the literacy. It's also showing that you're unable to participate in all the culture."

In 1998, Mesa Media Inc. conducted a survey of 200 Hopi people and found that while people ages 60 and up were 100 percent fluent in Hopi, that percentage diminished steadily as you got younger: 84 percent ages 40-59, 50 percent ages 20-39 and 5 percent in children age 2-19. The survey, which provides the most recent data of its kind on this community, con-

cluded that unless children began to learn Hopi right away, the language would die out completely in a few generations.

Davis, a blond-haired, blue-eyed Brit who fell in love with Native American literature in college and speaks Hopi ("people joke that I've created my own dialect"), believes that radio is the easiest way to counteract these bleak statistics. His station, KUYI, covers three counties, from the border of the Grand Canyon National Park, up to the Utah border, and down toward Winslow. Its programs include a junior and senior high school class that broadcasts in Hopi, a morning Sunday show aimed at small children, and cultural discussions for adults that are held according to the lunar calendar, in keeping with Hopi tradition.

Congress's passage of the Community Radio Act in 2011 means that community radio stations could soon—in Camp's words—"mushroom," which offers a lot of potential for Native American media on reservations, where there is usually little infrastructure and in many cases no electricity (certainly no wifi). In these areas, a low-power FM station that's plugged into the grid in the center of town allows people with battery-powered, handheld radios to listen in to what's happening all around them.

The programming on many of these stations is at least as diverse as you'd find on an all-English community frequency. And like with radio stations everywhere, there are longstanding on-air personalities that attract a devoted listenership. In Oklahoma, for example, Dennis Sixkiller has produced a "Cherokee Voices, Cherokee Sounds" radio show since 2004, and more recently, a podcast as well.

In the July 29 podcast, Sixkiller outlines in a low, Johnny Cash-like drawl—first in English, then in Cherokee—the lineup for the next hour. It is filled with Cherokee songs and stories, and a biography of a community elder. Kicking off his program, Sixkiller plays an old-fashioned country/gospel tune, with the tripping harmonies typical of country churches in Appalachia, sung all in Cherokee. "I tell you what, it sure is hot," Sixkiller monologues between tracks. "I'm sure a lot of you all are going down to the creek to stay cool."

There's weather, gossip, and news, in the mix, like you'd expect. But for Sixkiller, there's also a greater purpose. "At a certain time, people thought 'We live in a white man's world and have to change our language in order to make it in this world,'" he says. "But now we see how wrong that was."

## Mozilla Firefox translated to Maya language

*From the Yucatan Times on-line edition, 13 August 2012*

In the framework of the International Day of Indigenous Peoples, 31 professionals from several parts of the State of Yucatan joined the Mayan translations Marathon "Mozilla Translation 2012", in the Hotel Residencial.

During the marathon the volunteers and linguists translated the Internet browser Mozilla Firefox in to the Mayan language, as well as 500 articles from Wikipedia and uploaded 10 articles to Google Endangered Languages Platform.

The activity was organized by the Civil Association "Nacnati" (Active Nation) supported by the National Commission for the

Development of Indigenous Peoples (CDI), the Mozilla Foundation in Mexico and the Official Chapter Wikimedia Mexico.

The President of "Nacnati", Julio Gomez Sanchez, explained that the purpose of this first "translathon" is to promote the use of the Maya language for its preservation and increase its Internet presence with translation software to Maya.

A year ago the Nacnati association began the translation of the Mozilla browser, and due to the arising interest it was decided to extend the translations of the browser, which can be consulted in the webpage [www.mozilla-mexico.org](http://www.mozilla-mexico.org).

Vicente Canché Moo, independent cultural promoter, commented that the 31 translators and experts in linguists, who attended the marathon, were anthropologists, lawyers, researchers, graduate students in Maya language and college students from the municipalities of Peto, Tekax, Valladolid, Halachó, Muna and Merida.

The cultural promoter said that without underestimating the print media, any other communication channel available to the people that strengthen their language should be used, such as the new technologies.

"Unfortunately, there is computer illiteracy, because not all communities have access to internet and other technologies, we make a call to organizations and government institutions to provide information to the indigenous communities about these new tools to contribute to the development of Mayan culture."

Nacnati is currently working in 12 indigenous languages in Mexico; there are 7 already available through the [mozilla-mexico.org](http://www.mozilla-mexico.org) webpage. If any person wants to collaborate with the association, visit their website at <http://www.nacnati.org/>.

## Central Institute of Indian Languages salutes oldest speaker of endangered language

*From the Times of India on-line edition, 12 July 2012*

MYSORE: The Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL) will felicitate the oldest speaker of one of the most endangered languages of India to commemorate its Foundation Day next week.

Saimar had 25 speakers in 2009, which, the CIIL said, is at present used by only 4 people. The CIIL is holding a three-day meet focusing on Indian cultural traditions to mark its 44th Foundation Day starting July 17 during which the oldest speaker will be felicitated. The premier institute was established on July 17, 1969.

Linguists hope to save endangered languages in India.

From the Public Radio International web-site, 9 July 2012

UNESCO lists nearly 200 of India's 900 languages as endangered. Others are dying fast as the country continues its rapid development. A team of researchers are working to catalog what's left of them before they disappear completely.

Latu Rutia rises from a cot on the back porch of his house in Chhota Udaipur, a small town in western India that many members of the Rathwa tribe call home.

Rutia, an 80-year-old member of the tribe, wears only a loin-cloth and earring. He speaks in his native language of Rathwee. Rutia says in the schools his grandchildren attend they are taught in the state language, Gujarati.

"They are forced to speak differently," he said.

Rutia worries that elements of the Rathwee language are fading, even though it's believed to have nearly a million speakers. But the number of speakers may be less important than how and where the language is spoken.

That's where the People's Linguistic Survey of India comes in. It has field workers spread across the country documenting Rathwee and hundreds of other Indian languages.

Researchers are documenting each language's characteristics and recording its folk stories and songs. They also note how the languages describe time and color. For example, the Rathwee language labels various stages of dawn: when the cock crows is one part and when the birds start moving is another.

Ganesh Devy, who created the survey, says embedded in each language are unique ways of seeing the world.

"Some languages in India do not have terms for the color blue," he said. "I ask them how they look at the sky. So they said they do not think of a blue sky ... they think of the sky as so sacred that no adjective (can) be attached to it."

Of the roughly 900 languages spoken across India, many are closely related. But others vary wildly, especially when it comes to concepts like color.

Andrew Garrett, linguistics professor at the University of California, says it's these singular ways of describing things that are the first to go when a language like Rathwee assimilates into dominant languages. That's one reason documentation can help.

"If your government is interested in supporting small languages, then it's helpful for them to know that the language of your village is really quite different from the language of the other villages nearby," Garrett said. "They might actually put some effort into doing what's needed in education or in language documentation."

UNESCO has listed nearly 200 Indian languages as endangered. Some regions of India are experimenting with mother tongue-based education, which allows students to learn in the same language that they speak at home.

Many studies show that mother tongue-based education increases childrens' learning and decreases dropout levels. It's something the Indian linguists support. Andrew Garrett says it can help slow the death of languages.

"In the face of thousands of endangered languages, not all of them are going to still be used in a hundred years," he said. "Many of them won't be. But I think some efforts will be successful."

Earlier this year, the Indian linguists started handing over their findings to the Indian government. Devy says the government response was encouraging. He is hopeful it will introduce a program supporting mother tongue-based education.

The next challenge is to convince people that their language doesn't have to hold them back.

"Language is becoming a kind of condition for being counted as modern," Devy said. "If you speak your language, you are traditional. If you speak some other language, you are modern."

To Devy, the Rathwa people living in rural Gujarat are just as modern as those racing to business meetings in downtown Mumbai. Just because they speak an ancient tongue and live far from the city doesn't mean they should be excluded from proper schooling and progress.

Now that Devy and his colleagues have gathered details of all the known languages of India, they're hoping for swift government action so school teachers will once again instruct students in their own language.

## Researchers create alphabet for endangered language of Ghana

*From the Okanagan News, web-site of the University of British Columbia (Canada), 5 November 2012*

Fourth-year UBC undergraduate student Robyn Giffen has teamed up with PhD candidate Vida Yakong to create a writing system for the language of Nabit, an oral spoken language in Northern Ghana.

By first creating an alphabet, and consequently a fully-functional writing system, Giffen and Yakong hope people in the Nabdam district in Northern Ghana will have better access to essential services of education, health care, and government. All are currently delivered in a language not fully understood by most Nabit speakers, which limits their ability to influence those essential services.

"Within Ghana, there are 79 recognized languages, not including dialects. Nabit is at-risk of going extinct, along with all the knowledge and culture embedded within it," says Giffen, an anthropology student who received an Undergraduate Research Award (URA) through the Irving K. Barber Endowment in support of her work.

Yakong, a PhD candidate in Interdisciplinary Graduate Studies at UBC's Okanagan campus, is from Northern Ghana and fluently speaks Nabit. In 2007 she launched Project GROW (Global Rural Opportunities for Women) -- an initiative that aims to generate economic opportunities for women in rural Ghana.

"Vida and I started the project by recording the language of Nabit -- using words specific to the villages -- and then analyzing the individual sounds to create an orthography," says Giffen. "Nabit speakers hope to learn both written Nabit and English, so it was beneficial for the writing systems to be similar. However, for sounds that were unique to Nabit, we explored options from other languages."

"For the Nabit-speaking people, literacy means pride and security," adds Yakong. "It would mean the preservation of culture and history, and it would mean a greater ability to control and influence essential services and government."

The 52-letter alphabet, along with a writing tool and guide, will soon be sent to community elders and leaders in the Nabdam district for their review and feedback.

The idea for Giffen's URA project was sparked by doctoral research by Cindy Bourne, a PhD candidate in the Faculty of Education, who -- through her work with Project GROW and research on adult literacy in Northern Ghana -- identified the desire and need for a writing system for Nabit.

Although Giffen's project is now complete, the work in preserving the Nabit language will develop and expand as Bourne continues with research on how best adult literacy programs can be implemented in Nabit speaking communities.

Approximately 45 per cent of the population of Ghana, ages 15 and older, are illiterate. Nabit-speaking women often use their fingerprint to sign documents, considered degrading, as their ink-stained fingers also mark their illiteracy. And students are educated in either English or Gurene -- two languages that a Nabit-speaker does not understand. Both children and adults who learn to read and write in their mother tongue have an easier time learning English than those who are not educated in their first language.

"The establishment of a writing system is essential -- it is an important tool to help empower both women and men, not only because they will be able to sign their own name, but they'll be able to read and write, a skill that should be considered a human right," says Giffen.

## France's minority languages in danger

*From Al-Jazeera on-line, 12 September 2012*

When Tanguy Louarn casts his vote in next month's French presidential election he will be forced to do so in a language that he does not recognise as his own.

A resident of the rugged peninsula region of Brittany in northwestern France, Louarn is one of about 200,000 speakers of Breton, once the world's most commonly spoken Celtic language but now recognised as severely endangered by UNESCO.

Despite its precarious situation, Breton has no formal status in France. It is not offered as a language of education in the public school system, the state makes no provision for regional language media, and it is not used in government or public services.

Once home to a vibrant multitude of tongues, the monolingualism of modern France is enshrined in article two of the country's constitution, rooted in the revolutionary principles of 1789, which reads: "The language of the Republic shall be French."

Yet Louarn, the president of Kevre Breizh, a Breton language activist group, says that regional language speakers are still waiting for their human rights to be respected.

"Breton is my language. It is a part of my identity. Yet 'Liberte, egalite, fraternite' is only for people speaking French. When you speak another language you do not have equality."

While estimates of exact numbers vary, campaigners say there are more than five million people in France with fluency in a regional language.

Major language areas include Occitania, a broad swathe of southern France stretching from the Alps to the Pyrenees

where an estimated three million people speak various dialects of Occitan; the Basque and Catalan regions of the southwest, with nearly 200,000 speakers; Alsace in the east, with about 900,000 Alsatian speakers, and Corsica, with about 150,000 Corsican speakers.

On March 31, regional language speakers in 10 cities across France will stage the country's largest ever co-ordinated demonstrations to protest for their linguistic rights to be recognised.

Their demands include a change to the constitution to grant official status to regional languages, measures to make the languages "co-official" in the areas where they are spoken, and for France to ratify the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages.

### 'Rogue state'

Davyth Hicks, chief of EuroLang, a Brussels-based NGO that forms part of the European Language Equality Network (ELEN), said that France was one of only a handful of states in Europe not to have ratified the charter, which is considered the key legislation protecting and promoting linguistic diversity across the continent.

While neighbours such as the UK and Spain grant co-official status to languages such as Welsh, Basque, Catalan and Galician, Hicks said France remained a "pariah".

"France is a rogue state in terms of how it promotes its languages. It just has not kept up with European development. It says all these things about the promotion of human rights and equality elsewhere in the world, but meanwhile, on its doorstep, languages such as Breton have become seriously endangered," Hicks said.

Philippe Marliere, a professor of French and European politics at University College London, said France's antipathy towards regional languages could be traced to the centuries-old centralising tendencies of the state, beginning under the absolute monarchy and accelerated after the 1789 revolution.

"The French revolutionaries wanted one regime over one territory, but they also thought that to make the unity of the nation a reality you needed one language," Marliere said. "So language was an important element in the idea of building a French nation of equals and citizens."

But while regional languages were once actively suppressed, with children as recently as the mid-20th century facing punishment for speaking them in the schoolyard or classroom, Marliere said there had been a relaxation of attitudes in recent decades.

Nowadays, for instance, language is promoted as part of Brittany's culture, with bilingual street signs and private schools offering a Breton education for parents who want their children to learn the language, while many residents take pride in the Celtic heritage that sets their region apart from the rest of France.

"If we talk about languages such as Breton or Occitan, I think there has been a complete shift now. It used to be devalued, now it is very much valued," said Marliere. "It is a complete change of mentality. Before it was seen as completely backward; now it is seen as something that will enrich your personality, or your children's personalities."

## Symbolic recognition

A campaign to gain a measure of symbolic recognition for regional languages also resulted in a line being added to the constitution in 2008 acknowledging them as part of France's heritage. But Louarn said further action was needed to ensure their survival as living languages, rather something belonging to the country's past.

With a majority of Breton speakers now in their 80s and with few young people learning the language, he said the state needed to take urgent measures, including full constitutional recognition and subsequent investment in public education, regional language media and public services, to reverse the decline.

"All regional languages in France are in danger. They could disappear as social languages. Perhaps they can stay in museums, but not in real life. In Brittany in the middle of the 20th century there were a million people who spoke Breton; now there are 200,000. So the number is going down because of the policy of the state," Louarn said.

Alexis Quentin, of the Institute of Occitan Studies in Paris, said France needed to evolve from its centralist foundations towards something "more federalist, more open" and more relaxed about diversity.

"Centralism is like a weight for France nowadays. And I believe that the Republic could evolve like that, and be more democratic with rights for regions and minorities," he said. "It is an important point for democracy in France. And having only one language is more nationalistic."

While French President Nicolas Sarkozy has said that he would not ratify the charter on regional languages, several of his opponents in the April 22 first round vote have expressed support for greater linguistic rights.

On a campaign visit to Corsica last week, Francois Hollande, the Socialist candidate who leads Sarkozy according to latest polls, said he was committed to ratifying the European charter and providing greater support for regional language education, media and cultural activities.

Francois Bayrou, the candidate for the centrist Democratic Movement, who comes from the Pyrenees, even spoke the Occitan dialect of Bearnais in vowing to fight for regional language speakers at a rally in the southern city of Toulouse.

## 'Die-hard republicans'

But Philippe Marliere said any president or politician who wanted to amend the constitution to recognise regional languages faced an "almost impossible" task in mobilising the required two-thirds majorities in both the National Assembly and the Senate.

"There are still die-hard republicans in France and overall - let's say among politicians, political commentators, journalists - they are still pretty much the majority. If one starts acknowledging that there is not one unitary language but several then it's opening the Pandora's box to all sorts of issues. And, of course, the French fear is that there will be ethnic and religious claims made on behalf of minority groups, and then that will be the end of the French Republic."

Such a campaign would also face opposition from France's Constitutional Council, which blocked previous efforts to rati-

fy the European charter, and the Academie Francaise, the influential institution set up to formalise French in the 17th century, which remains the guardian of the national language and emphatically opposed to any challenge to its supremacy.

"There will always be people against it and I can see a very passionate campaign of people defending the status quo. So no government, no president, left or right, would have the stomach to do that," said Marliere.

But Marliere added that he he could envision a more piecemeal shift in French attitudes, in which greater awareness of regional languages and the benefits of bilingualism combined with external pressure from the European Union would push France towards a more progressive position.

"I think that change will come in practice, but in a very pragmatic way. There will be pressure on France to be more liberal and to accommodate more regional languages, and it will do so, but in a very ad hoc manner and not by revising the constitution."

Davyth Hicks also sees reason for hope in the way that new technology and social media have opened up new spheres for regional languages among a new generation of speakers beyond the traditional domain of the state.

"The key to the future of any language is the young people," he said. "Youngsters have got to see that they can go out there and use their language, and if they can see that it is there on Facebook and on the internet and on their iPhone then we can steal a march."

In the short term, however, responsibility for the survival of France's regional languages hangs heavily on the shoulders of a current generation of speakers determined to pass them on.

"I live in Paris, and come from a family that is both from the north and the south of France. So, speaking Occitan is to claim back one half of me," said Alexis Quentin.

"For me, it means to talk with my grandmother, to talk with my relatives in Auvergne. It is a part of me. It is normal that a state should secure this, and that our heritage should not be lost forever. And it is important for me to give this heritage to my children."

## Why the Kumzari tongue consists of ancient words with a future

*By John Henzell, The National, 7 December 2012*

The world is rallying to save Kumzari, a unique language spoken only on the tip of the Musandam peninsula and thought to be a mix of Farsi, Arabic, Baluchi, Portuguese, English and some uniquely local words.

UNESCO categorised it as severely endangered, it was listed on Google's Endangered Languages Project for those on the verge of extinction, and linguists fear Kumzari will be among the half of world languages that will be extinct by the end of the century. There's just one problem: nobody seems to have bothered to inform the residents of Kumzar that their language is in danger.

The first hint that reality did not tally with the concerns about the language came as we approached the village, as everyone

does, from the sea. In front of a crowded cluster of houses taking up nearly every square metre of flat land where a steep-sided wadi emerges from the mountains, Kumzar's children are playing in a tidal pool.

They're using a collection of construction offcuts to use as makeshift toy boats. Anywhere else on the Arabian peninsula, they would be jabbering away excitedly in Arabic.

Not here. There's plenty of animated chatter - and it's entirely in Kumzari. Arabic is a language they only encounter once they start school.

Their parents later explain to us in clear Omani Arabic that their language is strong. But what really validates the point is that whenever they confer before answering our questions, it is always in Kumzari.

All this defies what has been an otherwise one-way process in which the overwhelming majority of the more than 6,000 languages spoken globally are headed for extinction, pushed into obscurity by the dominance of the top five languages: English, Mandarin, Spanish, Arabic and Hindi.

At first blush, Kumzari ticks every box on the checklist for languages that should be facing extinction: it's a purely verbal rather than written language, it's only spoken by a few thousand people, its speakers are all bilingual, it cannot be used to communicate with the outside world, the education system is only in Arabic, and the children have access to satellite television and the internet.

So why is Kumzari doing well when so many other languages are not?

The way village elders such as Abdullah Kumzarireact to the question makes it seem faintly irrelevant. His explanation boils down to this: it's just Kumzari. They don't know for certain where it came from but they've always spoken it and they will always speak it.

"It's not going to be extinct, because when a child is born and finds the mother, father, siblings and everyone else talking the same way, of course it won't be lost," he says.

"Children ... have many years at home before they go anywhere. So [Kumzari] will always be around.

"It hasn't changed. It's the same from our ancestors' time, we inherited it from them, but where they got it from we don't know.

"We can't give you a date. It could be hundreds or thousands [of years], maybe millions of years ago. We can't give a day but it was a long time ago. This is proof that there were a lot of people living here for a long time."

Another elder, Mohammed Abdullah Kumzari, says the origins of the language remain obscure but only those from Kumzar can speak or understand it.

"Some say [it's from] Portugal, some say French, even we don't know where it came from," he adds.

"An Englishman came to us once, took a small can, filled it with rocks and shook it, then gave it to us saying: 'This is your dialect - it's everything.'"

"There isn't anywhere else that speaks Kumzari but here. In all of the Gulf countries, it's only here, in this village. You can't find it anywhere else."

Even trained linguists struggle to determine the language's exact origins, other than it's a reflection of Kumzar's location right on the Strait of Hormuz, one of the crossroads of civilisations for millennia.

Early theories included that it was the aboriginal pre-Semitic language of this part of Arabia that was supplanted by the spread of Arabic, or that it was related to the now-extinct Himyaritic language of Yemen.

The first serious analysis was in 1930 by Bertram Thomas, an English civil servant who worked throughout the region. He dismissed the earlier theories and determined Kumzari was "largely a compound of Arabic and Persian, but is distinct from them both [and] as spoken is comprehensible neither to the Arab nor to the Persian visitor of usual illiteracy".

He assessed more than 500 words of Kumzari and decided 44 per cent had a Farsi origin, 34 per cent had an Arabic origin and another 22 per cent could not be traced to either. The grammatical structure was more like Farsi than Arabic.

The Kumzari word for oven, for example, is "forno", the same as in Portuguese and most likely harking from when they ruled his area in the 16th and 17th centuries. The word for car (there are four cars in Kumzar, notwithstanding there are fewer than two kilometres of roads) is "motor", a direct lift from English. Other words are traced to Kurdish, Urdu and Hindi, all languages used in trading.

One recent theory is that the closest language to Kumzari - which, to be fair, is not very close - is the Minabi dialect of southern Baluchistan, and another is that Kumzari is a dialect of Luri, which is spoken by around four million people in Iran and Iraq.

The latter connection led to Kumzar's most recent intense assessment. Erik Anonby, a professor of linguistics at Carleton University in Canada who specialised in Luri, moved with his wife, Christina Van Der Wal Anonby, and their children to Kumzar in 2008 and learned the language.

Mohammed Abdullah Kumzari, the village elder, said by the time Anonby left, he was fluent in Kumzari. "Erik and Christina, they came and were writing our Kumzari dialect," he said.

"They'd sit with one of us and would ask us what this means and write down each word and its meaning and translated them; not in Arabic, he translated them in Kumzari.

"He would ask 'Where would this word go and how could it be used', like a dictionary. Erik would ask us how to pronounce it and what it all meant.

"After translating the words from us, Erik learned the dialect and could talk with us in Kumzari. He learned everything he needed from us and then he left with his family.

"When he talked with us, he talked using the Kumzari dialect and we replied to him in Kumzari. There was no need to talk differently, he got educated here.

"I can't say if they're coming back or not, but they stayed for three or four months, and could speak Kumzari when they left."

He dismissed the Luri connection, saying some Luri people lived in Kumzar and influenced the village and its language, just as other visitors had over the centuries.

But like all visitors, they didn't stay, leaving Kumzar to the Kumzaris.

"The Luri clan were here long back. They came, didn't find a living and went back to their own villages," he added.

"We can't recall how many people visited here, only God knows. Maybe 20 or 15 people came here. [This was] maybe 80 or 60 years ago these people came.

"They had small abras when they came. They didn't live on the land, they just fished and left.

"Just like Erik and his wife, they got what they wanted and left to another land to look for other new languages.

"The real Kumzari won't leave his land." And that in a nub explains the health of Kumzari. For most endangered languages, the threat of extinction is merely a symptom of something greater: the loss of a culture.

In other places where intensive efforts are made to protect endangered languages, such as for the native tongues of Canada's First Nation tribes, the path to success is seen as bolstering the culture behind the language.

One such organisation, Language Revival, cites two key points in saving a language: making the language and culture visible so people feel comfortable speaking it in public and ensuring that children are exposed to it from a very early age so it becomes hardwired into the brain.

In Kumzar, both of those occur naturally without the need of outside intervention. And it would be difficult to find a village with a stronger culture, which exists not because of the lack of knowledge of the outside world - as the profusion of Barcelona and similar football shirts worn by many of the young men demonstrates - but because the local way of life is robust enough to withstand the competition.

Depopulation is a trend throughout Oman's remote communities but the elders said Kumzar's population is growing by about 300 a year and is closing in on 5,000, which has caused the village to run out of free land so that every home has between three to five families sharing it.

Many Kumzaris, especially those with professional jobs, are based part of the year in Khasab but all of them live next to each other in a suburb known locally as Little Kumzar.

Mohammed Abdullah Kumzari said while some people leave the village, it is only ever temporary.

"The originals from this land won't ever leave, I guarantee it," he said.

"They only go to get a living, but always come back to their country, to their homeland.

"Even if they live abroad for 20 or 30 years, they always come back home.

"So the other clans, they didn't find a living and went back to their homes, but the real Kumzari won't ever leave and not come back, no matter what.

"We're family, that's why we stay here in our village. Because we don't get any problems from outsiders, and if we do fight, we're quick to make up with each other.

"Brothers and family don't fight for long, two or three days and we made up. But with outsiders, when they fight their fight lasts forever."

Maybe the biggest proof of that is demonstrated a few hours later. The village has satellite television and, in the last few years, the internet, but as the afternoon merges with dusk, the villagers head to the beach and sit around chatting in groups.

Gaggles of children sing and play games they've invented themselves rather than updating their Facebook accounts or watching the Cartoon Channel.

And the chatter, of course, is in Kumzari.

## 680,000 children illiterate in Papua New Guinea – report

*From the Port Moresby Post-Courier, 12 December 2012*

About 680,000 children do not go to school in Papua New Guinea, according to former Lae MP Bart Philemon.

He says this means that 50 per cent of school-age children stand no chance of being able to read or write in order to effectively contribute to nation-building.

This also means that 2-3 million Papua New Guineans out of a population of more than seven million are illiterate. Philemon says that four million of the population is between 7-21 years of age (school age), according to the 2011-2012 National Population Census report. The statistics say that more than half a million of the school-age children are not in classrooms throughout PNG.

Philemon reiterated these statistics during the launch of the 10th Buk Bilong Pikinini library at Rabe village several kilometres outside Alotau, the capital of Milne Bay Province last Friday.

The former MP, who is the patron for Buk Bilong Pikinini in Papua New Guinea, said PNG's literacy rate is about 50 per cent, which means that 2-3 million of the country's population is illiterate.

"At this point in time of our independence 37 years ago, I strongly believe that we are in a serious crisis in dispensing educational services to all the school-age children in PNG," he said.

Philemon said the Universal Basic Education is one of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals that PNG, together with the other UN member nations signed 12 years ago, but PNG to date has performed badly its efforts to achieve the goal and will not be able to achieve it by the 2015 deadline.

He said PNG had been described as an island of gold floating on oil which means "our country is richly blessed with many natural resources that is the envy of many other countries".

Despite these blessings, he said PNG ranked with the poorest countries of the world in terms of human development.

"Human development measures by United Nations rank us (PNG) 153 out of 187 countries. That places PNG as the 34th poorest ranking nation in the world," the former Lae MP said.

Philemon said under these circumstances, he was delighted to see that there was a charity organisation such as Buk Bilong Pikinini which was stepping in to assist in a small way at this stage to help in early childhood development in the country.

The creation of Buk Bilong Pikinini fits perfectly into the larger scheme of PNG's development goals, he said.

"We know that education is a vital road map in any nation-building and it is the key to open many doors. Education is the light that enables one to find one's way in life," Philemon said....PACNEWS (PINA)

## New York, a graveyard for languages

*Dr. Mark Turin, from BBC News On-line web-site, 16 December 2012*

Home to around 800 different languages, New York is a delight for linguists, but also provides a rich hunting ground for those trying to document languages threatened with extinction. To hear the many languages of New York, just board the subway.

The number 7 line, which leads from Flushing in Queens to Times Square in the heart of Manhattan takes you on a journey which would thrill the heart of a linguistic anthropologist.

Each stop along the line takes you into a different linguistic universe - Korean, Chinese, Spanish, Bengali, Gujarati, Nepali. And it is not just the language spoken on the streets that changes.

Street signs and business names are also transformed, even those advertising the services of major multinational banks or hotel chains.

In the subway, the information signs warning passengers to avoid the electrified rails are written in seven different languages.

But as I have discovered, New York is not just a city where many languages live, it is also a place where languages go to die, the final destination for the last speakers of some of the planet's most critically endangered speech forms.

Of the world's around 6,500 languages, UNESCO believe that up to half are critically endangered and may pass out of use before the end of this century.

Immediately we think of remote Himalayan valleys or the highlands of Papua New Guinea, bucolic rural villages where little known languages are still spoken by handfuls of speakers.

But languages can die on the 26th floor of skyscrapers too.

New York City is one of the most linguistically rich locations on earth, the perfect location to conduct research on endangered languages.

A recent [Census Bureau report](#) notes that in the United States, the number of people speaking a language other than English at home increased by 140% over the last 30 years, with at least 303 languages recorded in this category.

Originally home to the indigenous Lenape people, then settled by the Dutch, conquered by the English and populated by waves of migrants from every country ever since, the five boroughs that make up the Big Apple - The Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, Queens, and Staten Island - are home to every major world language, but also countless vanishing voices, many of which have just a few remaining speakers.

No longer do aspiring field linguists have to trek halfway across the world to collect data on Zaghawa or Livonian, they can just take the Number 7 train a few stops where they will find speakers of some of the 800 languages that experts believe are spoken in New York.

I did just that, getting out at Jackson Heights, to visit a young family I knew well from Nepal.

They live in a massive apartment block, which, judging by the names on the letterboxes, housed speakers of at least 40 languages.

Every household in their home village in Nepal, high in a mountains a few miles from the Tibetan border, has a son or daughter working in New York.

And they have recreated the sense of a Himalayan village in this new land - they all live within a few blocks of each other and meet regularly for children's birthdays or to play cards, chatting away in their endangered language, a form of speech known simply as village language.

And not only that - head of the family Wangdi has also picked up Chinese and Spanish from working in New York's sandwich bars and restaurants.

His son Sonam, now only one year old, already hears three languages at home. He will probably grow up speaking four. The only common language spoken in the apartment block? "English."

When there is an important Buddhist ritual to be performed, someone in New York records it on a smart phone and immediately posts it online so that grandma and grandpa back in Nepal can watch and participate too.

Recognising what a unique opportunity New York provided, two linguists and a performance poet - Daniel Kaufman, Juliette Blevins and Bob Holman - set up the Endangered Language Alliance, an urban initiative for endangered language research and conservation.

"This is the city with the highest linguistic density in the world and that is mostly because the city draws large numbers of immigrants in almost equal parts from all over the globe - that is unique to New York," says Kaufman.

Several languages have been uttered for the very last time in New York, he says.

"There are these communities that are completely gone in their homeland. One of them, the Gottscheers, is a community of Germanic people who were living in Slovenia, and they were isolated from the rest of the Germanic populations.

"They were surrounded by Slavic speakers for several hundreds of years so they really have their own variety [of language] which is now unintelligible to other German speakers."

The last speakers of this language have ended up in Queens, he says, and this has happened to many other communities.

Garifuna is an Arawakan language from Honduras and Belize, but also spoken by a diaspora in the United States.

Staff at the Endangered Language Alliance have been working with two Garifuna speakers, Loreida Guity and Alex Colon, to document not only their language but also aspects of their culture through traditional song, before these are lost without record.

Urban linguists have also shot video of Husni Husain speaking Mamuju, his Austronesian language from Sulawesi, Indonesia.

He may be the only Mamuju speaker in New York, and these recordings are probably the first ever digital documents of his language being spoken.

But why do languages die?

Communities can be wiped out through wars, disease or natural disasters, and take their languages with them when they go.

More commonly, though, people transition out of one mother tongue into another, either by choice or under duress, a process that linguists refer to as language shift.

Being one of the last speakers of a language is a lonely place to be - you may have no one to talk to, no way to write it down and all kinds of cultural and historical knowledge that does not translate easily into English, Spanish or another more dominant language.

Languages ebb and flow, some triumph for a while only to fade away.

At the end of 19th Century, the lower east side of Manhattan was a celebrated centre of European Jewish culture, a world of Yiddish theatre, newspapers, restaurants and bookshops.

But in the 20th century, Yiddish took a battering as the Jewish community left the lower east side and moved out to the suburbs. The American-born children of Jewish immigrants understood, but rarely spoke, Yiddish.

With no readership, newspapers closed and books were discarded.

And then, just as it was most threatened, Yiddish bounced back, thanks to an unusual combination of technology, faith and the efforts of Aaron Lansky, founder and president of the Yiddish Book Center.

He established the centre to help salvage Yiddish language publications, 11,000 of which have now been digitised and are freely available online.

Yiddish also found support from an unexpected quarter - while secular Jews were increasingly giving up the language in favour of English, religious Jewish communities across New York continued to speak it, using Yiddish as their everyday vernacular allowing Hebrew to be reserved for religious study.

"There are many people nowadays who take Yiddish very seriously and raise their kids in Yiddish as well," says Lansky.

"The resurgence of interest in Yiddish is certainly not a nostalgic enterprise. If anything I think it is really a serious attempt to understand a broader view of Jewish identity and it is only now that young people are engaging with that."

Even Yiddish radio, once ubiquitous in New York, has made a comeback thanks to technology, with a once-a-week show produced by staff at a Jewish newspaper.

New York is a city that never sleeps and a city that never stops talking - a churning metropolis in which businesses, buildings and people are buffeted by the changing winds of commerce and culture.

It is the perfect vantage point to listen to how the world's languages rise and fall on the tides of human affairs. I wonder in how many languages can you say 'Big Apple'?

## Aboriginal language returns from the dead

*By Nicola Gage, ABC news web-site, 1 October 2012*

An extinct Aboriginal language has been brought back from the dead, thanks to a handful of dedicated people in Adelaide.

Twenty years ago, not one person spoke the native Kaurna language of the Adelaide Plains, with the last known fluent speaker dying in the late 1900s.

But Jack Buckskin, 25, teaches people his native language at the Living Kaurna Cultural Centre where a group is gaining TAFE qualifications in the once-extinct language.

Mr Buckskin says interest in the program has been growing and the language is again thriving.

"We've just been going through the sound system, so we've got words up there for plate, cups, bowls," he said.

"Normally there's about six teachers and the teachers come to learn a bit of language, learn the culture, and then take it back to their day schools and teach other students out there, which is good because I'm the only teacher and to raise the awareness of what's happening with the language, I need people like this that are keen to learn but keen to teach other people as well."

Mr Buckskin is also teaching teenagers at Salisbury High School in Adelaide's north, where it has become part of the syllabus.

"I've probably had 12 enrolments at the start, and a lot of the kids were forced into it," he said.

"Now [there is] a good even 50-50 of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.

"There's probably more students chose the language over Italian and stuff now so starting, the students that are out there are learning it, speaking it around the school, so their younger brothers, their friends, are all wanting to come and learn as well."

Linguistics specialist at the University of Adelaide Dr Robert Amery says there is value in learning the language.

"Through the language you can learn a lot about culture, you can learn a lot about history," he said.

"The Kaurna language belongs to this place, to the Adelaide Plains, so it has the kind of vocabulary, the words to talk about the places here, to talk about the environment, to talk about the national species that inhabit this environment."

The university has received Federal Funding to expand its work in reviving the language, which includes the creation of a radio show spoken in native tongue.

Dr Amery says 20 years ago, he never would have imagined so many people again speaking the language.

"We've made a lot of headway, headway that I would never have foreseen," he said.

"I would have thought for a language in this state it would have been just too hard, but people were inspired, they became interested in the language, and for some people, it's become their whole life."

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

### University of Alaska at Anchorage works to preserve native languages

*By Mike Dunham, Anchorage Daily News on-line version, 22 September 2012*

What benefit can society at large receive from expending energy and resources on preserving endangered languages?

I had the chance to ask some experts that question before and after a panel discussion titled "Revisioning Alaska Native Languages at UAA: A Public Forum on SB 130" presented by the Alaska Native Oratory Society on Sept. 13. The program, in the University of Alaska Anchorage Arts Building, was intended to address how said SB 130 -- the new Alaska Native Language Preservation and Advisory Council Act -- might affect the university's efforts to teach indigenous languages.

The UAA Alaska Native Studies Department, which sponsored the event, is making what I consider heroic efforts in the often thankless quest to sustain or revive Alaska's indigenous languages.

This year, for the first time, language courses will include Dena'ina, the Athabaskan language that was once prevalent in the Anchorage area, taught by Marilyn Balluta. In addition, there are art courses taught by Emily Moore and a five-week Yup'ik drum-making course taught by Ossie Kairaiuak that starts Friday.

The panel included Balluta, Lt. Gov. Mead Treadwell, Tlingit professor Shirley Kendall and department head Maria Williams, among others. Chancellor Tom Case was on hand to make some opening remarks.

Getting back to the above question, different people had different answers, most of which deserve their own exposition. But a consistent current -- one that has fascinated me for some time -- is the number of ways Alaska Native languages have for pulling back from making set-in-stone statements.

Instead, the future is generally addressed using language that an English speaker would find evasive. Yup'ik grammars and dictionaries, for instance, seem to include more ways of ex-

pressing exquisite shades of doubt than the oft-cited number of Eskimo words for snow.

Reluctance to make absolute statements has historically permeated Central Yup'ik to its core, though a kind of Englishization is occurring as voices on television replace grandparents as speakers of a child's first language.

In contrast, a kind of recklessness in making such statements may unconsciously permeate Western thought and it shows no sign of letting up.

To express awareness of facts and reality in English and other Indo-European languages, one uses some version of the "deep root" word "gno-", as in: "know," "diagnosis," "kin" (a person known to you), "noble" (one well known or well regarded), etc. To express any lack of certainty or understanding, speakers put in an extra step, adding a negative prefix, as in: "unknown," "ignoble," "agnostic."

In what linguists call the Eskimoan language group, however, it's the other way around. The deep root word is "na-", producing "nallu" in Yup'ik and "nalu" in Inupiaq. It means "to not know." To express the opposite, what English-speakers call "knowing," one has to add the negative suffix, as in "nallunritua," which translates as "I know," but literally means "I don't not know."

Insofar as how we speak reflects how we think, the primary Indo-European understanding of reality can be said to be based on a concrete (or presumed) positive comprehension of what exists, a kind of mental command and ownership -- i.e. knowledge. Anything less is considered something of a void, less than perfection.

But to the traditional Native Alaskan mindset, the natural state of thinking may be envisioned as a clean slate to be filled in carefully and only to the degree that clear information becomes evident and is evaluated. It suggests a fundamentally reverse way of looking at the same universe.

This may be why urban people get frustrated at the frequent "I don't know's" and "maybe's" encountered in the Bush. And why rural Alaskans -- whether they're Native speakers or not -- can react to outsiders as loud-mouth know-it-alls.

We are! But in Western culture knowing it all is considered a good thing, the foundation of learning and science. We automatically consider it to be the normal way of thinking. (In fact, some, not all, philologists have suspected "normal" as coming from "gno-".)

The Yup'ik paradigm doesn't dismiss knowing it all as a bad thing, necessarily. Just highly improbable -- and surely not normal.

I offer this as a hypothesis, having more ignorance than education on the matter. But the idea of these two diametrically opposed deep roots captures my attention, maybe because I work for a newspaper.

Journalism should follow the "na-" principle. One starts with a blank piece of paper on which he writes only statements that can be confirmed to mean exactly what the words say. It doesn't always work that way, particularly in the Internet age in which authorities and the media issue or repeat uncon-

firmed statements as if leaping to conclusions were an Olympic sport. Perhaps the world can benefit if we add a little "na-" to the prevailing "gno-"centric thinking.

Now that fall has officially begun, those digging out shovels and scrapers may ask, How many words for "snow" are in Inupiaq, anyway?

Some say there are 20 or 30 or even 100 and more. Lists pop up all over the Internet, like the following from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute (huh?), citing Steve Culbertson, an Inupiaq language teacher at Eben Hopson Sr. Memorial Middle School in Barrow (O.K., that makes sense):

- **nutagaq:** new fresh powder snow
- **qiqsruqaq:** glazed snow in thaw time
- **sitliq:** hard crusty snow
- **auksalaq:** melting snow
- **aniu:** packed snow
- **aniuvak:** snow bank
- **natigvik:** snow drift
- **qimaugruk:** snow drift blocking a trail or a building
- **aqiluqqaq:** soft snow
- **milik:** very soft snow
- **mitailaq:** soft snow on ice floe covering an open spot.
- The Alaska Native Language Center's Comparative Eskimo Dictionary also includes:
- **pukak:** granular snow
- **qannik:** falling snow (similar to Yup'ik qanuk: snowflake, and qanir-: to snow).

The full lexicon varies widely from place to place and even speaker to speaker. Such multiplicity seems common among social groups familiar with cold. Norwegians also have scores of words to describe various forms of white precipitation, the forms it takes while coming down, when on the ground, when you're trying to work with it or around it, how humans and animals interact with it.

So do skiers and snowboarders. Crust, corduroy, crud, wet concrete, bulletproof, slush, powder and "phat pow" all have specific meanings. Others have noted that a lot of snow names used by those who sport in it seem to make some reference to food: Corn, death cookies, chicken heads, mashed potatoes. That's a topic for a different round of socio-linguistic commentary, preferably conducted over dinner.

## 5. New technology

### New technologies to revive indigenous languages

*From the ourlanguages.net.au web-site (Australia), originally from ABC News*

It's hoped a smartphone application will help revive an Indigenous language in far west New South Wales.

The Menindee Central School is developing an iPad app featuring hundreds of words in Paakantyi.

Only a handful of people speak Paakantyi fluently, and language assistant, Kayleen Kerwin, says she hopes the app will help the language survive.

"I know my voice is going to be there recorded when I'm long gone off this planet," she said.

"That'll be something to live on at the school for future generations."

She says children at the school have already been enjoying playing around with the unfinished program.

"Thank god for technology," she said.

"It's all upgraded now, you didn't have the little dictaphones back then and things get lost and the little tapes and stuff so this is all good now."

Isabelle Bennett, an 82 year-old Paakantyi elder, is learning the language again after being taken away from her home in 1945.

She is thrilled her voice will form part of the app.

"It makes me so proud," she said.

"I'm so happy that our children are going to learn the language."

The Paakantyi app is the second case of using a smartphone app to revive an Australian indigenous language, after a similar program in remote north-western Arnhem Land was launched in September.

It is part of a global online movement to use new technologies to revive endangered languages.

John Hobson, the Coordinator of Indigenous languages Education at the University of Sydney's Koori Centre, says the iPad app is a powerful tool.

"It's certainly cutting edge," he said.

"It's great to see people in a community like Menindee and the Paakantyi community getting on top of modern technology that's really going to appeal to kids and engage them in learning the language."

Mr Hobson is working with a colleague in the USA to translate Facebook into dozens of different languages.

"Having your page in Paakantyi might encourage people to actually post to each other in Paakantyi," he said.

"And that's using the language, and that's a fabulous thing.

"That's really reviving it."

But he says while the latest technology might get people hooked, the hard part is to keep them learning until they can speak the language fluently.

"There's a great temptation with technology, particularly in the language revival field, where people are pretty desperate to find a way forward, to latch on to something as the single answer, the magic silver bullet if you like," he said.

"Of course there is no such thing.

"We need as many different forms for people to be able to use the language and learn it and most importantly to speak it to each other."

The Paakantyi app is due to be released in the next month.

## 6. Obituaries

### Cromarty fisherfolk dialect's last native speaker dies

*From the BBC News on-line home page, October 2012*

The last native speaker of the Cromarty fisherfolk dialect has died.

Retired engineer Bobby Hogg, 92, was the last person who was still fluent in the dialect used in parts of the Black Isle, near Inverness.

His younger brother Gordon was also a native speaker. He died in April last year aged 86.

The dialect is believed to have arrived in the area with fishing families that moved north from the Firth of Forth in 15th and 16th centuries.

The families were thought to be the descendants of Norse and Dutch fishermen.

In 2009, researcher Janine Donald compiled a booklet of Cromarty dialect words and phrases for Highland Council's Am Baile project.

The initiative, which involved recording conversations between the Hogg brothers, was part of an effort to preserve the dialect.

The 40-page publication produced also has weather lore, biblical expressions and local tales and customs.

Included was the word "tumblers" for dolphins and harbour porpoises and phrases such as "At now kucka" for a friendly greeting.

Other words and phrases included *bauchles* which means old, ill-fitting shoes, *droog-droogle* for heavy work in wet weather and *Jenny Muck*, a female farm worker.

Earlier this year, Highland Council made a commitment to recognise and protect the region's languages and dialects.

## 7. Publications, Book Reviews

### A lexicon of Smyrneika (İzmir rumcası sözlüğü) ed. Alex Baltazzi, George Galdies, George Poulimenos. Emionönü/İstanbul: Tarih Vakf Yurt Yayınları, 2012

*Reviewed by Nicholas Ostler*

This is a dictionary of the distinctive vocabulary in the Smyrna (İzmir) dialect of Greek. Smyrna was once the main export capital of the Ottoman Empire. A commercial rival of Constantinople, Alexandria, and Salonika, with its own community of European merchant settlers since the early 18th Century, it was therefore inevitable that for commercial and practical necessity these non-

Islamic communities would blend into a cultural melting-pot.

The resulting illuminated dialect, it appears, triumphantly survived the clearance of Greeks from that city in the exchange of populations in 1923. The dictionary

is uniquely in Roman script, and gives translations for all the terms and phrases not just in English but also in Turkish, evidently now the dominant language of İzmir.

It is a beautiful volume, with two features which transcend its role as a "lexicon": on the one hand, it is lavishly illustrated with sepia postcard pictures from a by-

gone era, the Aegean of the early 20th century; and on the other, it includes as an appendix some pages of proverbs, and a series of *kouvedes* "conversations" which show the vocabulary in active use, in a kind of evolving soap opera. These *kouvedes* are unlike the rest of the book, in that they appear without translation, and also in that they are given in Greek script as well as phonetic Roman.

This means that they challenge the Hellenophone reader to get involved in the rest of the dictionary, hopefully discovering that she or he can make more sense of Smyrneic conversation than they might have hoped at the outset. It also taps into a particular old strain of Greek imagination, recalling perhaps Lucian's *Dialogues of the Courtesans* of the 2nd century AD, and other such anciently imagined conversations.

It will not make much sense to those without an exposure to one of the main languages current in the Aegean (Turkish, Greek) but to those who have this advantage it gives a heady draught of nostalgia, bringing back the

cosmopolitan world of Constantine Kavafis ["maker or seller of (cheap) shoes", as the dictionary informs us], Laurence Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet* and (more recently) works of Orhan Pamuk. For linguists too, it also balances the impression left by the eponymous "Lingua Franca" of the Levant, a pidgin language which – despite its name – had been Italian-based. On the evidence of

this volume, Greek too was embellished in day-to-day discourse with many other languages, from one end of Europe to the other.

The book can be obtained online at

<http://www.idefix.com/Kitap/tanim.asp?sid=JNC1L02FKL4SRKSZI4Z0&search>

**Scientific Methods for the Humanities** by Willie van Peer, Frank Hakemulder, Sonia Zyngier. 2012. Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company. 328 pp; Paperback, \$54.

Reviewed by Craig Soderberg

This book introduces empirical research methods for the humanities. The volume begins by reviewing some of the prejudices against scientific work that prevail in the humanities and then proceeds to explain some of the underlying concepts from the philosophy of science. The subsequent chapters progressively acquaint the reader with the practical application of research methods. These chapters guide the readers through the entire process of carrying out a scientific study. They help the readers formulate an initial idea for study and then provide valuable hints on conducting a proper literature search. The book then discusses how a critical reading of the literature available or of the theories in the field can lead to a concrete plan for research. The book highlights not only the most prevalent methods, but also how the reader can choose the one that fits his purposes best. The reader then learns how to collect and analyze data. Finally, the reader learns how to find practical guidelines on how to communicate the results of the study in a way that matches professional standards.

The book notes various methods of data collection including: observation, diary, interview, focus groups, experiments, content analysis, and surveys. The book also guides readers through the choices they have to make in selecting one or more methods of data collection.

My favourite section of the book was the section on research methodology and design. A key aspect of research methodology is being able to do internet searches for abstracts related to our research topic. The authors provided a number of websites and journals that might be of interest to us in our internet searches. The authors suggest different ways of doing internet searches which could be helpful to the emerging researchers hoping to benefit from this book (p. 61-68). The authors also listed a few sites which allow users to download electronic texts (p.97).

At the end, the book also shows how to give papers at international conferences, how to draft a report, and what is involved in the preparation of a publishable article or paper. This includes tips on submitting an abstract, how to present yourself, how to organize your paper, how to prepare a script, how to address the audience, how to use various media, and how to structure the discussion after the presentation of the paper.

The target audience of this book would be humanities students, especially in the fields of Literature, Applied Linguistics, and Film and Media.

I was pleased to see that this particular textbook provided chapter assignments on the website of the John Benjamins

Publishing Company. These assignments help the reader to assess whether or not he fully understands the material from that particular chapter.

## 8. Places to go on the Web

### Slip of the tongues: languages and the unintended consequences of indigenous policy

By Nicholas Biddle, from [www.theconversation.edu.au](http://www.theconversation.edu.au) (Australia), 3 October 2012

Indigenous communities are devastated when languages are lost.

This was the conclusion of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs last month. The committee members also found that Indigenous language plays a crucial role in people's relationships with family, country, kin and culture.

This fits with analysis I [recently co-authored](#) showing Indigenous Australians who were learning an Indigenous language were significantly more likely to report that they were happy all or most of the time in the previous four weeks compared to those who were not.

Recent census data can tell us much about Indigenous language usage in Australia. But as with much analysis of Indigenous outcomes, demographic and population processes confuse the story on the maintenance of Indigenous languages.

On the one hand, the analysis that I have carried out on [census data](#) showed an increase in the number of Indigenous Australians who spoke an Indigenous language at home from 51,990 counted in 2006 to 60,550 in 2011. There were 16.5% more people in 2011 who identified as being Indigenous and speaking an Indigenous language compared to 2006.

But on the other hand, as the number of people identified as being Indigenous also increased, there was in fact a small decline in the percentage of the relevant population speaking an Indigenous language — from 12.1% to 11.6%.

Of those classified languages with at least 100 Indigenous speakers in 2006, the biggest increase was among those who reported that they spoke "Aboriginal English". There were 1,037 speakers in 2011 compared to 471 in 2006 — a 120% increase over the period.

There were, however, also a number of specific languages that increased substantially over the period. This includes Nunggubuyu (114% increase), Manyjilyjarra (107%), Kunwinjku (80%) and Ngarrindjeri (71%). Some of these languages have been a focus of considerable government investment and, although it is difficult to establish causality with data in the census, it would appear that this investment may be paying dividends.

Not surprisingly, there was considerable variation in Indigenous language usage across the country. More than half of all Indigenous language speakers (34,086 people counted in the

census) live in the Northern Territory. This represents about 64.7% of the NT's Indigenous population. At the other end of the spectrum, 2% or less of the population in New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania and the ACT speak an Indigenous language at home.

Some of this geographical variation is due to specific historic government policies. However, demography is also likely to be playing a large part. In order for a language to be maintained and strengthened, it needs speakers. These speakers ideally should be in relatively close proximity to one another. While it is not possible to identify causal relationships with cross-sectional data, the following figure shows a strong association between the proportion of an area's total population that identifies as being Indigenous and the proportion of the Indigenous population who speak an Indigenous language at home.

The results presented in the above figure clearly demonstrate a relationship between Indigenous language usage in an area and the percentage of the population in that area that identify as being Indigenous.

There are some outliers. For example, in the areas of Cherbourg and Palm Island (both in Queensland), more than 95% of the population identify as being Indigenous, despite there being very few Indigenous language speakers. This clearly reflects past government policy in these (and other) areas with many Indigenous people being actively discouraged, and at times prohibited, from speaking their own language. Nonetheless, there is considerable overlap between language usage and the Indigenous share of the area.

The map highlights a potential tension in current government policy. In 2006, the average Indigenous Australian lived in an area where 18.8% of the total population identified as being Indigenous. By 2011, this had declined to 16.4%.

Demographically, there is less of an opportunity for Indigenous Australians to speak an Indigenous language with others in their area in 2011 compared to 2006, and a greater incentive to speak English only.

Not all of this increasing Indigenous urbanisation is driven by government policy. However, a focus on "closing the gap" in socioeconomic outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, as well as an increasing concentration of services in certain areas will probably encourage Indigenous Australians to move from remote to less remote areas.

Put simply, demographic trends, potentially exacerbated by certain government policies, are making it much more difficult for governments and the Indigenous community to maintain Indigenous languages in Australia.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the first recommendation of the standing committee's report was that:

*Commonwealth Government include in the Closing the Gap framework acknowledgement of the fundamental role and importance of Indigenous languages in preserving heritage and improving outcomes for Indigenous peoples.*

While this acknowledgement would be useful, it won't solve the fundamental dilemma at the heart of Indigenous policy in Australia – how to improve the health, education and employment prospects of Indigenous Australians without sacrificing the enduring differences in language and culture valued

by Indigenous Australians and the majority of the rest of the population.

## How to Study a Tone Language. Call for Papers

**How to Study a Tone Language**  
edited by Steven Bird and Larry Hyman  
to appear in *Language Documentation & Conservation*

The goal of this themed set of papers is to collect practical wisdom which has been built up over many years of investigating the world's tone languages. We expect this to be a comprehensive collection of the most effective methods for documenting, describing, and analyzing tone languages.

Contributions will focus on the methodology for studying tone languages, including elicitation practice, stages of description, descriptive pitfalls, and so on. Papers that simply present and analyze tone data are out of scope; a substantive methodological contribution must be made. Appropriate topics and approaches include:

- \* Management: approaches to elicitation and data management specific to tone; getting started; working with native-speaker linguists
- \* Documentation: ways to document the tone system of a language which minimally prejudice the later description and analysis; ways to study a tone language using archived materials
- \* Narrative: an instructive and reflective study of a language
- \* Computational: computational methods that support tonal investigations
- \* Typological: how to leverage knowledge about related languages
- \* Phonetic: how to combine impressionistic and instrumental observations; appropriate ways to incorporate recordings; accountability of transcriptions
- \* Diachronic: how to study the evolution of tone systems; how to reconstruct a proto tone system
- \* Development: how to contribute to a linguistic community's expressed need for support with orthography decisions and effective ways to teach tone marking
- \* Data: a systematic presentation of tone data which highlights a methodological issue
- \* Additional ideas of topics and approaches may be found at <http://www.toneworkshop.org/>

This themed set of papers has grown out of two workshops on tone languages (Berkeley February 2011, Canberra December 2011), and it continues the focus of those workshops on methodology. Submissions are invited from workshop participants and non-participants alike.

The deadline for submissions is 15 April 2013. For information about the submission process, please consult the website of Language Documentation & Conservation, at <http://www.nflrc.hawaii.edu/ldc/>

## Resource Network for Linguistic Diversity

The Resource Network for Linguistic Diversity, based in Australia, publishes a regular newsletter which is available on-line, giving news of activities to promote indigenous languages, mainly within Australia. The Network can be found on-line at [www.rnld.org](http://www.rnld.org).

## 9. Forthcoming events

### Information structure in spoken language corpora

10-12 June 2013, Bielefeld, Germany

#### Meeting Description:

Recent developments in technology have made it possible for linguists to create spoken language corpora on a hitherto unprecedented range of languages, including several lesser-studied languages. For languages without a written tradition, spoken corpora assume an even greater value since they document the only mode of communication. Data obtained from corpora are increasingly used in linguistic research, reflecting a more usage-based orientation on the part of linguists on the one hand, and making analyses verifiable on the other.

Spoken language corpora are promising to be particularly useful to the study of information structure (IS). IS often involves complex correspondences between communicative goals and marking strategies, encompassing prosody, morphology, and syntactic structure, the full range of which can best be observed in naturally occurring data (Brunetti et al: 2011). However, the investigation of IS in spoken corpora still has many methodological obstacles to overcome, ranging from those related to the prosodic analysis of spontaneous speech to those relating to the very identification of IS categories in such spontaneous data. These challenges explain why much research on IS continues to rely on introspection or on experimental research. These techniques are rarely available to linguists working with lesser-known languages: they are usually not native speakers, making introspection impossible; further, many types of experiments are not applicable in non-literate and/or non-western cultural contexts. Thus analysing spoken corpora is the only means to get insights into the encoding of IS in these languages, and indeed it is only through the study of spontaneous data that it is possible to gather inventories of the full range of IS categories and understand how they are employed in discourse.

The goal of this workshop is to discuss both research findings on information structure based on spoken corpora, and meth-

odological issues arising in such investigations, in a cross-linguistic perspective.

This workshop is part of the project Discourse and prosody across language family boundaries: two corpus-based case studies on contact-induced syntactic and prosodic convergence in the encoding of information structure, funded by DoBeS (VolkswagenStiftung Funding Initiative “Documentation of Endangered Languages”).

### International symposium on the languages of Java

Bung Hatta University, Padang, Indonesia, 6-7 June 2013

The island of Java is home to several major languages. Javanese—spoken mainly in Central and East Java—is the world’s 10th or 11th largest language in number of native speakers. It has one of the oldest and fullest recorded histories of any Austronesian language. It also has been of considerable interest to scholars because of the system of speech levels or speech styles found in a number of varieties of Javanese. Sundanese—spoken in West Java—has over 27 million speakers, and Madurese—spoken on the neighboring island of Madura and throughout parts of East Java—has over 13 million speakers. Varieties of both of these languages have speech level systems and such systems can also be found in the geographically, historically, and linguistically related languages on the neighboring islands of Bali and Lombok. Each of these languages displays a range of dialects, isolects, continua, and contact varieties and yet they have received relatively little attention from linguists. With this symposium, we offer an opportunity for scholars working on any aspect of Javanese, Sundanese, Madurese, Balinese and Sasak to come together and share their findings. We aim to encourage and promote continued research on these important and unique languages.

Abstracts are invited for papers to be presented on any linguistic topics dealing with the languages of Java and its environs—Javanese, Sundanese, Madurese, Balinese, and Sasak. Papers on other languages will be judged according to their relevance to the symposium topic. Papers are welcome from any subfield of linguistics and using any approach or theoretical background. Studies of non-standard(ized) versions, dialects, and isolects, including contact varieties, are particularly welcome. All papers are to be presented in English.

Abstracts of one-page [data and references may be on a second page] should be submitted in electronic form (PDF AND MSWord) to Thomas Connors at the following address: <[tconnors AT umd.edu](mailto:tconnors@umd.edu)>

Deadline for submission of abstracts: March 1, 2013

Announcement of acceptance: March 15, 2013.

**I wish to purchase proceedings (s):**

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_ Any special expertise or interest: \_\_\_\_\_

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# FOUNDATION FOR ENDANGERED LANGUAGES

## Mission Statement

### 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.



**Māori Welcome – *pōwhiri***



**Māori Sunset – *tōnga o te rā***