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Dancers from Pikwàkanagàn First Nation, Golden Lake, Ontario in performance at the FEL XVII Conference: Endangered Languages across Boundaries, 1-4 October 2013
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1. Editorial 3
2. Development of the Foundation 3
   New FEL Committee 2013-14: Candidates declared elected 3
3. Endangered Languages in the News 3
   On the Verge of Dying: Languages in Ethiopia 3
   Introduction 3
   The Chara 4
   The Nāj/Nā’ō 4
   The Shabu 5
   The Tamma 5
   Zimbabwe: Mother languages and identity 6
   Iranian Kurdistan: Restriction on use of minority languages 7
   Balinese will fight for their language 7
   China: Tibetan language classes closed 8
   Switzerland’s fourth language under pressure 9
   The Romansh language 10
   Decline of Romansh 10
   Finland: ‘Romano mirits’ - News broadcast in Romany language 10
   Dictionaries shed light on endangered indigenous languages 11
   Revitalization of the Saami languages in the balance 13
   Breathing new life into an old language 13
4. appeals, News and Views from Endangered Communities 15
   Brazil’s Guarani suffer at the hands of violent ranchers 15
5. Language technology 16
   Endangered Alphabets Project 16
6. Obituaries 16
   Yakeyale (She remembers) Maria Christjohn Hinton 16
7. Publications, Book Reviews 16
   Kaurna learner’s guide 16
   Poetry in Occitan 17
   Language Documentation and Conservation Journal 18
8. Places to go on the Web 18
   Digital Chrestomathy of Raeto-Romansh 18
   New video venture for Nahuatl in Mexico 18
   Livonian scholar receives Baltic Assembly prize for science 19

Letter to the editor 19

Endangered Languages in and around Laos: Some Opportunities 19

Forthcoming events 22

36th International LAUD Symposium 22
Confirmed Plenary Speakers: 22
Fourth Cambridge Conference on Language Endangerment 23

FEL Manifesto 24

FEL XVIII Naha
Indigenous Languages: Value to the Community

弥勒世果報創いるしまくとぅば
豊かな社会のための言語

This years’ conference will take place at

Okinawa International University
Ginowan City
Okinawa (Japan)
17-20 Sept. 2014

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1. Editorial

And so another successful FEL conference is behind us – our seventeenth. Our hosts at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada, did us proud this year with superb organisation and an interesting and memorable programme. The quality of the papers in our new Proceedings volume is a testimony to the enthusiasm that our theme ‘Endangered Languages Beyond Boundaries’ attracted. We also held our Annual General Meeting in the middle of the conference, and the names of the new Committee members are listed below.

We started the conference with a fascinating excursion to the We expect that our next conference, in 2014, will be held in Naha, in the Ryukyu Islands (Okinawa) south of Japan – as usual, FEL keeps pushing the geographical boundaries! Details of the conference are being announced on the www.ogmios.org website.

A wide geographical range is found in this issue of Ogmios too. We have a thorough study of the little-known languages of southwestern Ethiopia, and a personal view of the lesser-used languages of Laos – two countries which we have not featured before in any depth in these pages. Original articles are what we are always seeking, so reader, if you would like to write for Ogmios about your own expertise, you will be made very welcome. As usual, we include a digest of notes about endangered languages from media sources all over the world.

Chris Moseley

2. Development of the Foundation

New FEL Committee 2013-14: Candidates declared elected

At the Annual General Meeting of the Foundation in Ottawa, the number of nominations equalled the number of committee posts available. Therefore there was no need for a formal election, but the following officers and committee members were declared elected:

Officers:
Nicholas Ostler (Chairman)
Steven Krauwer (Treasurer)
Christopher Moseley (Acting Secretary, and Ogmios Editor)

Elected Committee:
Salem Mezhoud (Secretary in absentia)
Tjeerd de Graaf (International Groups)

The new members of the committee were asked to provide a brief biographical sketch:

Serena d’Agostino: Serena d’Agostino holds a Philosophy diploma from University of Rome 1997. She researches syncretism in Maya oral tradition for a master in anthropology at University of Montréal; collaborates to Celiac (Centro Editorial de Literature Indigena) of Oaxaca, Mex. and teaches French to immigrants and Italian to adults, using LI acquisition methods.

Mian Shah Bacha: I am from Pakistan and working as an assistant professor of English and also chairman of Humanities. I would love to work for languages and specially for endangered languages of Dir, Swat, and Chitral, if given a chance and resources or guidelines.

Femmy Admiraal: After her training as a linguist and anthropologist at the Univ. Amsterdam, she joined the DoBeS project “The Documentation of the Baure Language of Bolivian Amazonia” at Univ Leipzig, where she is working on her PhD about the expression of spatial relations in Baure. She has a special interest in language preservation and the development of (digital) teaching materials for endangered languages, and participated in the production of materials in various S. Amer. languages (Baure, Takana, Arowak/Lokono, Bésiro).

Edward Chepkotit Murunga: I am Kenyan citizen aged 35 years. I hold a Postgraduate Diploma in Education and Bachelors Degree in Language and Literary Studies. I am working as volunteer in my community to revive Bong’om language. Bong’om language is among 16 Kenyan languages classified by UNESCO as endangered. I am also the project coordinator of Bong’om Language Project, a community-based Organization.

3. Endangered Languages in the News

On the Verge of Dying: Languages in Ethiopia

By Dessalegn Gebeyehu, Mizan-Teppe University, Ethiopia

Introduction

Languages are highly complex, self-organizing systems in constant flux. Because languages are dynamic and variable and undergo constant change, the total number of living languages in the world ‘cannot be known precisely’ (Lewis 2009). Fewer than 4 per cent of the world’s languages have any kind of official status in the countries where they are spoken. Minority languages are being increasingly replaced by various politically, economically, or socio-culturally dominant ones. Every two weeks the last fluent speaker of a language passes on and with him/her goes literally hundreds of generations of traditional knowledge encoded in these ancestral tongues. Nearly half of the world’s languages are likely to vanish in the next 100 years. The fact that most languages are unwritten, not recognized officially, restricted to local community and home functions, and spoken by very small groups of people. The case of Africa in general and Ethiopia in particular is not different from the general context of the world. Many languages in Africa die out even before their existence is recognized. The issue becomes more complex in the remotest parts of the continent where no or very few surveys are made. A good instance here is the Tamma of Ethiopia in which even the existence of the community is not absolutely known. In a country like Ethiopia where only very limited or no resources are available to the study of languages, cultures and related issues, it would not become surprising to find languages that became extinct before their existence is discovered.
Languages play a significant role in identity formation. They define personal identities, and are also part of a shared inheritance. They are again an expression of cultures, and repositories of the history of the people who use them. They form an integral part of the sum of human knowledge, and are individually a unique encapsulation and interpretation of human experience (Crystal 2000 in Spolsky 2004). The death of each language, therefore, results in the irrecoverable loss of unique cultural, historical, ecological, and inherited knowledge. Languages in the process of dying are endangered languages. Wurm (2001) distinguishes five levels of language endangerment. A language is potentially endangered if the children start preferring the dominant language and learn the obsolescing language imperfectly. It is endangered if the youngest speakers are young adults and there are no or very few child speakers. It is seriously endangered if the youngest speakers are middle-aged or past middle age. It is terminally endangered or moribund if there are only a few elderly speakers left. A language is dead when there are no speakers left at all. The case of some of the South Western Ethiopian languages is not different from these premises. Some languages in the region are potentially endangered and others are seriously endangered. Yet, a few languages like Anfifilo and Boro are already dead.

The South Western part of Ethiopia covers a vast area and is the residency of multiple communities and societies. The area is rich in natural resources, minerals and conducive environment. This part of the country is one of the most linguistically divergent areas of Ethiopia. The languages of the region vary drastically in all aspects of linguistic parameters. The diversity of the language families of the region is also quite fascinating. Some of the region’s languages like Afan Oromo, Kefficho, Anuak, and many other languages have a significant number of speakers. In fact, some of the region’s languages, like Afan Oromo, are rapidly expanding and promoting from time to time, gulfing the weaker languages that have fewer speakers. The speakers of some of the endangered languages are as few as from 450 to 3500. In fact, there is no consensus on the number of the total population of each community and the actual number of speakers of each language. All my sources, including the Ethiopian National Statistics Agency and the Ethnologue, give varying data on the numbers of the population and speakers of the languages.

In this part of the country there are many languages that are spoken by many people. Yet, there are languages that are spoken by some people which are in good status. Equally, there are few recognized and unrecognized languages that became extinct before being documented and archived. Yet, there are some recognized and unrecognized languages that are threatened with extinction. Some of the region’s most endangered languages threatened to die, if actions are not taken on time, includes-

### The Chara
- The Nayi
- The Shabu
- The Tamma, and
- The Zilmamoo

However, in this paper I will try to discuss the general situation of three of the most endangered languages. In fact, it is difficult to support my arguments and discussions with literature and research findings as I work in a remote new University where there are not enough resources and documents. My readers, I believe, will understand the actual situations of these languages’ and, in fact, their cultures’ general situation from my general discussions.

Finally, the major objective of this piece of writing is particularly to give insight on the status of the endangered languages and to create awareness to all stakeholders and responsible bodies to take remedial action just before we lose these languages for good. It also aims at motivating and initiating projects that works on the studying and analyzing, and documenting and revitalizing of these endangered languages, oral cultures and ecological knowledge. By doing so, we save human languages, accumulated cultural heritages, ecological and traditional knowledge of the societies and humanity, in general.

### The Nayi/Na’o

It is believed that the Na’o people are one of the indigenous people of the area. The Na’o people live in three linguistically different places that affected their language and culture strongly. Scattered in three zones of the region, the majority of the people typically lives in Decha Wereda of Kaffa zone, near Bonga town. A few of them live in Dulkuma village of Shoa—Bench Woreda of Bench—Maji Zone, some 150 kms.away from Bonga. Some others live in Aybera, Kosa, and Jomodos villages of Sheko district of Bench—Maji and Shekicho zones. This happened, according to the people, as a result of series of conflicts between local feudal leaders of the Kaffa and the Na’o people between 1970 and 1977.

It is believed that the Na’o population varies from 3,000–7,190. It is believed that there are about 3,656 mother tongue speakers of Nayi; the language of the Na’o is called NAYI, and among these about 1,876 are second language speakers. Only about 1,137 of the community are monolinguals, (2007 – Census). The population’s alternate names include Nao, and Na’o.

The language is classified in the Afro—Asiatic language family. It is classified under the phylum of Omotic languages, one of the most divergent languages of its family. The Omotic Languages are majorly classified into North, South, and Gimojan, and the Nayi is grouped in North, Dizoid. The typology of the Nayi, like many of the Omotic languages, is fairly agglutinative and has SOV (Subject Object Verb) structure. According to the Ethnologue data of World Language status the Nayi is classified as “status 7B”; that is, it is threatened with extinction.
Many of the dialects of Nayi are related to Dizin, and Sheko, which has 58% lexical similarity with Dizin.

**Why we say the Nayi is endangered**

There are lots of factors that push a language to endangerment. This may include reduction of the number of speakers, cultural dominance, overt repression, natural catastrophes, marginalization of the community’s languages and cultures, economic factors, political dominance, educational policies, global influences and influence of other communities or the disintegration of the language community (due to displacement, war, assimilation into the dominant population, etc.). The case of the Nayi is not different from these factors. The major cause for the endangerment of the Nayi language is the disintegration of the Na’o people. The Na’o people live in three linguistically different communities—the Kaffa, the Benchi and Sheko. All these people have their own language and culture which is significantly different from the Na’o. The Na’o people have adopted the languages and cultures of the host communities. This is because the receiving communities put a strong impact on the Na’o in terms of economic activity, social norms, environmental conditions and cultural issues. The dominance of the host communities in terms of political decision, language of education for the youngsters, marginalization of people who do not speak their language and the disintegration of the Na’o people are some of the factors for the endangerment of Nayi (the Na’o language).

**The Shabu**

The total population of the Shabu, like many of the indigenous people of the region, is not clearly known. It varies from 400 (2000 M. Brezinger) to 1867 (2007 census); out of a large ethnic population, it is constantly decreasing. The Shabu live between Shekicho zone of Southern Nations and Nationalities and Peoples Region and Mejang zone of Gambela Regional government. Their alternate names include Mekeyer, Mikair, Sabu and Shako. The Mejang and Shakicho use the name “Shako” which the Shabu do not completely like.

The Shabo, who live in family units, in remote villages in the coffee-growing mountains of southwest Ethiopia are hunter-gatherers. They are may be among some of the hunter-gatherers that have remained in our planet. My study of the Shabu indicates that they are one of the original people who are likely to have lived in the forests of South West Ethiopia for thousands of years. Despite their long history, they have gradually been displaced and deprived for years, and now subjected to extreme poverty, stigma and marginalization. As far as one can see it, there is no sustainable supply of basic needs; non-existent basic services; other socio-economic development facilities and infrastructure are not available. They have been denied the right to be considered as an ethnic group and denied the right to develop their own culture, language and their human, economic and democratic rights. They are unrecognized by either of the two regional states in which they are living—the SNPR, and the Gambella national regional state.

Shabo is one of the greatest classification puzzles. Researchers who have worked on it have tended to classify it within the Nilo-Saharan family, though where it should fall within that family has still been a mystery. According to the Ethiopian Statistics Agency, the Shabo language is classified as a distinct language—as Hybrid, and unclassified. Most of the Shabo people speak typically two distinct languages— Majang and Shekicho - which are Nilo-Saharan, Surmic and Afro-Asiatic, Omotic respectively. Indeed, as Schneebelen (2009) states, it is possible that Shabo’s word order could have been influenced by Omotic languages that are nearby—all of the Nilo-Saharan languages with similar word order to Shabo are a thousand miles from it, but the Omotic languages that share word order characteristics are neighbours of the Shabu.

Schneebelen (2009) states that because Shabo isn’t very well described, it is not possible to give a comprehensive overview about its classification, despite the fact that the Shabo live between the families of Nilo-Saharan and Afro-Asiatic. Schneebelen (2009) argues that it is impossible to consider Shabo as either of the language families- though connections to Omotic are enough to need some explaining. According to Schneebelen (2009), the major proposals that Shabo might be classified as (a) Nilo-Saharan, (b) its own phylum, or (c) unclassified.

Within Nilo-Saharan, the best guesses are that it is related to the Koman languages (Gule, Kwama, Opuu, Uduk), but has borrowed most extensively from a neighbouring Surmic language, Majang, among whose speakers the Shabo live.

**The Tamma**

The Tamma of Ethiopia—(the ‘Tamma of Ethiopia’ because, according to the Joshua international, the Tamma population lives in Eastern Chad and Western Sudan)—is not even included in the Ethnologue among the languages of Ethiopia. The population of the Tamma, according to my informant Ato Esrael, does not exceed 500 in number. In early days, the name Tamma designated another ethnic group, the Majang. However, as my informant states, the Tamma and the Majang are quite different people, so that the Majang do not even understand the Tamma language. As my informant claims, though this needs further research and surveying, 90% of the Tamma people speak second languages such as Bench, Sheko, Me’init, Amharic, Suri and Majang.

**Origin of the Tamma**

The origin of the Tamma people is not clearly studied. This is due to two factors: the first is based on the insignificant number of the population that could not attract the attention of different researchers – anthropologists and ethnographers. The other is based on the living style of the community itself. As the community is more that of hunter-gatherers, they do not live constantly in permanent residency. Hence, it is difficult to access members of the community easily. As my informant Mr. Esrael states, most of the population speak at least two languages—their own language and either of the above mentioned, which belongs either to Nilo-Saharan or Omotic language families. However, during my stay in their residence I came across some individuals that speak the Afan Oromo language, which be-
longs to the Cushitic language family. This might be absolutely different from their first language “Tamma” which, I guess, belongs to the Nilo-Saharan language family, probably from the Suri Phyla. If Tamma is Nilo-Saharan or Omotic, it should be related to something that needs further investigation and analysis, if it does not become extinct just before all the analysis is made.

The term “Tamma” is the derogatory name for the Mejang community who dominated the Tamma in all aspects of life. (I did not get any information as to why the Mejang were called Tamma). They are predominantly hunter-gatherers living in the remote jungles of Gureferda District of Bench-Maji zone, South West Ethiopia. Few of them are engaged in pottery and others are engaged on traditional businesses that do not demand any skills. The Tamma people generally do not have a known religion and they believe in a traditional deity and other traditional ritual activities.

Because Tamma isn’t very well described, it is impossible to give a comprehensive overview of what people have said about its classification. Despite the fact that the Tamma live between the major phyla of Nilo-Saharan languages like the Suri, Me’en and Majang, and Afro-Asiatic, Omotic languages like Sheko and Bench, no one seems to seriously consider the possibility that it is an Afro-Asiatic language or Omotic. Tyler Schnoebelen, of course, has used the term Tama in his linguistic analysis of the Shabu, “Unclassifying the Shabu.” According to Schnoebelen, Tama and Nyimang have a 75% lexical connection with the Majang. This is probably unbelievable because Majang is part of the Surmic language family—though it is atypical for that family and usually placed as the sole representative of ‘North Surmic’. The Surmic languages, like many of the South Western Ethiopian Nilotic languages, are placed by Bender in the ‘Southern Eastern Sudanic’ group, whereas Nara, Nubian, Tama, and Nyimang are part of the ‘North-Eastern Sudanic’ languages (Bender, 1983). Here I am not clear whether Schnoebelen is discussing the Chadian Tama or the Ethiopian Tamma. However, as his discussion shows, he is stating this about the Chadian Tama, because he cites other Eastern Chadian and Western Sudanic languages, as well.

Within Nilo-Saharan, the best guesses are that it might be related to the Eastern Chadian and Western Sudanic languages, but the unanswered questions are:-

If the Tamma language belongs to its Chadian counterpart, how did it come here crossing thousands of kilometers?
If the Tamma people of Ethiopia and their language do not have any connection with the Chadian Tammas, then where is its origin and in which language family does it belong? Why did they share the same name, etc...?
Does the Tamma language belong to either of their neighbouring language families? If so, which one?
All these and other related questions need a scientific answer.

A SIL computer analysis shows a probable correlation of some 90-95% between the Tamma and Assangori languages, thus a Tamma and an Assangori can speak together, each using their own language and understanding most of what the other is saying. Yet, according to most people, neither of the two tribes claim common ancestry, particular friendship, special trading relationships, or even to have lived near each other in the past. Surprisingly, according to my informant Mr. Esrael, the Ethiopian Tamma community does not have any access to the Chadian Tama and do not know about them at all. Besides, the Arabic language and the Islamic religion does not have any trace among the Tamma of Ethiopia and throughout the region. It is quite important to conduct at least a preliminary survey to identify whether these two peoples and their languages have some relationship.

REFERENCES

Zimbabwe: Mother languages and identity

From the Herald web-site, 13 February 2013
Do Zimbabweans look down on their mother languages? If that is the case, can we then say that we are facing an identity crisis? What do you call yourself if you cannot write and speak your own mother language? What is your major language of communication at home and in other spheres? If your mother tongue plays second fiddle, is it progressive or it is regressive?

Before the brickbats are hurled at me, think carefully and answer the questions and then revisit some of the most recent statistics we have on the state of our mother languages - not just Shona and Ndebele.
One of the highlights of the draft constitution that was recently passed by Parliament is that 16 languages in Zimbabwe will be recognised as official languages.

For argument’s sake, I will use Wikipedia’s definition of official language since it is inclusive: "An official language is a language that is given a special legal status in a particular country, state, or other jurisdiction. Typically a country’s official language refers to the language used within its government - its courts, parliament, administration and so on - to run its operations and conduct its business. Since "the means of expression of a people cannot be changed by any law", the term "official language" does not typically refer to the language used by a people or country, but by its government".

Which would mean that if the draft constitution is adopted by the people, these 16 languages, among them Shona, Ndebele, Kalanga, Shangaan, Tonga, Venda, Nambya, Tswana will be used by Government and its various arms - the courts, parliament, administration, etc.

This is quite a task considering that with the exception of English, which has enjoyed the official language status for more than a century, the implementation of such a legal framework for other languages will not be as easy as it sounds on paper.

At face value, it sounds very easy and doable to achieve such an enviable task, but when we see a majority of meetings around the country addressed in English, how will the language section be implemented?

This statement is not different from what Christians wanted - that the constitution clearly spells out that Zimbabwe is a Christian country.

Iranian Kurdistan: Restriction on use of minority languages

From TelecomPaper, on Unrepresented Nations and Peoples web-site, 23 January 2013

The Iranian government’s recent restrictions on the use of minority languages are in clear violation of the constitution, says the country’s opposition Green Movement.

In a statement issued on Tuesday, the Coordination Council of the Green Path of Hope, an important body within the movement, voiced its criticism of government measures aimed at curbing the use of Kurdish in the Province of Kermanshah.

The statement, which addresses the Iranian people, is in response to a leaked Education Ministry letter that calls on teachers to refrain from using any language other than Persian at schools in Kermanshah Province, where the majority of the population speak Kurdish. The letter, which is dated 29 December 2012 and marked “confidential,” is signed by Jalal Amini, the head of Education Ministry’s Kermanshah bureau.

The Coordination Council said that the move was a clear breach of the Iranian constitution’s Article 15, which designates Persian as the “official and shared language of Iran,” but at the same time allows for the use of local languages in press, media the education system.

The Council called the Education Ministry’s move “provocative” and went on to add: “This is despite the fact that preserving and strengthening the security and national unity of the country and [its] territorial integrity necessitate the realisation of the fundamental rights of all citizens, while identifying and guaranteeing the rights of all ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities.”

“Such actions are against human rights norms, the articles of the constitution, the country’s international obligations, and the will of the majority of Iranians from all ethnicities, languages and religions,” the statement continued.

Such actions, the Council members argue, ultimately weaken solidarity, national unity and the country’s national interests.

According to a 2010 report by the International Federation for Human Rights, Iranian Kurds suffer from discrimination and their plight has not improved since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. They have suffered harsh political oppression throughout their struggle for their rights and have been denied their political, economic and cultural rights, including their right to use their own language. For Sunni Kurds, their right to freedom of religion has also been violated ever since the revolution.

Despite some improvements in Kurdish rights during the presidency of Mohammad Khatami, the ascent to power of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2005 saw a further suppression of Kurdish rights.

Balinese will fight for their language

By Agnes Winarti, from the Jakarta Post, 10 January 2013.

Following the Education and Culture Ministry’s plan to revise the 2013 education curriculum, which includes a move to immerse local language lessons into art and culture lessons, the Balinese people have pledged to keep Balinese language lessons in school and say no to the plan.

“In the past, there have been concerns that the Balinese language would be extinct by 2040. We would hate to see that prediction become reality because language is part of our local wisdom and pride. We hope that we can create synergy and drive the political will of the administration, the House of Representatives and our academics and practitioners, to keep the Balinese language in existence,” dean of the school of letters at Udayana University, I Wayan Cika, said on Wednesday.

He was speaking at the opening of the faculty’s public seminar on how the government’s plan to change the 2013 curriculum would affect the Balinese language.

The ministry plans to implement the revised curriculum at the beginning of the 2013/2014 academic year in June. Chairman of the board of trustees for the Balinese language, alphabet and literature I Gde Nala Antara cited that in the current structure of the elementary school curriculum, the local language is
taught as local content (for two hours) along with art and cultural skills (four hours).

However, in the revised 2013 curriculum, local content is no longer mentioned explicitly, as it is replaced with an art, culture and craft lesson (for six hours). Similar changes are also to be implemented in the junior and senior high school curriculums.

The public review period for the planned 2013 curriculum has now ended, having run between Nov. 29 and Dec. 23. Nala voiced regret that the schedule for the public review had not been well publicized and made known to his board.

“Basically, we do not agree with the 2013 curriculum and we have urged our governor to firmly state that Bali rejects the new curriculum and uses its regional autonomy right to keep the local language taught in schools in Bali,” said Nala.

“Filing a judicial review at the Constitutional Court has also been considered, as our last option,” he added.

The Balinese language has been a compulsory local content subject taught at schools throughout the island based on Provincial Regulation No. 3/1992 on the Balinese language, alphabet and literature.

A self-confessed lover of the Balinese language, who actively promotes the use of the language in children’s storytelling and songs, I Made Taro was saddened by the situation faced by his much-loved mother tongue.

“The Balinese language is dying. And I am sad if this language is deleted from schools. I have learnt to speak Balinese not only from my teachers at schools but also from my parents, my playmates and from traditional games, songs and poems, which I’m developing even today. Preserving this language requires simple efforts,” said Taro.

Chairman of Commission IV at the Bali House of Representatives, I Nyoman Parta, said that the commission was preparing to welcome the ministry’s education curriculum team, who would be visiting Bali on Jan. 18.

“This is a serious matter. I hope all of us can together join forces to save our language and our identity as Balinese,” said Parta.

Literary critic and lecturer at Udayana University’s school of letters, I Nyoman Darma Putra, emphasized that local language lessons must be explicitly mentioned as a part of the curriculum.

“Although the minister has said that the local language will be integrated into the art, culture and craft lesson, we fear that without explicit mention, multiple interpretations of the policy could harm the Balinese language,” he said.

Putra further stated that in terms of local language development, Indonesia needed to partly learn from the legacy of the Dutch, who generously supported the publication of dozens of books on Balinese language during the era of colonialism.

Up to the present day, the Balinese language still manages to exist through various preservation efforts, including Balinese language lessons at local schools, the presence of Balinese language pop music and the Bali Orti (Balinese language news) popularized by the local mass media on the island since 2006.

**China: Tibetan language classes closed**

By Lumbum Tashi, translated by Benpa Topgyai and Karma Dorjee, edited by Richard Finney, from the Radio Free Asia web-site, 10 January 2013

Authorities in China’s Sichuan province have banned Tibetan language and culture classes taught informally by volunteers to Tibetan students during their winter break, angering local residents who had sought to promote Tibetan national and cultural identity to their children, according to a local source.

The ban covers at least one township in the Ngaba (in Chinese, Aba) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, with similar bans in place at monasteries in at least two counties in the Kardze (Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture.

The program in Ngaba was initiated last year in the Muge Norwa township of Zungchu (in Chinese, Songpan) county, a man living in the area told RFA’s Tibetan service.

“Local Tibetans welcomed the project. But this year, unfortunately, Chinese authorities objected and shut it down,” the man said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

“Students then gathered to be taught in the courtyard of a private home, but this too was stopped.”

“This has caused strong resentment within the local Tibetan community, and participants in the classes are disappointed at having been deprived of an opportunity to learn their own language and culture,” he said.

**Scores jailed**

China has jailed scores of Tibetan writers, artists, singers, and educators for asserting national and cultural identity and civil rights since widespread protests swept Tibet and Tibetan-populated areas of China in 2008.

In November, about 1,000 Tibetan students protested in China’s Qinghai province over the release of an official Chinese booklet that ridiculed the Tibetan language as “irrelevant.”

The booklet also described self-immolations by Tibetans challenging Chinese rule, now totaling 95 since the wave of fiery protests began in February 2009, as “acts of stupidity.”

Students burned the offending booklets during the protest and called for “equality among nationalities and freedom to study the Tibetan language.”

And in March, around 700 students from the Rebkong County Middle School of Nationalities returned from a holiday break to find their textbooks for the new term written in Chinese.

“They started ripping the books up and tried to march into the town to call for language rights,” but were stopped by their teachers from proceeding into town, the London-based rights group Free Tibet said.

**‘Shattered hopes’**

Response to the language classes offered this winter in Muge Norwa township had been “very encouraging,” RFA’s source said, adding that even nearby townships had sent over 100 students to participate.

“All hoped that the project would continue,” he said. “Now their hopes have been shattered.”

Tibetan language classes organized by Beri monastery in Kardze prefecture and by monasteries in Dege county have also been banned, he said.
Switzerland’s fourth language, Romansh, under pressure

By Julia Slater, from the Swissinfo.ch web-site, 5 August 2013

“Stand up, and defend your ancient language, Romansh!” says a 19th century slogan. The language is still around, but as the number of speakers is diluted by incomers to the region where it is spoken, it is an ongoing struggle to preserve it. “The Romansh-speaking area is not strong enough to integrate speakers of other languages sufficiently – a finding that is unfortunately not new, and which continues,” the most recent government report lamented.

In its analysis of the state of the languages of Switzerland drawn up after the 2000 census, the Federal Statistics Office points to a striking contrast: while the proportion of German, French and Italian speakers increased within their heartlands thanks to the integration of new arrivals who have learned the local language, the proportion of Romansh speakers shrank, even in the parts of the south-eastern canton of Graubünden where it is widely spoken.

Primary school teacher Andreas Urech, who is responsible for bilingualism in the village of Samedan in the Upper Engadine, 18 per cent of whose population comes from 33 foreign countries, is aware the situation hasn’t improved since the 2000 report. Since German is spoken at work, it’s normally the language of integration for those outsiders who don’t have it as their mother tongue, he told swissinfo.ch.

But language acquisition is surprisingly pragmatic. Construction at building sites in Urech’s area tends to be in the hands of Italian speakers. “The Portuguese speak it, and of course the Spaniards too. But at one time we had a lot of people from former Yugoslavia, and those working in construction spoke Italian too. I don’t know how good this Italian is, but it works very well.”

**Josling for position**

The phenomenon of one language pushing out another in the area is hardly new. Romansh is descended from the Latin brought by the Romans – replacing the ancient Raetic language, about which practically nothing is known - but German speakers started taking up positions of influence in the area more than a thousand years ago, and over the centuries the Romansh-speaking areas have shrunk.

Graubünden is a canton of mountains and valleys with small scattered villages. As typically happens with languages in isolated areas, Romansh is splintered into a myriad of dialects, each belonging to one of the five written variants, or idioms. But mountains also mean passes, and passes mean transit traffic.

Barbara Riedhauser works for the Lia Rumantscha - the umbrella organisation for the language as a whole - promoting Sutsilvan, the idiom spoken along the route that leads to the Splügen pass and into Italy. In some parts of its original heartland it is barely spoken at all any longer; in the valley where it is strongest it is spoken by perhaps 20 per cent of the population.

“People had to understand the languages of their neighbours in order to earn money. Perhaps that’s why Romansh has declined here,” she told swissinfo.ch.

“I would say that now the overwhelming majority of Romansh speakers speak German better than they do Romansh. In the old days Romansh was the language people used every day, but today they are so connected with the outside world, what with internet and the media, that they get much more input in German about more complex issues.”

“You can in fact say everything you want to in Romansh – although if you compare it with Italian, for example, it has certainly been influenced by German.”

**Outside pressure**

Indeed, Romansh is liberally sprinkled with recognisably German words – but that is nothing new. There’s a fine dividing line between the natural linguistic process of word formation, which enriches the language, and the steady impoverishment which happens when speakers with an imperfect knowledge of their mother tongue seize the first word that comes to mind and end up speaking a mixture of Romansh and German.

Urech admitted that Germanisms are entering the spoken language all the time, and English words are also creeping in – but pointed out that literary Ladin (his local Romansh dialect) endeavours to retain “genuine” Romansh.

Interestingly, there was a time when the Ladin literary language, traditionally oriented towards its southern neighbour, was full of Italianisms. They were largely purged in a conscious move about 100 years ago.

Sursilvan, the idiom with the most speakers, has always had a lot of contact with German. The result goes deeper than vocabulary.

“They use structures that hurt my ears, because I know they’ve been taken over from German,” Ladin-speaker Urech explained. “But by now they are completely normal, and even grammatically correct.”

**Teaching**

Schools have a major role to play in keeping the language alive – but in an area where Romansh is spoken by a small minority, as in Samedan (about 16 per cent) this can be quite arbitrary, as Urech’s experience has shown.

“When a class has lots of children from German-speaking families, it’s quite different from when there is a large proportion of Romansh speakers. The composition of the class has an impact on the language they use to communicate in. That’s not something you can do anything about. And the children of the new arrivals follow the trend.”

This applies even to those whose home language – Italian, Spanish and “more and more” Portuguese - is Latin-based, for whom Romansh is in principle easier than German.

While children follow the flow, some adults take a conscious decision to learn Romansh, even if they don’t need it to survive. But in the Sutsilvan area, Riedhauser struggles to get a class together. There are rarely more than six in a beginners’ group, and – for whatever reason - many give up after a year. Those who want to continue may have to wait until there are enough pupils to form a class.

Nevertheless, she thinks they are still making a contribution to keeping the language alive.

“When someone decides to take a course, and tells everyone so, it makes Romansh speakers feel: ‘Ah, our language and culture are special, other people are interested. We have something they don’t have.’ And that’s really good.”
Sursilvan, being more widely spoken, has far less difficulty in attracting learners – mainly people who have settled in the area, have a Romansh-speaking partner, or have Romansh roots.

Tessa Meuter, a professor of English in Winterthur, bought a house in a largely Romansh-speaking village eight years ago and has been attending a Sursilvan summer course for four years.

She knows she will never speak like a native, but it has transformed her relationship with her neighbours. They are interested to hear what she has learned each day – sometimes things they don’t even know themselves. And they appreciate her effort. One woman brought along old parish minutes to share with her, giving her an insight into village problems and how they were solved. Another, whom she consulted about the names of fruit and vegetables, then put together a collection of recipes for her to try out.

“It’s so positive. Before, it was a holiday place. Since I started learning, I really feel it’s become a home,” she told swissinfo.ch.

The Romansh language

Romansh, spoken in the south-eastern canton of Graubünden, is descended from Latin, the common parent of all the Romance languages.

The most widely spoken are Spanish, Portuguese, French, Italian and Romanian. Smaller Romance languages include Catalan, Galician, Lombard, Piedmontese, Napolitan, Sardinian. Occitan and Corsican.

Romansh is spoken in a number of different areas in the south-eastern canton of Graubünden. Its nearest relatives outside Switzerland are Friulian and Ladin (spoken in northeastern Italy).

Romansh is divided into five written dialects or “idioms”, each with its own subdialects. The first written documents were produced in the Engadine in the 16th century.

Since 1996 the official administrative form of Romansh has been an artificially created version, Rumantsch Grischun, which has been in existence since 1980.

The idiom with the greatest number of speakers is Sursilvan, spoken in the area along the Anterior Rhine (Vorderrhein) from its source near the Oberalp pass.

In the 2000 census, 55% of the population of the Surselva area said Romansh was the language they knew best or spoke most at home, school or work.

In Graubünden as a whole, the figure was 21.5%, while in Switzerland it was 0.8% - just over 60,000 people. Only 35,000 said it was the language they spoke best.

Decline of Romansh

Until about 1850, Romansh was the most spoken language in Graubünden. Since 1880 census figures have shown a steady increase in the number and proportion of German speakers.

By 2000, only 14.5% of the canton’s population said it was the language they spoke best. German was the best language of just over 68%, and Italian of 10%.

With the decline of traditional occupations in farming and rural trades, many speakers migrated.

Tourism has become the main economic activity, bringing in outsiders, whether permanently or temporarily, and opening the region up to the modern world.

German-speaking media are widely available; because they have more users, their unit costs are lower. As a result, people get much of their entertainment and information first and foremost in German.

The fragmentation of the dialects and lack of a unified written language until 1980 has also contributed to its decline.

Romansh has been recognised as a national language since 1938.

Under the Swiss language law the Swiss Confederation is bound to support measures adopted by cantons Graubünden and Ticino to promote Romansh and Italian.

Among other things, the Lia Rumantscha, the language’s umbrella organisation, promotes the publication of teaching materials and literature, in particular literature for children.

Finland: ‘Romano mirits’ - News broadcast in Romany language

By Sampsa Oinaula, from Helsingin Sanomat, 21 August 2013, translated by the editor

Finland’s Romany minority came into being five hundred years ago. Nowadays there are about ten thousand of them. One third of the minority still speaks the Romany Language, and it is danger of disappearing in Finland.

Today in the Romano mirits – ‘Romany Pearls’ – programme, one of the speakers of the language, Väinö Lindberg, answers questions from journalist Tuovi Putkonen in both Finnish and Romany.

A big problem from the point of view of preserving the Romany language in Finland is that it has no written literature at all. But progress has been made. Nowadays the language can be studied at the University of Helsinki.

The Romani’s right to protect their language and culture was enshrined in the Constitution in 2000.

Väinö Lindberg is a priest of the Free Church and deputy chairman of the Council on Romany Affairs. In the interview he tells how he himself learned the Finnish Romany language and what significance it has had in his life.

Lindberg has used it at important moments, such as when his mother was unconscious in hospital. His mother awoke to words in Romany.

A radio programme for Romanies is a rarity in Europe. Although there is a Romany minority in numerous countries, nationwide radio programmes for them are made only in Finland and Sweden.

The Romano mirits programme came about in 1996 as a demand of the Council on Romany Affairs. Since the beginning it has included news bulletins in their own language. In 1998 Romany programmes were written into the law on national broadcasting alongside Saami and sign language.

The subject is close to the heart of Tuovi Putkonen, who edits the programme. She is married to Marko Putkonen, the singer in Hortto Kaalo, the best-known Romany band in Finland. Romano mirits is mind-expanding listening for the majority population as well.

It familiarises them with a minority that is still the subject of prejudices. However, the programme does not touch on the most sensitive matters affecting Romany culture.

The position of the Romanies is also being taken up internationally. Romano mirits has been a step forward in dealing with the issue of beggars, for example.
The programme anticipated the begging phenomenon before others did.
It also discusses the subject more openly than those politicians who support a ban on begging.
The problem, according to Romano mirits, is not the beggars but the poverty that drives them out of their home areas. According to Tuovi Putkonen, Finland’s Romanies are positive about the phenomenon, but helpless.
Culture is also often a big part of the radio programme. In particular it features Romany musical culture.
Since Romano mirits mostly uses music that is free of copyright, the programme can be heard on the Web. It can also be kept as a pod-cast.

Dictionaries shed light on endangered indigenous languages

By Oliver Laughland from the Guardian (UK) web-site, 28 August 2013

Hidden away on a shelf at the Mitchell library in Sydney sat what Dr Michael Walsh thought was a chunky volume from the New South Wales state library’s vast collection of colonial manuscripts.

He pulled it from the shelves only to realise it wasn’t a book but a box, containing two notebooks. He flicked through the first pages which contained, in Walsh’s words, ”a lot of doodles” – but on page seven things got in

“A short vocabulary of the natives of Raffles Bay,” it said. Walsh had just rediscovered a guide to the Indigenous languages used near a British settlement on the coast of the Northern Territory, written by the Victorian colonialist Charles Tyres. The text had been unknown to modern academics.

“At that time I figured, well, probably no one knows about this because I only stumbled across it by dumb luck,” says a modest Walsh. But the notebooks form part of a huge array of documents uncovered at the state library,

The two-year research project, headed by Walsh, has sifted through 14km worth of colonial manuscripts that shed light on 100 Indigenous languages, many of which were considered lost before the finds.

Walsh describes another of the discoveries he’s particularly proud of, a 130-page trilingual dictionary in German and the Indigenous languages of Diyari and Wangkangurru from the north-east of South Australia. Diyari has been undergoing a revival in an attempt to keep it in active use.

“Compared to some of the other resources that might be as small as 20 words, this is quite a substantial addition … so to suddenly get 130 pages from the late 19th century popping up is quite a find,” Walsh says.

The jubilation of unearthing such a document is beset by a sobering reality. The federal government estimates that 145 Indigenous languages are still spoken in the country, but an overwhelming 110 are threatened with extinction.

These documents, collected in part to harvest knowledge amid attempts to exert control on Australia’s Indigenous population, will now help to preserve that culture.

“There is a certain irony there, I guess,” Walsh says. “One harsh view would say that the people who were collecting this stuff were colonialists who were basically intent on stealing Aborigna...
Therefore, Mrs Le Grip said she was being “coherent” in voting against the report. “In my country, regional languages are not threatened. All means available are used to protect them. Voting in favour of this report could open sensitive doors”, she said.

Not all French conservatives rejected the report however. Alain Cadec, also a centre-right MEP from the UMP party urged France to ratify the European Charter on Regional and Minority languages. “French shall remain the language of the Republic. Recognising regional languages does not question this unity, to which I am deeply attached,” Cadec said in a statement.

At the beginning of his mandate, President François Hollande announced he would ratify the charter, but backed down in the first half of 2013. In France, minority languages often belong to regions with a separatist history, such as Corsica or the Basque Country, making it a sensitive subject among the public. However, MEPs in EU countries with separatist regions did not reject Mr Alfonsi’s report, as it is non-binding. In France, only those French Conservatives and far-right politicians like Marine Le Pen and far-left leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon said no to the report.

Out of 255 languages currently spoken across Europe, 128 are listed as endangered languages and 90 are “severely endangered” according to Unesco’s Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger.

In France, languages native to Burgundy, Picard and Lorraine are considered “severely endangered, while the Spanish dialect Gascon is “definitely endangered” and Dalmatian in Croatia is considered “extinct”. The UN predicts that half of the world’s 6,000 languages will become extinct by the end of the century.

The process, however, is neither inevitable nor irreversible, Unesco said, as policies can support the efforts of speaker communities to maintain or revitalise their native tongues. Cultivating endangered languages requires financial backing and strategies to help and fund training, education, media and research programmes throughout Europe, say the supporters of the report.

The internet presents a glimmer of hope for students of unusual languages, where despite the dominance of English, mandarin, Spanish, French and Japanese, rarer languages can remain in use and gain prominence, says Daniel Prado, a renowned linguist of Franco-Argentine origin.

However, he warned: “If the internet can constitute an opportunity for languages, the first step is to ensure that everyone gets access to it, which is still far from being the case.”

Corsican MEP battles for Europe to protect endangered languages

From the EurActiv.com web-site, 23 April 2013
Just as the EU legislates to protect migrating birds and wildlife habitats, it should also protect its 120 or so endangered languages, argues François Alfonsi, a Corsican MEP who has prepared a parliamentary report that could name and shame European wrongdoers.

Languages would not disappear without a deliberate policy to marginalise them, argues Alfonsi, who has tabled a draft report on endangered languages that will be voted in June by the full Parliament in a plenary session.

“It’s always the case,” Alfonsi replied when asked whether the loss of a language was the result of intentional state policy. “Languages would not experience such a recession if they were not marginalised in the education and media system and society in general,” said Alfonsi, who is the European Parliament’s only Corsican-speaking MEP.

In France, the country he knows best, Alfonsi mentioned Corsican, Franco-Provençal, Breton and Occitan as being threatened with extinction. Of those, some may be in better shape than others, but “all are going in the same direction,” he told EurActiv in an interview.

In Europe, about 120 languages are considered to be threatened with extinction, according to the UNESCO Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger, which estimates that one language dies every two weeks worldwide.

Naming and shaming

While some European countries like Finland receive praise for protecting minority languages, others have a poor record and should be named and shamed, Alfonsi says. Without support they will struggle to survive in a globalised world.

“If we compare the resources allocated by the Finnish state to promote Saami and the resources allocated by the French state to promote Corsican, it is like a bicycle and a Ferrari!” he explains, saying France had a specific responsibility to protect regional languages and minorities.

For Alfonsi, the issue extends to basic European values like human rights and the protection of minorities.

But while the EU is usually very capable at defending the rights of minorities in other countries - like the Kurds in Turkey - it is powerless when it comes to putting the 27 EU member states to task. The European Commission indeed cannot interfere with language rights or the protection of regional minorities, which remain an area of national competency.

Still, Alfonsi says the EU has an “ethical duty” to protect what he describes as “a European heritage”. Just as the EU legislates to protect endangered birds and wildlife, it should also protect “cultural biodiversity”, he argues, stressing that the Lisbon Treaty gives the European Commission an “ethical responsibility to promote cultural diversity”.

It is not easy however to hold countries accountable for failing to protect regional languages or dialects.

At European level, many countries have signed up to the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, endorsed by the Council of Europe, a Strasbourg-based organisation. But the obligation to ratify the charter only applies to new member countries, Alfonsi says, not to existing members like France and Greece, which have refused to sign it.

“Why? Because if they ratified, they would be held to account before the Council of Europe by such or such linguistic association, or political community, and they would be condemned.”

EU funding on the wane

Perhaps more worrying for Alfonsi, EU funding for minority languages “has been cut drastically” over the years, his report states, with regional languages receiving more aid two decades ago than they do now.

Part of the problem, he says, is that EU-funded programmes in support of languages or culture are geared mainly towards large events, like the Avignon theatre festival in France.

What Alfonsi recommends doing is to lower the entry barrier so that smaller regional events also receive EU funds for the
Breathing new life into an old language: Franco-Provençal

From Julia Slater, Swissinfo
‘Binvinyête’ said the welcome signs in Bulle as it prepared to host the international festival of patois speakers. Not the welcome you would ordinarily find anywhere in Switzerland, but this was not an ordinary event.

The participants had come to the small western Swiss town from France and Italy as well as Switzerland – places where they speak, or used to speak, the language commonly known as patois. The stalls in the hall where they met were selling CDs of songs in patois, patois dictionaries and books about patois – but the language being spoken all around was French.

Patois, known to linguists as Franco-Provençal, and called Arpitan by some of its speakers, has been on the retreat for years. It is now at its strongest in northern Italy – where it is one of several recognised minority languages – but even there it is struggling. Almost everywhere, few people other than the very old speak it as their mother tongue.

In many places it has died out completely. In some areas schoolteachers were ordered to stop children speaking it not only at school, but even, as far as possible, at home too. Many of the participants at the festival recalled regretfully that their grandparents were often ashamed of it.

Outside pressures

Even in Italy, the language did not have an easy ride. When Floran Corradin was at school in the 1960s in the Aosta Valley, the country was experiencing an economic boom.

“My generation had to exist in the context of the Italian state. Italian was the dominant language. And our parents, who wanted us to have successful careers, warned us not to insist too much on our patois, because we’d have big problems with Italian at school,” he explained to swissinfo.ch.

The population shift from rural to urban areas has not helped either.

Bernard Papaux, who always spoke one of the dialects of canton Fribourg with his grandparents, admitted that his own children had not been interested. “They didn’t have friends who spoke patois. I moved from Treyvaux and Laroche, where patois is widely spoken, to Corpataux, where it is practically extinct.”

New learners

Even if few people now learn it at their mother’s knee, there has been an increase in interest, mainly among older people.

“I’ll be retiring soon, and lots of people have asked me to give patois courses when I have more time,” Papaux said.

Nicole Margot is a typical learner. Her grandfather spoke the patois of canton Vaud, but not her parents. It was only when she retired that she started to learn it seriously – and loved it.

“I speak quite fluently, but I’d like to speak better. Often I put in French words, for example. And I certainly make lots and
lots of grammatical mistakes. But I think it's important to speak, even so,” she told swissinfo.ch.

Alain Favre lives in Chambéry, the capital of the French département of Savoie. He heard patois from his grandparents and father, but only got them to teach him seriously when he was an adult. He thinks he is now practically the only speaker in the town, and that the dialect of his own particular village is more or less dead.

The way forward

Favre’s way of tackling this problem throws up an important issue for the survival of patois: adapt or die – but then how to stop it becoming an ungrammatical mish-mash?

“I’ve kept the basis of my language, but I am internationalising it,” he explained. “I speak my own personal language. I’d say three-quarters is my own patois, but what I don’t know, and words that don’t exist in it, I get from somewhere else, mainly in the Aosta Valley, which is very rich.”

When you are the only speaker, in the last resort you are more or less free to do as you please with the language. Joel Rilliot is more unusual still: on the basis of intense research he has single-handedly resurrected the patois of Neuchâtel which died out in the 1920s, and always speaks it to his children. For modern words he does the same as Favre: “pinches words from other patois”.

“There’s a problem with swear words,” he admits. “Unfortunately at the end of the 19th century when the material I used was collected, people couldn’t talk about things like sexuality in the way we do today. So I borrow them from other patois, and by now I have quite a lot. Even so, I am probably one of the politest patois speakers in Switzerland!”

Enthusiastic learners can influence the language in the opposite way as well. Jacques Mourin – or Dzakye Monire, as he writes his name in patois – discovered words in his research which the surviving native speakers of his dialect – that of Saviese in canton Valais – had forgotten.

“My vocabulary dates from the 1960s. People still had patois as their mother tongue in 1950, but ever since starting school they have been immersed in French. So now they hesitate over words, and it’s easier to use the French one. Since the previous generation is no longer there to remind them what it should really be, the French displaces the patois word,” he explained. Among the examples he cited was the “really ugly” word "bócû” – clearly from French “beaucoup” – which has pushed out “prous prous”, the old expression for “a lot”.

Preservation

With so few speakers scattered over a wide geographical area with many different dialects, there is a tightrope to be walked between maintaining the old and exploiting the new if patois is to survive.

The example of Hebrew, the main language of Israel, resurrected out of classical Hebrew in the late 19th century but incorporating influences from various other languages spoken by Jews in different countries, inspires many patois speakers to believe that even a moribund language can revive and flourish.

“It’s very important to go back to our roots,” Margot told swissinfo.ch. “But it’s also important that it should be a living language, so sometimes it’s not exactly the same as the one our ancestors spoke.”

Margot is one of those who are keen that speakers of different dialects should get together, and admits that the adoption of French words, especially in modern contexts, helps here, although naturally they share plenty of vocabulary anyway.

But she accepts that there are different views, and that some speakers put more emphasis on preserving their own dialects. Maurice Michelot of Nendaz in canton Valais, now aged 60, learnt the language as a child. He is the secretary of the Valais Federation of Friends of Patois, and told swissinfo.ch that the festival was a chance to create “new synergies” between dialects, but was much less optimistic than Margot.

“People in our valleys tend to be individualists, attached to their own patois,” he admitted.

He gives courses in the Nendaz dialect, but while young people may be curious about it, few take that any further. Does that mean patois is going to disappear?

“I think so. Perhaps I shouldn’t say it, but I don’t want to lie. How many more generations will it last? They say a language isn’t dead as long as just one person still speaks it.”

Franco-Provençal

Franco-Provençal is a Latin-based language; as such it is related to French, but it belongs to a different sub-family. It was spoken in the area stretching from Lyon in central France into what is now French-speaking Switzerland (apart from Jura) and the Aosta Valley and parts of the Piedmont in northern Italy.

There is also a small pocket of speakers in the Apulia region of southern Italy, presumed to be the descendants of mercenaries. This language never had a standard written form; it is broken up into numerous different spoken dialects, which are more or less mutually intelligible.

Even by many speakers it is commonly referred to as “patois”, although in French this has a pejorative meaning: “patois” is defined in Le Petit Robert dictionary as “a dialect with a small number of often rural speakers whose culture and level of civilisation are regarded as inferior to that of the surrounding population who speak the standard language”.

In recent times some speakers have started to use the name Arpitan, and there have moves to bring the dialects together, for example through a standardised spelling system.

Estimates of the total number of speakers vary considerably. The latest figures quoted on the website of the Endangered Languages Project of the University of Hawaii give 100,600 mother tongue speakers in 2010.

The Swiss census for 2000 put at about 16,000 the total number of patois speakers in French-speaking Switzerland, a drop of over one quarter since 1990.

The Minority Rights Group International puts at about 66,500 the number of speakers in the Aosta Valley.

A report published by the French Institut national d’éludes démographiques in 2002 put the number of people in France handling down some knowledge of Franco-Provençal to the next generation at less than 15,000.
4. Appeals, News and Views from Endangered Communities

Brazil’s Guarani suffer at the hands of violent ranchers

From the Survival International web-site

The Guarani were one of the first peoples contacted after Europeans arrived in South America around 500 years ago. In Brazil, there are today around 46,000 Guarani living in seven states, making them the country’s most numerous tribe. Many others live in neighbouring Paraguay, Bolivia and Argentina. The Guarani people in Brazil are divided into three groups: Kaiówá, Ñande và and M’byá, of which the largest is the Kaiówá which means ‘forest people’. They are a deeply spiritual people. Most communities have a prayer house, and a religious leader, whose authority is based on prestige rather than formal power.

For as long as they can remember, the Guarani have been searching – searching for a place revealed to them by their ancestors where people live free from pain and suffering, which they call ‘the land without evil’. Over hundreds of years, the Guarani have travelled vast distances in search of this land.

One 16th century chronicler noted their ‘constant desire to seek new lands, in which they imagine they will find immortality and perpetual ease’.

This permanent quest is indicative of the unique character of the Guarani, a ‘difference’ about them which has often been noted by outsiders.

Today, this manifests itself in a more tragic way: profoundly affected by the loss of almost all their land in the last century, the Guarani suffer a wave of suicide unequalled in South America.

The problems are especially acute in Mato Grosso do Sul where the Guarani once occupied a homeland of forests and plains totaling some 350,000 square kilometers. Today they are squeezed onto tiny patches of land surrounded by cattle ranches and vast fields of soya and sugar cane. Some have no land at all, and live camped by roadsides.

‘This here is my life, my soul. If you take me away from this land, you take my life.’ Marcos Veron

The killing of Guarani leader Marcos Veron in 2003 was a tragic but all too typical example of the violence that his people are subject to.

Mr Veron, aged around 70, was the leader of the Guarani-Kaiówá community of Takuara. For fifty years his people had been trying to recover a small piece of their ancestral land, after it was seized by a wealthy Brazilian and turned into a vast cattle ranch. Most of the forest that once covered the area had since been cleared.

In April 1997, desperate after years of lobbying the government in vain, Marcos led his community back onto the ranch. They began to rebuild their houses, and could plant their own crops again.

But the rancher who had occupied the area went to court, and a judge ordered the Indians out.

In October 2001, more than one hundred heavily armed police and soldiers forced the Indians to leave their land once more. They eventually ended up living under plastic sheets by the side of a highway.

While still in Takuara, Marcos said, ‘This here is my life, my soul. If you take me away from this land, you take my life.’ His words came prophetically and tragically true early in 2003, when, during another attempt to return peacefully to his land, he was viciously beaten by employees of the rancher. He died a few hours later.

Veron’s killers have not been charged with his murder, but they were charged with lesser crimes related to the attack, following a court hearing in early 2011.

In the last 500 years virtually all the Guarani’s land in Mato Grosso do Sul state has been taken from them. Waves of deforestation have converted the once-fertile Guarani homeland into a vast network of cattle ranches, and sugar cane plantations for Brazil’s biofuels market.

Many of the Guarani were herded into small reservations, which are now chronically overcrowded. In the Dourados reserve, for example, 12,000 Indians are living on little more than 3,000 hectares.

The destruction of the forest has meant that hunting and fishing are no longer possible, and there is barely enough land even to plant crops. Malnutrition is a serious problem and since 2005 at least 53 Guarani children have died of starvation.

Brazil has one of the most highly-developed biofuels industries in the world. Sugar cane plantations were established in the 1980s and rely heavily on indigenous labour. Workers often work for pitiful wages under terrible conditions. In 2007, police raided a sugar cane alcohol distillery and discovered 800 Indians working and living in subhuman conditions.

As many indigenous men are forced to seek work on the plantations they are absent from their communities for long periods and this has a major impact on Guarani health and society.

Sexually transmitted diseases and alcoholism have been introduced by returning workers and internal tensions and violence have increased.

Over 80 new sugar cane plantations and alcohol distilleries are planned for Mato Grosso do Sul, many of which are to be built on ancestral land claimed by the Guarani.

The Guarani in Mato Grosso do Sul suffer from racism and discrimination, and high levels of harassment from the police. It is estimated that there are over 200 Guarani in jail with little or no access to legal advice and interpreters, trapped in a legal system they do not understand. This has resulted in innocent people being condemned. Many are serving disproportionately harsh sentences for minor offences.

The response of this deeply spiritual people to the chronic lack of land has been an epidemic of suicide unique in South America. Since 1986 more than 517 Guarani have committed suicide, the youngest just nine years old.

Crowded onto tiny reservations, with appalling social conditions, many Guarani communities have attempted to recover small parcels of their ancestral land.

These ‘retomadas’ (literally ‘re-takings’) have been violently resisted by the powerful and ruthless farmers who now occupy the region.
5. Language technology

Endangered Alphabets Project

From Tim Brookes

The world has between 6,000 and 7,000 languages, but as many as half of them will be extinct by the end of this century. Another and even more dramatic way in which this cultural diversity is shrinking concerns the alphabets in which those languages are written.

Writing has become so dominated by a small number of global cultures that those 6,000-7,000 languages are written in fewer than 100 alphabets. Moreover, at least a third of the world’s remaining alphabets are endangered—no longer taught in schools, no longer used for commerce or government, understood only by a few elders, restricted to a few monasteries or used only in ceremonial documents, magic spells, or secret love letters.

The Endangered Alphabets Project, which consists of an exhibition of carvings and a book, is the first-ever attempt to bring attention to this issue—and to do so by creating unforgettable, enigmatic artwork.

brookes@champlain.edu

6. Obituaries

Yakeyale (She remembers) Maria Christjohn Hinton

Oneida Longhouse Faithkeeper, Teacher
June 5, 1910 – July 28, 2013

In 2002, the Indigenous Language Institute honored Yakeyale Maria as Elder Language Teacher of the Year. Yakeyale was a very active woman who directly experienced many of the things we refer to as historic events. When she was born in 1910, Indians were not citizens so she, along with that generation of Native people, became United States citizens in 1924. She was subjected to the oppressive policies of the federal Indian Boarding School system at an early age, at first unable to speak English. Like most Indian students at boarding schools, she was immersed in English and discouraged from using her Oneida language, which was the official policy of the government. Despite these experiences she was always positive about her life and worked to make things better wherever she found herself.

She kept her language and eventually became a teacher of the Oneida language at the Oneida Tribal School. She earned her degree in 1979 from the University of Wisconsin. Her brother, Amos Christjohn, was also an Oneida language teacher at both the Oneida Elementary School and the Oneida High School. Both of their lives reflected a family dedication of service to the Oneida community whether it was the Holy Apostle’s Church, the traditional Oneida Longhouse or the school. Yakeyale and Amos’ older sister, Anna, was an outspoken advocate for Indian Education and would not hesitate to remind the Councilmembers of their duty to the Oneida people. Yakeyale was of that mold but a quieter Oneida voice, one who was dedicated to the truth that our children should know tsi’niyukwalihot’ oliwakai (the old ways of our ancestors), as an integral part of their/our education.

In the years following her retirement, well into her 90s, Yakeyale continued to teach ukwehunkweneha (our real words = the Oneida language) at school and from her home.

Yakeyale was a revered, respected and accomplished Oneida woman to the moment she left us in the early evening on July 28th, 2013. Her immediate and extended family, her community, friends and colleagues are honored by her presence in their/our lives. Her inspiration shall continue to remind us of our responsibility to our descendants as well as our ancestors, our culture and language and in time, the heartache we feel now will become the energy to carry on tsi’niyukwalihot’. Yakeyale gave us the message that was given to her.

Kaihuhatati
Jerry L. Hill, President of the Board of Directors
Indigenous Language Institute, Santa Fe, NM 87505 US

7. Publications, Book Reviews

Kaurna learner’s guide


Reviewed by Nicholas Ostler

The Kaurna language has been spoken in the Adelaide area of South Australia from time immemorial. But it was reduced from being the fluent medium of a population of some 700 people in 1836 (when British colonists first arrived) to effective silence in the 1860s, with the death of the last native speaker, Ivaritji, coming in 1929.

In that brief period, a single generation, between colonization and the infamous banning by Governor Grey, the language had been quite effectively documented by German Lutheran missionaries, C.G. Teichelmann and C.W. Schürmann, including a sketch grammar, a corpus of sentences (not restricted to translations of Gospel material) and a vocabulary of well over 3,000 words. Using their work, and more fragmentary records by
many others, linguists, led above all by Rob Amery (and including his Doktor-mutter Jane Simpson), as well as an increasing band of enthusiastic local people, have since 1990 been endeavouring to decipher and re-constitute – in their word, to ‘reawaken’ – Kaurna as a functioning language. This work represents the most complete published product of that endeavour, a rounded grammar of the language, presented in such a way that it is accessible, and indeed enticing, to people who are not linguists, but simply want to gain a competence in the language. Of course, it is presumed that most of these people will be of Kaurna parentage, or at least resident in the Adelaide area.

The work is unique among grammars that I have read in beginning with 23 Profiles – i.e. photos, mini-biographies and bidding statements – of significant actors in the effort to reawaken Kaurna, beginning with Elder Kauwanu Warritya Yer-lurburka O’Brien, who gave the first speech in the revived language in 1989, and Ngarrpadla Alitya Wallara Rigney, the principal of the Kaurna Plains High School, which hosted the first Kaurna school language program. The book is filled with a sense of actual people’s lives, and what they can make out of linguistic materials, fitting the 19th century vocabulary into a milieu which is very clearly 21st century urban – for such is modern Adelaide.

There is even a sense of slang being born, as the word paiiya – never explicitly translated, but cropping up here and there – seems to be expanding from a word for a snake, into a calque of Oz English ‘deadly’; and now a good one-word description of an awesome bike ride. This is conveyed as much through the illustrations as the text.

The strategy of the language teaching task that the book adopts is to divide the book in two: the first sixteen chapters are more like a phrase book, though one with copious explanations, giving simple responses and dialogues for use in a variety of situations, while the following section, chapters 17 to 25, give more scholarly detail, both about the language and the evidence for it, and also systematic accounts of morphology and more complex syntax. The result is a book that should satisfy users of whatever level of linguistic preparedness. It also lets the user in on some of the (very necessary) tactics of word invention in a reawakening language.

Although the book is not short, then, in giving explanations, where there are evident rules to be formulated, it also delights the user by showing rather than always instructing. The final chapter is given over to full-colour illustrations of complicated scenes, which are extensively labelled, so giving the learner a direct – rather than a translated – feel for the reference of terms. It also labels two identical family snapshots with different arrays of terms, revealing the different network that that kinship imposes on the same group when seen by grandmother as against grandson. Although the scenes are familiar, whether drawn or photographed, the struggle to express their details in recently-learnt Kaurna validates the claim – made by so many of the profiles – that the value of learning a language lies in organizing the world in a different way.

If the book has a fault, it is a physical one. The book is produced in A4 format on coated stock, making it rather heavy and unmanageable, especially in small hands, even if its lavish illustrations are beautiful to behold. No pocket will hold it. There is also no universal vocabulary, either into or out of Kaurna, a fact which will make it harder to use for a different reason. Perhaps it will have an extended life on line, however, where both these faults will cease to have meaning.

Overall, this is an excellent work which will teach Kaurna learners much. Yet, even more, it can act as an example of how to reawaken “dormant” languages. Amery and Simpson can be congratulated of setting such a good example, which must reflect many years of planning, practice and execution. All you enthusiasts for languages once thought dead or moribund, go and do ye likewise!

Poetry in Occitan


Reviewed by Nicholas Ostler

This book is unlike many others published by Boutle in recording a distinctive individual voice, rather than the collected works of a culture united by a particular language. In this case the language is Occitan, native to the south of France. The Occitan words appear with a facing-page translation into English. The book’s intent is best revealed in a few sentences from the blurb:

in Solstice, the Call of Janus (Solstici, lo Bram de Janus)…
a woman … arrives alone amongst a rural community on the eve of the summer solstice. As annual rituals are performed, she encounters the sensual forces of a universe that questions the fixed nature of temporal and earthly borders.

The rest of the work rejoices in the resonant title, Dawn of the Wolves (L’Alba dels Lops).

The poetry is – for this reviewer – impossible to characterize, but creates a distinct atmosphere, within which the reader may pause, while struggling to elucidate the meanings. Many of the poems are extremely short (two or three lines). Meter and rhyme are absent, the main form being the pattern on the page.


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**Language Documentation and Conservation Journal**

We are pleased to announce the addition of new items to Volume 7 of LD&C.

http://www.nflrc.hawaii.edu/ldc/current/

The International Workshop on Language Preservation: An Experiment in Text Collection and Language Technology (Steven Bird, David Chiang, Friedel Frowein, Andrea L. Berez, Mark Eby, Florian Hanke, Ryan Shelby, Ashish Vaswani, Ada Wan)

Building the British Sign Language Corpus (Adam Schembri, Jordan Fenlon, Ramas Rentelis, Sally Reynolds, Kearsy Cormier)

Review of ‘Language documentation: Practice and values’ (Rosés Labrada, Jorge Emilio)

A reminder that Special Publication No. 6: 'Microphone in the mud' by Laura Robinson was also recently uploaded. It is a novel based on her fieldwork experience. "A young woman battles armed terrorists, a kidnapper, malaria, a tsunami, and dial-up Internet as she documents the endangered languages of hunter-gatherers in the jungles of the Philippines.”

http://www.nflrc.hawaii.edu/ldc/sp06/

We are having a subscription drive right now so please encourage your friends and colleagues to subscribe (http://www.nflrc.hawaii.edu/ldc/subscribe.html). While subscription is free, it helps us justify our existence with our funders.

Nick Thieberger, Editor

Language Documentation & Conservation Journal

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**8. Places to go on the Web**

**Digital Chrestomathy of Raeto-Romansh**

If you were interested in the feature on the Romansh language of Switzerland and its history elsewhere in this issue, you might also like to know about the Digital Chrestomathy of Raeto-Romansh which is available on-line. It is being compiled by Prof. Dr. Jürgen Rolshoven, Sprachliche Informationsverarbeitung, Institut für Linguistik, Universität zu Köln; and Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Schmitz, Universitäts- und Stadtbibliothek Köln.

The Partners in the project are: USB Köln, Societad Rätoromanische, Legat Cadonau, Institut für Kulturforschung Graubünden. Assistants on the project are: Claes Neufeld M.A., Fabian Steeg M.A., Michail Atanassov, Frauke Schmidt, Dr. Florentin Lutz (Bern CH), with support from DFG, Legat Cadonau, Institut für Kulturforschung Graubünden, Amt für Kultur Graubünden.

The project was run from November 2009 to October 2011.

**Description:**

The object of the project is the digital extension of the Rätoromanischen Chrestomathie by Caspar Decurtins, which appeared in the journal „Romanische Forschungen“ (Erlangen, 1896-1919). The Rätoromanischen Chrestomathie is the most important collection of texts so far and an unrivalled source for linguists, literary scholars and ethnologists. The aim is to make available the complete text and to provide a corpus of Raeto-Romansh texts as the basis for corpus linguistic and philological research. Part of the intention is to develop specialised methods of proof-correction and reconstruction in interlinked systems. Automatic and interactive proof-correction will be combined through a Wiki. The interactive proof-correction is being integrated by the Raeto-Romansh speech community in collaboration with the Societad Rätoromanische, Chur, Switzerland. The techniques set out in the plan should then be applicable to other text corpora in minority languages. The project is thus something of a prototype for projects dedicated to the provision of specialised text corpora principally aimed at the documentation and preservation of smaller and endangered languages. The speakers of these languages are to collaborate actively in the proof-correction and use of the materials.

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**New video venture for Nahual in Mexico**

**From Norbert Francis, 25 September 2013**

TV Malintzin, from Puebla and Tlaxcala states, announces the inauguration of a series of short video programs featuring the oral tradition of the Nahual-speaking communities from this region of Mexico. The videos are available at:

http://www.youtube.com/user/TVMalintzin. Mainly in Nahual, the series currently includes traditional narrative and oral history. Future programs are planned that will incorporate poetry and other genres of interest to members of the communities and to investigators and students of the Nahual language and culture. For more information and to become a Friend of TV Malintzin, go to:

https://www.facebook.com/pages/TVMalintzin/609100105778209. The mission of TV Malintzin consists in the compilation and dissemination of this material of literary and artistic merit, founded over hundreds of years of creative language expression, now in gradual decline and likely in the future to be in danger of significant erosion in the highland communities of Puebla and Tlaxcala, along with the Nahual language itself.

The following programs are now available:

1. Bienvenida al canal TV Malintzin
2. Entrevista con el Mtro. Carmen Zepeda: Año 1923 (Spanish)
3. In tomin
4. Coyotl huan Tlacuatl
5. In Pillo (primera versión)
6. Tesoro escondido de la Revolución
7. Quehaceres cuando era niña
8. Historia de lo que pasó después de la matanza de 1968
9. La señora y su amante
10. El hombre que no quería poner ofrenda
11. El cielo emborrugado
12. Historias de Chalma
13. La mujer nahuale
14. In Pillo (segunda versión)
15. El nevero de la Malintzin
16. El hombre que no creía en las mujeres piedra encantadoras
17. El compadre de la muerte
18. Pastorela: La adoración de los reyes
Livonian scholar receives Baltic Assembly prize for science

From the Latvian parliament (saeima.lv) web-site, 7 October 2013

On Friday, 4 October, the Joint Jury convened in the Saeima to evaluate nominees for the Baltic Assembly prizes, and it decided to award this year’s Prize for Science to Renāte Blumberga. “Although the Livonian language, history and other aspects have already been studied, Renāte Blumberga’s scientific work has contributed immensely to compiling historical testimonies in Latvia, Estonia and Finland,” said Valdis Muktpāvels, a member of the Jury from Latvia. The expert also stressed that Latvia is not the only home land of Livs, as this ethnic group has been studied by their ethnic brothers – Finns and Estonians. Therefore, the research carried out by Blumberga is of international importance and will foster cooperation in Livonian studies among various countries, said Muktpāvels. It is planned to award the prizes during the annual session of the Baltic Assembly, which will take place on 28 November in Riga. Each prize is EUR 5,000.

The Joint Jury consists of nine experts in literature, science and the arts from Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia.

Letter to the editor

From Eisel Mazar, referring to the article reproduced from the Sacramento Bee in Ogmios 51:
The article on the Iu-Mien (a.k.a. Yao) is impossible to read without much wincing and rolling-of-the-eyes. Much of this stuff is untrue, or, worse, half-true, and thus false but seemingly believable.
Alas, one cannot expect too much erudition about the languages of Laos and Yunnan from the Sacramento Bee.

By way of explanation and correction, Eisel Mazar offers the following article:

Endangered Languages in and around Laos: Some Opportunities

From a very pragmatic point of view, we could group the languages of the area into four categories, by their written status.
① There are languages that are not written now, and have no prior written tradition.
② There are languages that were formerly written (in their own orthography) but are no longer written, and now increasingly exist as an adjunct to some other language of formal education (such as Lao, Thai, etc.). In some cases, this is a clear prelude to language extinction, but in other cases, people seem confident (rightly or wrongly) that their languages can thrive through diglossia.
③ There are languages that have new writing systems, and now have the potential to take on a durable existence in this form.
④ There are the official written languages supported by institutions (both secular and religious) that may themselves (nevertheless) be endangered, or face serious questions as to their long-term viability.
To expand on the last point first, it is very obvious that lowland Lao is not in a strong position within Laos, where it is the first language of a minority of the citizens, albeit the minority concentrated in the largest cities, controlling the military, and so on. Meanwhile, the same language (lowland Lao) exists within Thailand in category 2, where ethnically-Lao citizens of Thailand will invariably read, write and receive education in Thai, but generally continue to speak Lao at home (if not in the workplace).
Under category 3, the best-known examples are those that have had the most involvement from foreign missionaries, and that use scripts more-or-less derivative of the Roman alphabet. Lisu has been relatively successful, whereas written Akha, Iu-Mien (Yao), and Wa are relative failures.
The idea that the modern Lao alphabet could be extensible to include other languages was reflected on (in the past tense) by various government officials whom I spoke to, and documented in one or two reports that I saw. The basic principle was to produce new consonants (where necessary) on the same pattern as Lao follows for $\text{f} + \text{d} = \text{r}(h+m = hm)$. The Lao government tried for decades to encourage the Hmong to use a modified form of the Lao alphabet to (phonetically) write their own language (rather than systems of writing that were ineluctably linked to both America and Christianity). I tried to find samples of this during my time in the region, but while I did speak with government officials who could remember seeing such things (produced sometimes in conjunction with efforts at having radio-broadcasts in Hmong), I never found an extant publication or pamphlet of this kind.
The vast majority of Lao people (speaking any language) are probably unaware that any such policy (of many languages united by one orthography, mutatis mutandis) was ever pursued, and there is no trace of it whatsoever in the new curriculum that the Lao government produced in partnership with Australian aid (post 2000, with much of the activity being more recent than 2005, when foreign donors became increasingly involved in alleviating the scarcity of textbooks in rural areas, etc.). Although this is misleading, the impression one would get from looking at the materials on paper is that the current education strategy does not acknowledge the existence of minority languages at all—neither Tai-Kadai languages that could be easily accommodated by a lowland Lao education system, nor indigenous Mon-Khmer languages (such as Khmu) that would really require unique educational materials to be designed.
One of the Lao officials overseeing the Australian-funded project explained to me the modestly bilingual aspect of their plans (I note that she was herself a member of a non-Tai ethnic minority). The government’s strategy had been to recruit young people from the various target villages who spoke the local minority language as their mother tongue, and to then bring them into the city, and provide them with teacher-training, to then send them back to the same village, to teach (bilingually) in their community of origin (a plan devised and pursued very much in dependence upon foreign donors, with the Australian government being the most vocal).
From a Lao perspective, it might be supposed that the government expected that the same type of polyglot society that had been ubiquitous within the Lao military a few decades earlier would (similarly) spring up spontaneously in these conditions. Although this expectation reflects the historical experience of
many administrators in the country (who are themselves military veterans) it is false.

From an Australian perspective, however, it is difficult to see how the new model of education was meant to create anything other than a monolingual future for Laotians (as Australia has pursued its own monolingual future, in a genocidal context, etc.). Vague statements of policy such as “education for all” really do seem to mean “language assimilation for all”, from the standpoint of the donor nations.

Conversely, I heard several different perspectives on a foreign-funded project to create educational films in the Khmu language that ended in disaster. The objective of providing minority-language education (via DVDs) was reportedly regarded positively by the higher levels of the Party in the capital city, but was reacted to with fear and apprehension by the local (provincial) Communist officials. This project ended with the sole foreign executive fleeing the country amidst death-threats, and work suddenly stopping on all projects. This scenario is a consequence of the structure of Communism, though not of any particular government policy; instead, it reflects the lack of any clear policy toward endangered languages, and the conflicted feelings that exist (but cannot be discussed) amongst the (unelected) government’s apparatchiks.

It is also noteworthy that the Australian reports on these programs refer to training “ethnic minority teachers” as standard phraseology. This conflicts with the Lao government policy of never referring to the non-Lao languages as “minority” (partly in recognition of the fact that they are, collectively, the numerical majority in the country, and partly out of a peculiar sense of showing respect for the rural periphery that many Lao officials whom I spoke to took very seriously). The Australian phrasing also seems to echo a British-empire schedule of values, presuming the bloodline of the teachers to be more important than the languages they are capable of communicating in, or the languages they are actually trained to teach in.

Quite a number of anecdotes reached my ears about the defects of the ensuing process of reform. Reportedly, many of the teachers of the old curriculum quit as soon as the new textbooks were distributed, protesting that their own level of education was not high enough to teach the new material. However, their eagerness to resign also reflected the fact that the wages for the job were so low that they typically regarded this as a sort of hobby, supplemental to some other job or role in the community (as housewife, farmer, etc.).

The ideological shift in the textbooks may have been significant for some of these teachers, but this was never confessed to me directly. I spoke at length with a woman who received her own childhood education in a cave, taking shelter from U.S. aerial bombardment on the Lao-Vietnamese border. She had given up teaching (to instead earn her income from a manual trade) due to a variety of factors that she specified. However, left unstated was the significance (if any) of the shift from the “anti-feudalist” rhetoric of “high Communism” to a vaguely nationalistic narrative that embraced the former kings of Laos as a continuum leading up to the current era.

Although I would not describe the woman I interviewed as a believer in Communism, the discontinuity between her own education and the type of education she would be (now) expected to provide is extreme. When the financial motivation to teach is extremely weak, ideological motivation will be significant, even if it is also weak. Conversely, if the purpose of education is merely economic, it is impossible to ask teachers to sacrifice their own economic interests to support the education system.

With all of these factors taken together, a significant number of the people who received teacher-training did not (thereafter) accept the job, or else they did not keep the job for very long. The rate of pay was so low relative to the cost of bus-fare (required to reach rural areas) that teachers would often arrive weeks late for the start of the term because they would (in effect) go on strike until their superiors agreed to (informally) pay their transport costs. I saw one example of this myself, and then learned that it was common through inquiry. I have only seen Australian reports stating the number of “ethnic minority” persons trained, not measuring the real outcomes by contrast (i.e., how many of the trainees actually taught for how many years, in how many languages, after training was complete); a 2009 AusAID report simply stated that it had doubts as to how many of these teachers really remained in the field. If reliable statistics exist, I haven’t seen them.

The Lao government remains very much reliant on “local hiring” to recruit people who speak local languages, as they never developed any formal capacity in minority languages within the capital or central educational institutions; this has become an intractable problem because, fundamentally, the Communist Party no longer has a monopoly on upward social mobility. Military service and Buddhist monasticism, likewise, have very much receded in significance as routes to upward social mobility for the rural poor (of any ethnic group).

Anyone from an ethnic-minority village who has the knowledge of how to travel back-and-forth to the capital city is (ipso facto) already in a position to be “relatively wealthy” by the standards of that village, and will be able to earn more than a government schoolteacher (either in the village, in the capital, or as a middleman between the two). In one cluster of villages on the Burmese border (where several mutually-incomprehensible languages were spoken), I was delighted to discover just one man who could communicate with me in Lao. I was later told by others that he was indeed the only man who could speak Lao in those villages, and that he had recently been recruited by the Communist Party for some bilingual administrative role.

Within a month of my meeting him, he had apparently been imprisoned as he had become involved in cross-border drug trafficking as soon as he had adopted his new position as a government official. This reflects both the absolute scarcity of bilingual persons available for the government to employ and, also, the desperation of such people to seek out corruption in a
context of laughably low salaries, and near-zero upward social mobility.

Meanwhile, Buddhism has lost its ancient monopoly on the teaching of literacy, and monastic education in Laos has very little to offer its students aside from food and shelter (although this is, itself, a significant difference from the secular education system, where neither housing nor meals are provided).

In the year 1976, the number of lower-secondary students receiving their education within the Buddhist monasteries of Laos was 26,268. This had grown, in 1996 to 119,992. With the acceleration of “western influence” in the decade that followed thereafter, a casual observer might expect the numbers to then stagnate or drop, but no: in 2006, the number had increased again to 183,588 children.

While the budget of the foreign-funded education reforms can be measured in the millions of dollars, it deserves to be asked if (empirically) this has had a greater effect on language and ethnic identity than the (penniless) Buddhist temples. The total numbers (for students of all ages) indicate that 36% of Lao students were receiving their education within monastery walls in 2006. Very nearly zero of the monastic students are female, and so this represents a much larger portion of the male population.

For the most part, the monasteries are very much within Laos, as they would often be represented in a variety of writing systems sharing a single wall. These factors do not exclusively involve Tai-Kadai peoples. Within Yunnan, there are Mon-Khmer peoples who converted to Theravada Buddhism centuries ago while continuing to speak their own languages (e.g., the Bulang or Blang) and, within Laos, I heard one detailed account of a Khmu village that had converted to Theravada Buddhism as a whole, under the charismatic leadership of a local war hero, in recent years. Their language, culture, etc., remained Khmu, but they had decided to reject the animal-sacrifices of their traditional religion, and also to reject the message of Christian missionaries (who have been active in the Khmu language). This type of scenario relies totally on the structure of power created by Communism, and yet has nothing whatsoever to do with any intentional policy of the Communist Party.

The status of endangered languages within Laos has to be understood in this peculiar context: the official language of the state is itself rather weak and marginal. Communism is still the official ideology, but Theravada Buddhism has re-emerged as the state religion, with expectations that it will perform its former (and ancient) educational function for a large number of students, but without any institutional capacity to do so. Perhaps thankfully, Buddhist education in Laos has had no foreign involvement comparable to Australia’s intervention in secular education. What, therefore, is the future of Laos’s endangered languages in an era of open borders, electronic communication, and so on?

As a sort of test-case, I think it’s worthwhile to consider the reformed Shan script as a non-Romanized example of the third category, as set out at the start of the article. This new form given to the written language is pliant enough to work for a variety of dialects and Northern Tai languages, and it now shows more potential than (e.g.) the 20th century scripts devised for Tai minorities by the local governments of Yunnan, China (or the attempts to simply foist typewriter-Thai, mutatis mutandis, onto minority languages of Northern Thailand). On the other side of Burma’s borders, I have observed the new Shan writing expanding through distinctively 21st century media, such as Karaoke DVDs, etc., and this clearly has the potential to appeal to speakers of minority languages (other than Shan) that are in categories 1 and 2 in the region, either because their own language has some level of mutual-comprehensibility with Shan, or because they feel more sympathy toward Shan than a totally alien language-of-state (such as Chinese in Yunnan, or, possibly, some will regard Burmese, Lao and Thai as more alien than Shan, etc.).

Is something similar possible for Khmu, and other non-Tai-Kadai languages? I would like to think so, but it obviously will not transpire under Christian missionary leadership, nor under Australian government patronage.

However, all of the languages in the third category rely on upward social mobility (or the perception of it) to motivate students. If there is no way to earn money through a language, it recedes into category 1 or 2, as a language of the elderly left behind on the homestead, while the younger generation pursues economic opportunities in the city (or at least on other farms, etc.)—and this is, generally, a decisive step toward language extinction within the next 100 years.

The economy of the anti-Communist refugee camps (disbanded within living memory) was a powerful motivation for ethnic minorities to assert their own identity, and intensify their commitment to their particular language and dialect. They were powerfully motivated to be non-Lao, non-Thai, non-Vietnamese, and non-Chinese (although they may have, as individuals, had strong links to any or all of those languages, before arriving in the camp). This was rewarded partly by the peculiar politics of American intervention in the region (and the explicitly tribal organization of the refugee camps themselves), partly through the prospect of migrating to the U.S. (or at least of receiving money from relatives relocated to the U.S., etc.), and partly by various foreign (Christian) churches. In this context it became economically and politically viable (e.g.) for the Iu-Mien to be primarily or exclusively Iu-Mien, with English as their (aspirational or actual) second language, rejecting (or minimizing) their links to other languages like Chinese and Lao. Today, that could not possibly make economic sense for an Iu-Mien family living within Laos; this type of motivation has disappeared, and both the scholars of minority languages and the native speakers are (frankly) still in a period of post-war adjustment.
Consider, also, that the refugee camps provided educational materials translated into these myriad minority languages (on a shoestring budget, with hand-drawn illustrations, etc.), whereas the Australian-funded national education system of Laos provides nothing of the kind for any language (other than Lao). Having spent many hours with textbooks of this kind (sometimes published by photocopier, etc.) I would point out that a future historian might find it absurd that refugee camps produced better textbooks (for many of these languages) than the Communist government of Laos or China in a period of relative peace and prosperity. The prospects for the endangered languages “at the bottom” have shifted around with the geopolitics “at the top”. The older generation in Laos today has lived through the disappearance of French, Russian and German as prestige languages. Despite the geographic distances involved, links to East Germany had been especially strong (under the Schwesternationen system, with German-run colleges and factories in Vientiane), whereas contact with China was almost nil due to the hostilities of the Sino-Soviet split. Through their recent economic reintegration into their own continent, the various peoples of Laos have re-discovered nearby “giant” languages (that seemed so distant during the Cold War era), such as Chinese Burmese, even Japanese, and so on. Foreign donors need to sympathize with the fact that the younger generation may sincerely aspire to learn a major language such as Chinese, and to visit China (etc.), rather than devoting their lives to the language of the village that they happen to have been born in. Whereas international volunteers (myself included) made a choice to study obscure languages, people born into these circumstances never made any such choice, and instead have to struggle with various routes to bilingualism, trilingualism, etc., just to have access to basic social services (the electricity bill is written in Lao, and the nearest dentist may speak only Vietnamese, and so on). In terms of actionable advice, (1) it is clear to me that a very small charity could make a positive contribution to the status of any of the endangered languages of the region through the same type of cultural activities that I have mentioned the new Shan script as now (commercially) engaged in. In terms of an affordable, effective intervention (with few negative side-effects) it has to be said that funding Karaoke videos in the target language is hard to beat –and it does not require the type of government involvement that brought disaster upon the Khmu film project mentioned. (2) For charities working with a larger budget, or on a larger scale, the clear challenge is to provide parallel educational materials that supplement whatever forms of upward social mobility already exist in the given society. It is clearly impossible for a person who speaks Khmu to learn chemistry in Khmu only; however, it would be genuinely meaningful if they were able to study subjects of this kind with the Khmu language in parallel, and this might avoid the trap of the younger generation only being able to discuss “simple things” in their grandparents’ tongue, while relying on the language of the state for the adult realm of discourse (about commercial and political affairs, etc.).
In the light of increasingly complex and variable multilingual environments and their impact on language endangerment the following thematic and partly overlapping areas of research will be explored:

Theme session 1:
Language Endangerment, Language Ecology and Globalization
The first session examines the richness and complexity of linguistic diversity and language contact situations from the perspective of language endangerment, with a focus on case studies from around the world. In this regard, topics such as the diversification of languages, their adaptation to new ecologies, and the relation between linguistic and biological diversity (i.e. ecolinguistics) will be discussed. In the context of globalization, the impact of English in different parts of the world, such as Africa, Asia, the Americas, Europe and the Pacific region will be explored. The spread of English to virtually all parts of the world has brought along completely new challenges to the research in this area, such as the effects of the gradual shift in the functions of language (e.g. Europe), as well as the impact of the ever increasing changing role of English as a second language and as the preferred language in communication among non-native speakers from a variety of linguistic backgrounds. The contemporary global processes of socio-cultural, economic and environmental disruption represent a threat to the world’s fast-declining linguistic diversity. Globalization also entails discussion of attitudinal and ethnic identity factors as necessary for conflict resolution.

Theme Session 2:
Language Endangerment, Language Policy/Planning and Ideology
When languages and linguistic varieties are endangered, language policy often takes the form of specific ideologies and attitudes that underlie language planning strategies and language management. This session explores language policy and language planning models, activities associated with minority and endangered languages, and issues such as linguistic imperialism and language inequality in communities around the world. Are language policies the way to maintain and promote an endangered minority language or can they sometimes be counterproductive?

In this vein, should we insist on promoting and implementing mother tongue education or should we further encourage the use of an ex-colonial and official language such as English in multilingual and multicultural contexts?

In particular, we invite abstracts on the following topics:
- Language policy, the nation and nationalism
- Cognitive models of language policy (rationalist vs. romantic)
- Language inequality and linguistic imperialism
- Empowerment of the populations through the use of indigenous languages
- Linguistic human rights
- Colonial and post-colonial language policies (e.g. Africa, the Americas, Asia and the Pacific)
- Language policy and medium of instruction in education
- Language planning and policy in the context of protection of linguistic diversity vs. promotion of linguistic homogeneity
- Governmental support of endangered languages as a moral obligation

Theme Session 3:
Language Endangerment and Documentation
One response to language endangerment has been the creation of a new discipline within linguistics labelled language documentation or documentary linguistics. With the disappearance of unwritten and undocumented languages, humanity would lose not only an invaluable portion of its linguistic and cultural wealth but also important ancestral knowledge embedded, in particular, in indigenous languages.

The last session, therefore, aims to assess what can be done to promote the documentation, preservation and revitalization of endangered languages. A further question concerns the forms and functions in the structural system of an endangered language. For example, from the perspective of cognitive semantics, metaphors are considered to play an important role in the ecosystem of endangered languages: they appear not to be universal but rather shaped by the sociocultural worldviews of native speakers.

In particular, we invite abstracts on the following topics:
- The role of the linguist in language maintenance, promotion and revitalization
- Degrees of endangerment: ethnolinguistic vitality
- Revitalization of endangered languages: case studies
- Language obsolescence and language death
- Language documentation and documentary linguistics
- Information technologies: digital archiving and the role of the new media
- Language preservation projects and language activism (e.g. Hans Rausing Endangered Languages Project, etc.)
- Structural changes in endangered language systems
- Endangered metaphors and metaphors in endangered languages

Conference fees:
The conference fee is EUR 75 and is payable on arrival.

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Fourth Cambridge Conference on Language Endangerment

From Dr. Mari Jones
I am delighted to announce that the Fourth Cambridge Conference on Language Endangerment will take place in the Alison Richard Building, University of Cambridge on July 4th 2014. This year’s theme is ‘Orthography Development for Language Maintenance and Revitalisation’.

For further details, and the Call for Papers, please see the conference website:
http://www.mml.cam.ac.uk/news/fourth-cambridge-conference-language-endangerment

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FEL Manifesto

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:

- 36% 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 recognize in language issues the principles of self-determination, and group and individual rights. It will pay due regard to economic, social, cultural, community and humanitarian considerations. Although it may work with any international, regional or local Authority, it will retain its independence throughout. Membership will be open to those in all walks of life.

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

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

FEL is a charity, registered in England and Wales since 1996. Details of FEL’s publications and activities, and how to join us, can be found at www.qmios.org