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1. Editorial

Now that your Editor is also Secretary of the Foundation, I have the duty of typing up the minutes of our committee meetings. It is becoming a time-honoured tradition that under the item headed ‘Fund-raising’ there is nothing to say. That has always been a weak point in the running of this Foundation. It isn’t always easy for a charitable foundation such as ours, devoted to such an intangible thing as language, to either run fund-raising events or sell merchandise related to our rather invisible topic. Now, however, we are welcoming new blood onto the Foundation’s Committee, and with that we can look forward to new initiatives to raise funds for your Foundation, which you can be assured will be ploughed back into our main activities, of giving annual grants and running annual conferences.

Christopher Moseley

2. Development of the Foundation

Your FEL Committee

Since the Annual General Meeting in Okinawa, our FEL committee has been expanded to include several co-opted members to occupy new posts to enhance our activities. The full committee now consists of:

Honorary Officers
Nicholas Ostler (Chairman)
Christopher Moseley (Secretary, Editor of Ogmios)
Steven Krauwer (Treasurer)

Executive Committee
Femmy Amraal (Grants monitor)
Serena d’Agostino (i/c Communication - Social Media)
Hakim Elnazarov (Grants officer)
Tjeerd de Graaf (Co-ordinator, Regional Interest Groups)
David Nathan (Web Editor)
Mary Jane Norris
Claudia Soria (Membership Secretary)
Adriano Truscott (Assistant Editor of Ogmios)
Gil’ad Zuckermann

3. Endangered Languages in the News

By using language rooted in Andes, Internet shows hope to save it

By Kirk Semple, from the New York Times, 15 August 2014

Segundo J. Angamarca, half-hidden in a thicket of electronic equipment on a recent Friday evening, put on his headphones and glanced around the room, a makeshift Internet radio station in his apartment in the Bronx.

“We’re all set, no?” he asked in Spanish. He punched a few buttons on a console and, leaning into a live microphone, began speaking in the percussive phonemes of a completely different tongue, one with roots in the Andean highlands of his native Ecuador.

“We’re here!” he announced. “We’re here tonight for you, to help bring happiness, from Radio El Tambo Stereo.”

And so began the inaugural broadcast of “Kichwa Hatari,” perhaps the only radio program in the United States conducted in Kichwa, an Ecuadorian variant of Quechua, an indigenous South American language spoken mainly in Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru.

Despite its humble source, the show’s principle objective is anything but modest: to save a fading language.

Scholars say that Kichwa use is most likely on the decline worldwide, due in part to the increasing use of English and Spanish among native speakers. In the growing Ecuadorian diaspora in the United States, the sustenance of the language, the scholars say, is undermined by the lack of Kichwa classes and other resources as well as by the push among many Ecuadorian immigrants and their children to integrate quickly into the mainstream.

New York City’s Ecuadorian population now numbers more than 137,000, making it one of the city’s fastest-growing immigrant populations. Yet the number of those immigrants and their offspring who speak Kichwa remains unclear.

Charlie S. Uruchima, a master’s student at New York University who was born in the city to Ecuadorian immigrant parents, said the Kichwa-speaking population had been largely invisible, subsumed within the broader Ecuadorian and Latino populations. Census Bureau surveys do not specifically measure Kichwa use.

The weekly show is a collaboration between Mr. Angamarca and his two co-hosts: Mr. Uruchima and Luis Antonio Lema, an Ecuadorian-born language professor and court translator.

Mr. Uruchima met Mr. Lema, a native Kichwa speaker, in March. The Bronx public school that Mr. Lema’s child attends had called N.Y.U. looking for translation help. (Since 2008, the university has offered Quechua classes,
helping to promote the language.) The school, in the Parkchester neighborhood, had some 50 Kichwa-speaking families and some of the parents were unable to speak either English or Spanish.

Mr. Lema and Mr. Uruchima then met Mr. Angamarca, also a native Kichwa speaker, whose station normally broadcasts in Spanish to a largely Ecuadorian audience.

Mr. Angamarca proposed the idea for a radio show. The three men envisioned a program that would address the concerns of Kichwa speakers, including the problem of language isolation among those who spoke neither English nor Spanish. More broadly, they hoped the show might help to unify the atomized Kichwa-speaking population in New York and beyond. Members of the population find it difficult “to reach out to each other and articulate the issues affecting the community as a whole,” Mr. Uruchima said. He said he hoped the program would become “a space where all of this can change.”

The radio show began on July 25. Around 5:40 p.m., 20 minutes before the scheduled start, Mr. Angamarca and Mr. Uruchima arrived at the studio, in a spare room in the apartment where Mr. Angamarca lives with his family. Promotional posters for the station and two guitars hung on the walls. The rooftops of the Highbridge neighborhood were visible through the gaps in translucent magenta-colored curtains. The hosts had two guests: Elva Ambía Rebatta, founder of the New York Quechua Initiative, and Fabian Muenala, a founder of Kichwa Nation, a cultural group based in New York. (Mr. Muenala and Mr. Lema were colleagues in an indigenous social and political movement in Ecuador during the 1980s.)

A doctoral student in anthropology at N.Y.U. who has been making a documentary about Ms. Ambía Rebatta was filming the event, and a program director from the Endangered Language Alliance, based in New York, was recording the show.

Mr. Uruchima wore a T-shirt with the words, in Quechua: “Am I dreaming or do I hear Quechua?”

Mr. Lema finally appeared with only minutes to spare, apologizing for his lateness. And then it was showtime.

“We’re here to help you guys,” Mr. Angamarca told the listeners. “Today we’re going to present songs, stories.” He added, “We’re also going to learn.”

At the first break, as traditional San Juanito folk music played on the air, Mr. Angamarca slipped off his headphones. “A little nervous,” he confessed. Glancing at his computer monitor, he exclaimed: “One hundred and twelve!” There were 112 people listening to the broadcast, plus others who had tuned into the live video stream on the station’s website.

For the next two hours, the hosts and guests discussed language, culture and current events, and they talked about their lives.

“For you, what is Kichwa?” Mr. Angamarca asked.

“Kichwa is life,” Mr. Muenala replied.

Mr. Lema said: “Kichwa is a language, Kichwa is a place. Kichwa is a story.”

“We don’t want the language to come to an end,” he added.

As the program drew to a close, Mr. Angamarca said to his listeners, “We should feel embarrassed that while foreigners take interest in our Kichwa language and indigenous traditions, we, as Kichwas ourselves, are constantly ashamed of our language and traditions.

“Hopefully this program will provide an incentive for us to start valuing our language, culture in this country.”

Off the air, Mr. Uruchima surprised the group with a cake decorated with the words: “Kichwa Hatari!”

“We can do a lot of things if we’re unified,” Ms. Ambía Rebatta said, before the group went out into the Bronx twilight. “Really, this is like a dream.”

Cambridge studied the future of the world’s languages, and the results are alarming

From the World-mic web-site, 2 October 2014

There are currently seven thousand spoken around the world, with one dying off about every two weeks. Now researchers say that 25% of the world’s languages face extinction in the next few decades, and there’s a surprising reason behind it — economic development.

In a new study published Wednesday in the Proceedings of Royal Society B, Tatsuya Amano, a conservation scientist at Cambridge University, took the ecological tracking methods used for endangered species and applied them to languages. Using this methodology, his team identified hotspots where languages were in danger of disappearing, just like animal species are.
What he found was surprising: "Both are seriously threatened, and the distribution of linguistic and biological diversity is very similar," Amano told Live Science. "Of course languages and species are fundamentally different in many aspects, but I thought I might be able to contribute to this urgent problem — language endangerment — using what I have learnt."

But why exactly? In a word, globalization.

The study's most notable discovery is that the hotspots of language endangerment were concentrated around specific areas: those that are already developed, and those that are currently undergoing rapid economic development.

"We found that at the global scale, language speaker declines are strongly linked to economic growth — that is, declines are particularly occurring in economically developed regions," Amano said.

Why this is happening: While the Cambridge study did not go into details to analyze the trend, Amano posited that in a globalized economy, people might find it more useful to learn a "useful" language such as English and Mandarin Chinese — which means less care and attention are being spent on passing down little-spoken languages, such as indigenous dialects.

"As economies develop, one language often comes to dominate a nation's political and economic spheres," Amano explained to Al Jazeera. "People are forced to adopt the dominant language or risk being left out in the cold — economically and politically."

There are of course other sociocultural factors to consider, such as systemic erasure of indigenous languages under colonization. But the overwhelming trend seems to be that when a region opens itself up for global commerce, it inadvertently makes its own languages unattractive in comparison.

Why this matters: Language endangerment has serious repercussions.

"As indigenous languages die, so too do integral parts of indigenous people's cultures," UN Deputy Head of Humanitarian Affairs Kyung-wha Kang said. "Without the appropriate linguistic terminology available to express indigenous philosophies and concepts, indigenous peoples lose some of their ability to accurately define themselves in accordance with their traditions and to convey these traditions to future generations."

The result is effectively a form of cultural extinction. So while learning commonly spoken languages might make you more competitive in a globalized market, keep in mind that millennia of human language and culture might be endangered in the process.

Another report on the same topic:

**Economic growth causes extinction of aboriginal languages: study**

*From the University Herald (www.universityherald.com) 4 September 2014*

Economic boom triggers language extinction, according to a University of Cambridge study. The researchers urge the United Nations to pay attention to hotspots in both developed (north Australia and the north-western corners of the US and Canada) and developing (Himalayan regions, Brazil and Nepal) countries, where languages are in danger of extinction. Global leaders must keenly participate in the preservation of linguistic diversity.

In the northwest corner of North America, the languages of the local people are vanishing at an alarming rate. For example, Upper Tanana - a language spoken by indigenous Athabaskan people in eastern Alaska - had only 24 active speakers in 2009 and was no longer being learnt by the children there. In 2008, it was reported that just one person could fluently speak the Wichita language of the Plains Indians in Oklahoma.

On the other hand, aboriginal languages like Margu and Rembarunga from the peninsulas of Australia's Northern Territories are dying at a faster rate.

For the study, the researchers used the same criteria for describing endangered species proposed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature to determine the occurrence and frequency of language loss.

There are three main risk factors: small population size (small number of speakers), small geographical habitat range and population change (the decline in speaker numbers).

Using language datasets against these risk factors, the researchers found that the levels of GDP (Gross Domestic Product) per capita was directly proportional to the loss of language diversity. In other words, the more successful economically, the more rapid disappearance of languages was observed.

"As economies develop, one language often comes to dominate a nation's political and educational spheres. People are forced to adopt the dominant language or risked being left out in the cold - economically and polit-
"Of course everyone has the right to choose the language they speak, but preserving dying language is important to maintaining human cultural diversity in an increasingly globalised world."

The researchers said that languages are vanishing at a rate faster than the appalling loss of biodiversity.

A previous study by Cambridge's Department of Theoretical and Applied Linguistics showed that people who speak more than one language fare well in education, cognition and social interaction.

"As economies develop, there is increasing advantage in learning international languages such as English, but people can still speak their historically traditional languages. Encouraging those bilingualisms will be critical to preserving linguistic diversity," said Amano.

The finding is published in the journal Proceedings of Royal Society B.

And another report on the same topic:

**Languages are going extinct even faster than species are**

*From the Huffington Post, 3 September 2014*

The world’s roughly 7000 known languages are disappearing faster than species, with a different tongue dying approximately every 2 weeks. Now, by borrowing methods used in ecology to track endangered species, researchers have identified the primary threat to linguistic diversity: economic development. Though such growth has been shown to wipe out language in the past on a case-by-case basis, this is the first study to demonstrate that it is a global phenomenon, researchers say.

Many people know about the threatened polar bear and extinct passenger pigeon, but few have heard of endangered and extinct languages such as Eyak in Alaska, whose last speaker died in 2008, or Ubykh in Turkey, whose last fluent speaker died in 1992, says Tatsuya Amano, a zoologist at the University of Cambridge in the United Kingdom and lead author of the new study. It’s well known that economic growth or the desire to achieve it can drive language loss, he notes—dominant languages such as Mandarin Chinese and English are often required for upward mobility in education and business, and economic assistance often encourages recipients to speak dominant languages. Whereas specific case studies demonstrate such forces at work, such as the transition from Cornish to English in the United Kingdom and from Horom to English in Nigeria, this is the first study to examine losses worldwide and rank economic growth alongside other possible influences, he says.

Data on the number and location of surviving fluent speakers of endangered languages are scant, but Amano and colleagues used the most complete source available—an online repository called Ethnologue—for their analysis, he says. From the database, the group was able to calculate the geographical range, number of speakers, and rate of speaker decline for languages worldwide and map that data within square grid cells roughly 190 km across, spanning the entire globe. Although they were able to obtain information about the range and number of speakers for more than 90% of the world’s estimated 6909 languages, they could only glean details about the rate of decline or growth for 9%, or 649, of those languages, Amano notes.

Next, they looked for correlations between language loss and factors such as a country’s gross domestic product and levels of globalization as calculated by an internationally recognized index. In addition, they examined environmental factors such as altitude, which might contribute to language loss by affecting how easily communities can communicate and travel.

Of all the variables tested, economic growth was most strongly linked to language loss, Amano says. Two types of language loss hotspots emerged from the study, published online today in the *Proceedings of the Royal Society B*. One was in economically well developed regions such as northwestern North America and northern Australia; a second was in economically developing regions such as the tropics and the Himalayas. Certain aspects of geography seemed to act as a buffer or threat, Amano says. For example, recent declines appear to occur faster in temperate climates than in the tropics or mountainous regions—perhaps because it is easier to travel in and out of temperate regions, Amano says. More research is necessary to determine precisely what it is about economic development that kills languages, he adds. Figuring out how growth interacts with other factors such as landscape is the next step, he says.

"This is the first really solid statistical study I’ve seen which shows principles about language decline that we’ve know about, but hadn’t been able to put together in a sound way," says Leanne Hinton, a linguist at the University of California, Berkeley. Economics is far from the whole story, however, she says. In the United States,
for example, current attitudes toward endangered tongues stem in large part from historical policies that forced young American Indians to eschew their native tongues in order to learn English, she says. Generations of disease, murder, and genocide—both historic and present, in some regions—have also played an important role and were not included in the new study's analysis, she says.

Although the study is silent on the subject of interventions to help preserve endangered languages, there is a range of revitalization efforts that can serve as examples, such as the incorporation of the Hawaiian language into school curricula and daily government operations, she says.

The Oto-Manguean languages of Mexico: current work by the Surrey Morphology Group

By Enrique Palancar

The large Oto-Manguean family of Mexico includes several endangered languages. Moreover, many members of the family exhibit complex morphology, which naturally attracted the attention of the Surrey Morphology Group (SMG) at the University of Surrey. We started work in 2012. The work is being carried out under the auspices of a research project entitled "Endangered Complexity", funded by the ESRC and the AHRC at the UK and by the CNRS at France. It will continue until February 2015. Since its foundation, the SMG has been studying the relations which hold between grammatical categories in broad samples of languages. The studies we have conducted have been led by a common interest to develop typologically informed frameworks for the expression of theories of natural language morphology. We have been particularly interested in a set of linguistic phenomena which are both relevant for the morphology and the syntax of natural languages such as gender, number and agreement, but we are also interested in other phenomena which are purely morphological, such as inflectional classes.

Our interest in inflectional classes has developed from the belief that the status of such classes within morphology and beyond is not yet properly understood. In the general view, inflectional morphology expresses grammatical information, and in an ideal world each distinct form would correspond to a distinct meaning. However, we often find allomorphy whose distribution defies a syntactic or a phonological explanation. Often such allomorphy pervades the entire paradigm, so that a given word class falls into morphologically distinct inflection classes. From a syntactic point of view, inflectional classes are seemingly useless in functional terms, and yet they are widely found across languages. Nevertheless, our knowledge of such classes to date is still largely based on European languages and is thus limited by their typological characteristics. To elucidate a sound typology of inflectional classes, a comprehensive theory must expand its horizons beyond well-known languages and this is where the Oto-Manguean languages from Mexico come in, because they are known to be particularly challenging in this area.

Oto-Manguean is a large language phylum in Mexico, and it is probably the most diverse one in the Americas. There are hundreds of Oto-Manguean languages still spoken but most of them are endangered. Some of these languages display an unparalleled richness of inflectional class systems and can serve as a point of departure for investigating the full range of typological possibilities. Their inflectional morphology takes on a rich array of forms, involving clitics, suffixes, prefixes, complex tonal patterns and stem alternations, all of which may fall into different classes, depending on the language family in question. And since suffixes, prefixes, tone, and stem alternations can co-occur in a single word form, this may result in the interaction of multiple layered inflectional classes, drastically increasing the complexity of the system. We think that the Oto-Manguean languages provide important evidence for the limits of inflectional idiosyncrasy that a language can tolerate.

We are interested in finding answers to general questions such as: what are the degrees of inflectional class complexity? and how do inflectional classes arise and decay? We have been addressing such questions by conducting studies based on a sample of different Oto-Manguean languages, and we plan to create a database of at least 15 such languages with inflectional information and verbal lexicons. The database will shortly be made publicly available over the internet linked to a specialized webpage supported by the University of Surrey devoted to other aspects of the Oto-Manguean languages, including a survey of some of the relevant bibliography.

Within this project and as part of our commitment to the documentation and description of endangered languages we have conducted two important activities. First, on two occasions we have carried out intensive fieldwork on the inflectional classes of the Otomi language spoken in the village of Santiago Tilapa. This language, known as Tilapa Otomi, is perhaps the most critically endangered Oto-Manguean language at present, spoken by less than 10 old people. We want to thank our main language con-
sultant Doña Petra Cruz, for her invaluable help. And second, with the help of Roberto Zavala at CIESAS-Sureste, in July 2013 we organized a successful workshop on the inflectional classes of the languages of Mesoamerica.

The workshop took place at the campus of CIESAS-Sureste in San Critóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, and a total of 12 language specialists participated in it, ten of them being indigenous native speakers who are postgraduates in Linguistics at CIESAS. The goal of the workshop was to produce a written presentation of the major characteristics of the complex inflectional systems of the languages of study. The 11 languages represented in the workshop are all endangered. They included eight Otomanguean languages —Acazułco Otomi (by Nestor H. Green); Amuzgo de Xochistlahuaca (by Jair Apostol Polanco); Chatino de Teotepec (by Justin McIntosh and Reginaldo Quintas Figueroa); Matlatzinca (by Leonardo Carranza); Tlapanco de Malinaltepec (by Abad Navarro Solano); Zapoteco de Mixtepec (by Pafuncio Antonio Ramos); Zapoteco de Teotitlán del Valle (by Ambrosio Gutiérrez Lorenzo); and Zapoteco de Zoochina (by Oscar López Nicolás)—and three Mixe-Zoques —Mixe de Tamazulápam (by Godofredo Santiago Martínez); Mixe de Tlahuitoltepec (by Juan Climaco Gutiérrez Díaz); and Mixe de Totontlepe (by Verónica Guzmán Guzmán).

If you have any queries about this project or its outcomes, have a particular interest in some relevant data to be included in our database or databases, have some phenomenon that puzzles you in the language or languages you know that you do not mind sharing with us, please contact us at e.palancar at surrey.ac.uk/palancar at vjf.cnrs.fr, and we will always be very happy to talk to you.

**Peru sets up first bilingual civil registry**

*From El Peruano, on-line edition, 23 August 2014, translated by the Editor*

**Attempt to revitalize the Jaqaru language, which is in danger of extinction**

In the district of Tupe, situated in the province of Yauyos, in Lima region, the first bilingual civil registry will be established, with sections in Spanish and Jaqaru, reports the National Registry of Identity and Civil Status (Registro Nacional de Identificación y Estado Civil, RENIEC). For the first time in the country, people who speak an indigenous Peruvian language will have their birth, marriage and death documents in their own language, the organization emphasized.

RENEC pointed out that the new registration practice will begin to be implemented – from tomorrow – in Tupe, in the mountains near Lima, whose 750 inhabitants speak Jaqaru, a language older than Quechua or Aymara.

Aiza, Colca and Tupe are the three communities located in the province of Yauyos, 2,840 metres above sea level. The forms for registration documents to be used are in Spanish and Jaqaru versions, and have been drawn up by RENIEC. Also in both languages will be the applications and legal declarations used to fill out the registration of births, marriages and deaths.

Each document produced for this first bilingual civil registry will have the same legal validity as a document in Spanish.

The institution affirmed that this innovation is an attempt to revitalize Jaqaru, which, according to UNESCO, finds itself in danger of extinction, and is a first step on the way to adopting administrative procedures in indigenous languages which use a valid approved orthography. RENIEC recognizes a listing of names in Quechua and another with Awajún as correct registrations.

The residents of Tupe conserve their cultural traditions. The women wear dresses with red and black checks. The feast of the village’s patron saint, St.Bartholomew, is celebrated every 24th August.

**Premiere of ‘Navajo Star Wars’ centrepiece of Native Language Institute program**

*From the Native American Times, on-line edition, 11 September 2014*

ARLINGTON, Texas – Less than two weeks after the passing of Chester Nez, one of the original Navajo Code Talkers, the University of Texas at Arlington hosted the Texas premiere of ‘Navajo Star Wars’ at CoLang 2014, a major institute on language revitalization focusing on Native American and other endangered languages. Nearly two hundred people, representing twenty-nine different tribes and indigenous communities from the Americas and countries ranging from Australia to Japan and Ethiopia, participated in events at CoLang in June and July.

As part of the public events, the first Texas screening of ‘Navajo Star Wars’ took place. The Navajo Nation Museum worked with Lucasfilm and 20th Century Fox to
create a Navajo language version of the science fiction classic, with dialogue dubbed into Navajo and accompanied by English subtitles. Navajo Language Academy Executive Director Irene Silentman commented on the movie’s significance.

"It’s one way of preserving the language, it’s one of the most fun ways to do it. It’s a major motion picture. It brings the language up to par with English, in a sense. I know a lot of people, when they first viewed the movie in Navajo, they were so proud. It’s something to be proud of, to show off the language, and to show it in other forms. You can use it [Navajo] in any form, you can use it in any field," said Silentman. Earlier in the day, Silentman gave a public talk about the endangered status of Navajo and showed how to teach Navajo in an immersion approach, using volunteers from the audience.

The institute received significant funding from the National Science Foundation from to a grant awarded to UT Arlington linguistics professor Colleen Fitzgerald, and bringing internationally known instructors to Texas to teach and to share methods of documenting and revitalizing indigenous languages from all over the world. The roster of instructors included Chickasaw Nation’s Joshua Hinson, Cherokee Nation’s Roy Boney, Jr., Ryan Mackey, and Candessa Tehee, and Lorna Williams, representing Lil’wat First Nation in British Columbia.

Williams, who also serves as Chair of the First Peoples Cultural Council, offered a powerful opening day public talk on the impact of colonization, noting how “education as tool of colonization” served to divide children from their families and communities, having a significant negative impact on the intergenerational transmission of indigenous language and knowledge systems. She laid out an approach to reviving and revitalizing languages by creating “sites of restoration” to “understand and help to heal the pain, trauma, consequences of colonial practices and policies.”

The curriculum offerings included nearly sixty courses, ranging from technology to immersion teaching methods to linguistically focused approaches to documenting language. CoLang Director Fitzgerald noted that the offerings and number of participants exceeded previous institutes. “It was incredibly rewarding to see so many people here to focus on their language. We worked very hard to reach out to Native American communities and were able to offer a number of scholarships to help people attend. CoLang is also a great opportunity for linguistics students to learn how to collaborate ethically with community language programs, and to give back in useful and meaningful ways to Native communities,” said Fitzgerald.

Most of the activities spanned the first two weeks of the institute. The final month was a series of four classes where participants worked with one or two speakers of an endangered language. Three of the languages in these ‘field methods courses’ were from the Americas. Jonelle Battise, a citizen of the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas, contributed as a speaker of the Alabama language.

“As language speaker for one of the Field Methods classes, I learned a lot about my language and how I can take back what I learned and help my community with language revitalization,” said Battise.

For people who were unable to attend, the CoLang website for a number of the courses includes readings or other helpful resources, Fitzgerald said. The website is at http://tinyurl.com/colang2014 for those interested.

The host of CoLang 2016 will be the University of Alaska at Fairbanks in June and July 2016.

Voices of the land

In Port Augusta, an Israeli linguist is helping the Barngarla people reclaim their language

By Anna Goldsworthy, From The Monthly (Australia), September 2014

In a bluestone former school building in Port Augusta, now a campus of the University of Adelaide, four generations of Barngarla people sit conference-style around a table. Harry Dare, a local elder, wears a snug beanie pulled down to his eyebrows: a ganoo-ganoo moona, or “warm and sheltered hat”. His sister Patricia sits at the opposite side of the table, long white hair pulled off her face with a comb. A handful of children have been raiding the sugar packets at the tea station but now sit quietly, drawing pictures.

“The word for ‘white’ in Barngarla is yallo,” announces Professor Ghil’ad Zuckermann. “Let’s hope your grandchildren will not need mnemonics because the words will come automatically, but you’re not native speakers so you need to find ways to remember.”

There is something operatic about Zuckermann. In his early 40s, he is larger than most people and speaks more languages (11 fluently, 11 in progress). He also speaks them more loudly, in a rich baritone accompanied by extravagant hand gestures. Usually he wears velvet jackets in jewel colours – emerald green, sapphire blue, ruby red – custom-made by his tailor in Shanghai. Today’s
jacket is jet black, each button imprinted with the name “Zuckermann”.

“How will you remember yalloo?” he asks.

“Yahoo.com,” suggests a young woman.

“But why is Yahoo white?”

“Whitefella invented it,” offers her partner.

“Very good. The more pictorial your mnemonic, the easier to remember. And how will you remember yooga, for ‘black’?”

“Yoga,” the woman says.

“But how would you link yoga to ‘black’?” Zuckermann thinks for a moment. “Mahatma Gandhi is a black fellow, I guess. So imagine him doing yoga, and that will help you remember yooga.”

“Yooga is sort of like yura, the word for ‘man’,” observes Harry Dare.

“So if you’ve got a yura doing yoga, then you’ve gotyooga,” puns his nephew, and everyone laughs.

Zuckermann is chair of Linguistics and Endangered Languages at the University of Adelaide. Born in Tel Aviv, he studied at Oxford and was a research fellow at Cambridge before moving to Australia in 2004, on account of being thunderstruck by Sydney’s beauty: “It was the wow effect! It wows me!” Determined to make a contribution (“I’m not coming here to get single mother benefits”), he observed that the country faced two main problems: bureaucracy and the plight of the Aboriginal people. Vanquishing bureaucracy was beyond him – “I can only swallow the bitter pill” – but as an expert in language revival he sensed an opportunity.

Zuckermann’s language reclamation workshops are great entertainments, featuring multimedia presentations, Google searches, digressions about famous people he has known (“Let’s see, when did I meet Nelson Mandela?”), and frequent visits to Facebook, where he has the maximum 5000 friends. His account reached full capacity five years ago after he released Israelit Safa Yafa, or Israeli – A Beautiful Language, a book that “multiplied the number of my enemies slash admirers by a factor of a million”.

The book’s central thesis is that the modern Hebrew spoken in Israel should be analysed as a reclaimed rather than a Semitic language, and called Israeli instead of Hebrew. Before its revival at the end of the 19th century, Hebrew had not been spoken for around 1750 years, and the native tongues of those who revived it – primarily Yiddish, Russian and Polish – are implicit in its grammar, vocabulary and syntax. It is a contentious thesis that earnt its author hate mail and death threats, as it suggests that the language spoken by modern Israelis is not descended from holy writ but is instead a “beautifully multi-layered and intricately multi-sourced language that one should embrace and celebrate”.

For Zuckermann, diversity is beautiful. This is no abstract aesthetic principle, but a premise of his life’s work. His ninth-floor office at the University of Adelaide’s North Terrace campus is a small shrine to diversity. Its walls are papered with printouts of his favourite words: mahilapinatapi, “a look shared by two people, each wishing that the other will offer something that they both desire but are unwilling to suggest or offer themselves”, from Tierra del Fuego’s Yaghan language; nakhus, “a camel who will only give milk if you tickle her nostrils”, from Persian; and tingo, “to take all the objects from your neighbour’s house, one by one, by asking to borrow them, until there is nothing left”, from Rapa Nui’s Pascuense language. The depletion of the world’s languages strikes him as an aesthetic catastrophe. He quotes the late American linguist Kenneth Hale: “When you lose a language, you lose a culture, intellectual wealth, a work of art. It’s like dropping a bomb on a museum, the Louvre.” It perplexes Zuckermann that others do not share this sense of crisis: “The survival of the Tasmanian Devil is important, but what about the survival of the Palawa languages of Tasmania? Why do people not give money for languages but do give monies to the zoo?”

According to Zuckermann’s most recent figures, only 13 of the 330 Aboriginal languages spoken when Australia was colonised remain “alive and kicking”, by which he means spoken by children. In a recent paper for the journal Australian Aboriginal Studies, Zuckermann and his co-authors, Shiori Shakuto Neoh from the Australian National University and Giovanni Matteo Quer from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, make the case for Native Tongue Title, a statute-based ex gratia compensation scheme. Aboriginal languages were lost due to what Zuckermann calls “the white fellow”; it is up to the white fellow to provide redress. Controversially, he believes that the loss of language is more severe than the loss of land, because “the land is still there, the language is not”.

Of course, the two are not mutually exclusive but profoundly interlinked. Daryn McKenny, a founder of the Miromaa Aboriginal Language and Technology Centre in New South Wales, has said that “our languages are as diverse as our people are themselves, they are a true ex-
pression of one’s thoughts, feelings and emotions, they connect us to the land and to the stars like no other, but most of all they guide us and they heal us”. In her 1993 Boyer lecture, the Aboriginal linguist Jeanie Bell explained that “our languages are the voices of the land, and we are the carriers of the language”. Zuckermann acknowledges this with his own version of the Aboriginal flag, in which the yellow of the sun is replaced by the pink of langue, or tongue, lying between the black of the people and the red of the land: “because language is in fact the mouth of both the land and the people in many Aboriginal spiritualities”.

Once spoken throughout South Australia’s Eyre Peninsula, the Barngarla language died out in the 1960s. After locating a Barngarla dictionary from 1844, compiled by a Lutheran missionary, Zuckermann saw that the language could be reclaimed. But he would not go further without the approval of its traditional owners: “This is a rule. It’s their language. I am a facilitator.” He made contact with the Barngarla Council, and in 2012 five of its members came to see him in Adelaide.

“I have this kind of idea,” he told them. “Not a dream but a possible dream. Your beautiful language is no longer spoken, and I have this idea maybe it is possible to reclaim it.” They listened carefully, and then, “to my great surprise and my great happiness, they told me, ‘We have been waiting for you for 50 years.’”

Patricia Dare was a small child when she was taken to the Plymouth Brethren–run Umeewarra Mission in Port Augusta. A softly spoken woman, she remembers “talking language” as a girl, before being fostered to an English couple who were “really nice, treated us as if we were their own children”, but “didn’t want us to speak language, I supposed because they didn’t know what we were talking about. So we gradually forgot it, and it sort of felt strange, you know?”

In a 2013 article for The Australian, Dare’s nephew Stephen Atkinson describes the parallel story of his mother, Maureen, who arrived at Umeewarra Mission aged eight. Forbidden to speak Barngarla, she was no longer “able to put a sentence together” by the time she left. (Children, with their neuroplasticity, are not only great learners but also great forgetters.) Some years later, on a visit to the mission, she overheard the missionaries speaking to the children in indigenous languages. They acknowledged that they had previously done the wrong thing and were now “promoting the speaking of language on the mission in later years, even against government policy”.

Atkinson attributes his mother’s language loss to “ignorance and misunderstanding on behalf of the missionar-ies”, and to the “arrogance or possibly misled naivety” of the government. When publicising the issue, Zuckermann prefers the term “linguicide”. He emphasises that this was not haphazard but a deliberate process of colonisation, and he cites the comments of 19th-century financier and politician Anthony Forster as typical of the mindset of the time. Forster claimed:

“arrogance of the land that was extinct. The childen taught would afterwards mix only with whites, where their own language would be of no use – the use of their language would preserve their prejudices and debasement, and their language was not sufficient to express the ideas of civilized life.

But the greatest loss has occurred over the past 50 years, due largely to government assimilation policy and the legacy of the Stolen Generations. At the Native Welfare Conference of Federal and State Ministers in 1961, the goals of assimilation policy were articulated: “All Aborigines and part-Aborigines are expected to attain the same manner of living as other Australians and to live as members of a single Australian community, enjoying the same rights and privileges, accepting the same customs and influenced by the same beliefs as other Australians.”

The effect was catastrophic for indigenous languages. Some members of the Stolen Generations retained snippets of their mother tongue, which they passed down to their children divested of meaning. One workshop participant recalls being called gooni by his mother; it is Zuckermann who informs him that gooni means “third-born male child”.

When he speaks to the Barngarla people, Zuckermann avoids the word “linguicide” because “dead can be offensive to some people”. Instead, acknowledging a “non sequitur within my discourses”, he refers to their language as a “Sleeping Beauty”.

But this too can be controversial. “It never went to sleep,” says Scotty Murray, visiting from Coober Pedy. “They got forced not to talk it. Come on!”

“You’re right,” says Zuckermann. “I said ’went to sleep’ because some people do not like the word ‘dead’ when talking about language, but usually when talking to the government I use the word ‘killed’.”

“They didn’t kill it, they just buried it,” Murray replies. “They buried it and tried to hide it from us.”

Burying is a useful metaphor: among other things, language reclamation is a great process of excavation. A key artefact in Barngarla reclamation is the 1844 dictionary,
compiled by the Lutheran missionary Clamor Wilhelm Schürmann. Born near Hanover in 1815, Schürmann was schooled in Latin, English, Greek and Hebrew before being posted to Adelaide. A passionate advocate for Aboriginal people, he claimed it was “bad enough that a great part of the colonists are inimical to the natives; it is worse that the law, as it stands at present, does not extend its protection to them, but it is too bad when the press lends its influence to their destruction”. In 1850, he founded a school at Wallala, near Port Lincoln, offering instruction in Barngarla. When the school lost its funding, its students were sent to school in Poonindie. There, in a precursor to assimilation policy, they were no longer instructed in their native tongue.

Shortly after arriving in South Australia, Schürmann and his colleague Christian Teichelmann compiled a dictionary of the Kaurna language of the Adelaide Plains, which has formed the basis of a Kaurna reclamation hosted by the University of Adelaide’s Kaurna Warra Pintyanthi. In 1844, Schürmann produced A Vocabulary of the Parnkalla [Barngarla] Language, Spoken by the Natives Inhabiting the Western Shores of Spencer’s Gulf.

The dictionary is crucial to the Barngarla reclamation project but requires its own work of excavation. Zuckermann likens his reconstructive work to that of a detective: painstakingly piecing the language together, comparing it to related tongues and making accommodations for how Schürmann, with his own language background, might have understood its structure. Like Israeli, the reclaimed tongue is by nature a hybrid, bearing Zuckermann’s imprint as well as Schürmann’s.

Zuckermann concedes that “one day in the future a scholar might detect Israeli impact on neo-Barngarla”, and he hopes to train a Barngarla linguist to lead the project. One possible candidate is Stephen Atkinson. Tall and charismatic, Atkinson refined his own communication abilities while working in security: “Your job’s a lot easier if you can just talk to people.”

A key player in the reclamation project, he muses that “Ghil’ad is doing a great thing, but he speaks with an accent as it is, so hopefully we’re not speaking with a Jewish accent but speaking Barngarla.”

The process might be easier if there were still elders who were fluent in the language, but for Zuckermann this would pose its own problems of “linguistic hygiene”. He explains, “With the Tiwi language, spoken north of Darwin, the elders look at the youngsters who rape and slaughter the language, so to speak, and say, ‘You’re such an idiot.’ The result is that these youngsters turn to English. ‘Give us authenticity or give us death’ usually results in death.” To revive a language, Zuckermann believes you must embrace impurity: “You cannot be anal. Some linguists are not willing to relinquish their principles, and might consider this process a bitlaissez-faire. This is the difference between a documentary linguist and a revival linguist. If you have Asperger’s, you can still be a documentary linguist. But you cannot be a revival linguist.”

Funded by the federal government’s Indigenous Languages Support program, the Barngarla workshops are held in Port Augusta, Whyalla and Port Lincoln several times a year. They operate as impromptu language academies: their purpose is not only instruction but also collective decision-making. One of the challenges of reviving a dormant language is finding words for a new world. The word for “brain” was recorded in the 1844 dictionary as gaga-bibi, or “head-egg”. To create the word for “computer”, workshop participants simply added “electricity”, or waribirga, forming gagabibiwarbirga, abbreviated to gabiwa. (This construction is based on the Māori rorohiko, also “brain-lightning”, and amounts to a calque, or translation of individual components of a borrowed expression.) The internet is irbiyarnoo, combining irbi, or “information”, with yarnoo, or “net”.

The Barngarla were traditionally a coastal people known for “singing to the sharks”, an art that died out with its final practitioner in the 1960s. In bays across the Eyre Peninsula, the men sang from the cliffs as the women danced on the beach, luring sharks and dolphins towards the shore, and driving fish into the shallows. Three words for “shark” remain in the dictionary – gadalyili, goonya and walgara – but their individual shades of meaning have been lost. “Sometimes in language revival, we have five or six words for the same thing,” Zuckermann explains, “so we decide to particularise.”

The workshop participants try out each word.

“We say goonya for ‘whitefella’, ” Harry Dare observes, and the repartee starts flying.

“Because of whiting!”

“No, it’s white pointers!”

There is much goodwill in the room, and the constant hum of comedy, but the goonya is never far away. The goonya, after all, is the reason these people have to relearn their ancestors’ tongue. Towards lunchtime, Zuckermann projects a picture of a boab tree onto the wall: “In Barngarla, the word for ‘tree’ is the same as the
word for ‘communicate’: wadlada. Do you know what type of tree this is?”

“Jail tree,” Atkinson says. “The white man used them as makeshift jails for Aboriginal people and locked up our men. Hollowed them out and had bars there to stop us getting out.”

“That’s disturbing,” says Zuckermann. He searches for “prison tree” on Google and reads from a 1931 newspaper article: “The bottle tree known as Hillgrove lockup, situated on the King River 25 miles from Wyndham, is a tree with a history. When blacks were bad, in the ‘90s, this tree was used as a prison.”

“When blacks were bad,” repeats Harry Dare.

“Is that why they planted half a dozen of them out Elizabeth way?” jokes Scotty Murray.

Zuckermann runs an image search and projects the result on the wall. It is a large, squat boab tree, covered with pockmarks and graffiti, still bearing green leaves. A tourist in a khaki hat grins from the hollow in its centre.

There is a collective sigh in the room that I will not soon forget.

On 16 May this year, three days after the Abbott government unveiled the federal budget, Education Minister Christopher Pyne launched Zuckermann’s inaugural Adelaide Language Festival in Bonython Hall at the University of Adelaide. The event was typically diverse. Beneath the heraldic shields, a group of Uyghur dancers waited to perform, clad in sequinned aquamarines and beaded caps. A Vietnamese singer stood beside them, in blue jeans and a plain white jumper. Young police with soft faces hovered at the aisles; a security detail lurked at the back. In the audience, private-school students in blazers sat alongside retirees and linguistics students.

As Pyne delivered his keynote address, a group of student protesters maintained a loud barrage of socialist anthems. Directly in front of me, a blond, bearded man appeared to be conducting them, his body vibrating with revolutionary fervour. Two nights earlier, Pyne had reassured the presenter of ABC’s 7.30 program, Sarah Ferguson, that he didn’t “feel flustered”, and today he maintained a stoical grin, his increasing pink the only sign of fluster. (Occasionally he allowed himself a dig at the protesters: “I don’t think this group would be winning any prizes on The Voice competition.”) In the reverberant, cathedral-like hall, neither party was especially comprehensible, but each pressed on with joyless resolve. The odd snippet of Pyne’s speech was audible, as he announced a “national revival of language education”, highlighting the need to “overcome the ‘monolingual mindset’” and to shake students “out of their complacency”.

Despite such commendable objectives, the federal budget cut $9.5 million from the Indigenous Languages Support program (ILS) over four years. Established under a different name in 1991 and administered by the Ministry for the Arts, ILS invests over $9 million each year in programs to maintain and revive indigenous languages. The 2012 Our Land, Our Languages report of the House of Representatives’ Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs recommends that “the Commonwealth government include in the Closing the Gap framework acknowledgement of the fundamental role and importance of Indigenous languages in preserving heritage and improving outcomes for Indigenous people”. Between 2011 and 2012, ILS invested in 75 activities across Australia, supporting more than 200 indigenous languages. In March this year, the report from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies’ National Indigenous Languages Survey 2 noted that at least 30 languages were used more widely due to community-based language programs.

“NEEDED,” Zuckermann posted on Facebook. “Aboriginal language revivalists who are willing to disguise as school chaplains.”

How successful can language revival hope to be?

“I am a native speaker of Israeli,” says Zuckermann, “so if you believe that I speak coherently, then it proves that it is possible to speak a reclaimed language that did not exist 130 years ago.”

But Israeli had two factors working in its favour: significant critical mass – compared to the 120 participants of the Barngarla workshops – and the movement to sovereignty. “When you reclaim a language in order to get a state, it gives you a huge advantage,” Zuckermann concedes. He sees his role as providing an opportunity to the Barngarla people: “If they wish to go the full monty – that is, for their children to speak natively – it can be done, but it requires huge dedication. No footy on Sunday. No materialism.”

Several participants express impatience at the rate of learning. “At the moment, it’s going along too slow,” says Harry Dare.

“We understand that Ghil’ad’s a full-time professor down in Adelaide, and we understand that there’s not much time that he can deliver to us. But it would be great
if there was someone that was here in Port Augusta.” He holds high hopes for the comprehensive “user-friendly” dictionary Zuckermann is preparing, because “then we can kind of teach ourselves”. Stephen Atkinson observes that “I don’t have grandchildren at the moment, but hopefully when I do, they’ll be immersed in the Barngarla reclamation and they’ll be speaking the language fluently, and carrying on where Mum left off at eight years old.”

Another possible scenario is what American scholar Jeffrey Shandler terms “post-vernacular” language use, analogous to the role of Yiddish in the US. This might take the form of ensuring familiarity with several dozen words, erecting bilingual signs in Barngarla country, and performing Welcome to Country and other rituals in Barngarla. In his book Adventures in Yiddishland, Shandler explains that

In semiotic terms, the [post-vernacular] language’s primary level of signification – that is, its instrumental value as a vehicle for communicating information, opinions, feelings, ideas – is narrowing in scope. At the same time its secondary, or meta-level of signification – the symbolic value invested in the language apart from the semantic value of any given utterance in it – is expanding.

Language can have many meanings beyond the semantic. It offers not only connection to the group but also connection to one’s ancestors. To strip a people of both land and language, as we have done, amounts to a double displacement, from within and without. “Personally would not say my ancestors are happy,” says Zuckermann, “but I know that when an Aboriginal person says this, it is a sign of empowerment.” He is disparaging of armchair linguists who “believe the point of language revival is to speak the language, when the point is actually to improve the wellbeing of those who participate in the language reclamation and their associates”.

Strong research links the use of indigenous language to better physical and mental health, higher incidence of paid employment and school attendance, and reduced likelihood of substance abuse, police arrest and violence. In a 2007 study on Aboriginal language knowledge in the Canadian province of British Columbia, researchers uncovered a clear correlation between youth suicide and lack of conversational knowledge in the native language. Zuckermann is particularly interested in the effects of language reclamation on mental health. He cites the 2008 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey, in which 31% of respondents aged 15 and over had experienced high or very high levels of psychological distress in the four weeks leading up to the interview – a rate 2.5 times greater than for non-indigenous Australians.

But how much conversational knowledge is enough to improve wellbeing? Would a post-vernacular language be enough? There have not yet been longitudinal studies performed on language reclamation’s effects on mental health, but the wellbeing in this classroom is palpable.

“I love the concept of this,” says Harry Dare, “but I actually really enjoy the process too. This is probably the highlight of my month, or whenever Ghil’ad comes up. It’s very important to us, as a group.”

By the end of the day’s workshop, we head out to the Umeewarra Mission, which operated from 1937 to 1995 and housed more than 480 members of the Stolen Generations. Now termite-ridden and overgrown with weeds, it comprises a group of corrugated iron buildings, surrounded by cyclone fencing. The Aboriginal Lands Trust has declared the mission “derelict” and earmarked it for demolition.

Lavene Ngatokoura, the chairwoman of the Umeewarra Nguraritja Committee, considers the mission “a vital place for our social and cultural wellbeing” and has spearheaded local protests against the demolition. “The relevant authorities haven’t come to us as the Barngarla people, as the traditional owners of this country, to do something in our own land,” Atkinson observes. Lawyers are seeking an injunction against the demolition.

We arrive in time for a psychedelic sunset. The group wanders quietly through the site.

“Remember the trampolines there?”

“And we used to play footy on that oval over there.”

“They really shouldn’t knock it down,” says Scotty Murray. “They should at least make a memorial out of it, to remember what that mob did. Wasn’t it a federal government thing? Federal government should clean it up then, the state as well.”

“They said sorry,” observes Harry Dare, laconically.

Out the back of the mission is a burnt-out car, upside down, with tyres removed and contents strewn on the ground. Behind it, the Flinders Ranges lie low and purple on the horizon.

Can culture be salvaged, when it has been so relentlessly destroyed?
“I’d love for a language centre to be here,” says Harry. “It would be great, and not just for Barngarla. We want to attract the other groups in, to help us to help them to maintain their language too.”

He stares through the cyclone fence, past the asbestos warnings. “I know what I’d like to see in the language centre. A crèche for the kids. A kitchen so we could feed the children while they’re here, and the adults, of course. Probably makes sense also to have a little painting studio, because we have a lot of artists.”

The Barngarla word for “memory” is ngandyarnidi, from the word ngandya, which means “dear”, “sweet” or “pretty”.

The mission offers a complicated cocktail of memory and possibly requires a different word. Patricia Dare confesses that she visits the mission sometimes with her daughter. “Just to cruise around and sticky-beak, you know? How can I describe it? It’s still home, you know? But it’s not home.”

Proposed charter school aims to resurrect Wampanoags’ native tongue

By Michael Gague, from The Herald News, 6 September 2014

MASHPEE — Slowly but steadily, and one speaker at a time, the Wôpanâàak language — the one that until dying out in the late 1800s had been spoken for centuries by the tribes that formed the Wampanoag Nation — is coming back to life.

A proposed charter school that seeks to open by August 2015 in Falmouth aims to further that linguistic resurgence. It would accomplish that task by immersing young children into the Wôpanâàak language as they learn their core academic subjects, including math and science.

Jennifer Weston, an educator listed on the prospectus for the proposed Weetumuw Wôpanâàak Charter School submitted to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education as its lead applicant, recently spoke about the proposed school, and the larger Wôpanâàak Language Reclamation Project, an effort to restore the Wampanoag Nation’s language and cultural identity.

Weston said recently the concept behind an indigenous language immersion charter school is not actually new. The proposed school would follow the successes of schools throughout the United States that already exist, including those operated by the Cherokee, Navajo, Mohawk and Native Hawaiian tribes.

A language immersion charter school would not be new to Massachusetts either. For example, educators at the Pioneer Valley Charter School in Hadley teach daily lessons in Mandarin Chinese.

Although the Weetumuw Wôpanâàak Charter School’s prospectus often specifically speaks to Native American children, because it is proposed as a charter school, in accordance with Massachusetts Charter School regulations, enrollment would be open to any student from “any family,” regardless of their backgrounds, Weston said. The school would serve students from Cape Cod, Plymouth County and Bristol County.

“We’re promoting a pretty small school. And we’re casting a net as widely as possible,” Weston said of the proposed area from which the school would draw its students.

“The vision is really to give 5- and 6-year-olds the opportunity to become fully bilingual,” Weston said. “They will already come to us speaking English. the goal is to teach all subject areas.”

The founding group submitted its application in July and will receive notification from DESE later this month if it will be invited to submit a final application. If invited to submit that application, the proposal will go through a public hearing and the founding group would be interviewed by officials from DESE’s Charter School Office, before it goes to the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education for consideration. In February, the board will decide on whether to grant a charter.

The school, if approved would open with 35 to 40 kindergarten and first-grade students, and slowly grow enrollment up to Grade 5.

How a 17th-century Bible is helping to revive a Native American language

By Mark Hay, from the Good Magazine, undated

Four hundred years ago, before the Pilgrims washed up on Plymouth in 1620, the Massachusetts coast was home to at least 12,000 Native Americans united by a common language: Wômpanâàak. Also known as Wampanoag, Natic, or Pokanoket, Wômpanâàak was one of the Massachusetts languages that gave the modern state its name. It was the language of Massasoit and Tisquantum; traces
of it are still found in English, with words like skunk (squnk) and squash (askosquash). While Wômpanâak should rightfully be enshrined as a major touchstone of early American culture and history, instead, it was a language put under assault. Between smallpox, endemic warfare and enslavement, flight to other Native American tribes, and centuries of forced Christianization and European assimilation in New England’s infamous praying towns, by the close of the 18th century there were only a few hundred Wômpanâak speakers left. By the language was dead. Until, 160 years later, it suddenly wasn’t dead anymore.

Today, after regaining their tribal identity in 1928, there are 2,000 Wômpanâak in southern Massachusetts. And one of them, Jessie Little Doe Baird, has found a way to bring their language back to life. Born in 1963 in the Mashpee (Massippee) band of Cape Cod, Baird claims when she was 30 she began having visions of her ancestors, pushing her to revive the tongue. She started the Wômpanâak Language Reclamation Project in 1993, eventually composing her Master’s thesis on Algonquian Linguistics at MIT. Baird and linguists Kenneth Hale and Norvin Richards used religious texts and letters written by Natives and missionaries to painstakingly reconstruct Wômpanâak grammar and vocabulary. And miraculously, with the aid of volunteers from the region’s Mashpee, Aquinnah, Assonet, and Herring Pond (Manomet or Comassakumkanit) bands, there are now many classes and teaching tools in the language.

As of 2014 there were at least 15 competent Wômpanâak speakers in the world. Baird’s success is exceptional—some say she’s the fulfillment of a prophecy—given the number of dead and dying languages in the world, and the rarity of revival. But she’s also the start of a new wave of language resurgences, as what once seemed an impossible act of resurrection becomes more and more common.

Although it’s hard to track, some linguists believe that every 14 days a human language dies, and that half of the world’s languages will be gone by the close of this century. Some language loss is inevitable, as young people lose interest and tongues lose meaning and function. For many languages, though, decline and death are far from natural phenomena. Hastened on by centuries of cultural and physical genocide, it’s no accident that hundreds of Native American languages have gone extinct, and that of the 299 or so remaining, only 20 are spoken by the youngest generation. Even the most widely spoken, Cherokee and Navajo, are considered threatened languages. Some linguists, ardent enemies of sentimentality, question the purpose of stemming this death march, saying that fading languages ought to die. But their opponents argue that if these languages are going to perish, it should be by individual choice, and not by the sickly half-life of imperialism.

Up until the millennium, many efforts to keep waning languages alive focused on revitalization, creating new resources to help remaining speakers of endangered languages—like the indigenous Ainu tongue of Japan or native Hawaiian—to spread their cultural traditions to younger generations. Up until around 2000, many observers though the only true case of bringing back a language that hadn’t been spoken for generations, was the 19th century effort to move Hebrew from a priestly relic to an everyday language spoken by millions. Even this revival, though, drew upon the continued use of the language by limited classes over millennia, whereas many dead languages don’t have any speakers or readers, period.

Ironically, Wômpanâak’s unprecedented revival benefited from the forces that killed the language in the first place—its early interactions with colonists. From 1620 on, pious arrivals started learning Wômpanâak. They developed a system of writing for the language so that they could convert and minister to Native Americans. By 1651, they’d established entire convert towns. By 1663, they’d completed a Wômpanâak Bible. And by 1674, a Massachusetts government survey of the region found that in some Wômpanâak-speaking areas they’d achieved over 50 percent literacy, enabling the creation not just of Christian tracts, but vocabularies and personal Wômpanâak-to-Wômpanâak correspondences throughout the 17th and 18th centuries. Baird and her collaborators were able to use the Wômpanâak Bible, comparing it to contemporary English versions, and seeing how that stacked up against similarities in related Massachusetts languages. This and other primary, documentary evidence helped them to slowly revive the structure and vocabulary of the language. And, thanks to certain linguistic similarities to 38 extant Algonquian languages, they were able to recreate the sounds as well.

Wômpanâak isn’t the only language pulling a Lazarus act nowadays. In America, the Chochenyo language of California’s Muwekma Ohlone tribe, dead since the 1930s, has several conversational students. In Europe, the languages of the southwestern British region of Cornwall, dead since the early 1900s, Manx, dead since 1975, and the Livonian tongue of Latvia have become the first UNESCO-recognized revived languages within the space of a decade. And, most amazingly, in Australia where there are often far fewer records and living correlates, the Barngarla,Kaurna, and Palawa
Kani (Tasmanian) Aboriginal languages, all dead for over a hundred years, are coming back to life as well.

Baird’s efforts have gone above and beyond other revivals. She’s written over a dozen books of phrases, prayers, stories, and teaching tools, and at least one-fifth of Wômpanââk’tak tribe members have taken language classes. Most of that was achieved before she won the MacArthur Fellowship, often called the Genius Grant, for her work in 2010, lending the project its first great rush of publicity and funding. Now Baird is working towards finishing a comprehensive dictionary, currently at 10,000 entries, and launching a Wômpanââk’tak charter school next August, to teach Wômpanââk’tak to both tribal and non-tribal students. That’s not bad for a movement that was a mere vision just two decades ago, with no revenue or institutional support.

But not every language has a Baird to lean on. Despite all of these success stories, extinction is still a real threat for many traditional languages. Eyak, the first Native Alaskan Athabaskan language headed to extinction, and one of 19 endangered languages in the family, has only one native speaker. She has recognized the precarious nature of her culture and been cooperating with University of Alaska linguists for years to document her tongue. For those whose youth expresses little interest in revitalization, this may be the best choice—putting a language in deep freeze. That way, even if youth choose not to speak a language anymore, it doesn’t die. It just sleeps, waiting for a time when it will be reawoken.

Saving a French dialect that once echoed in the Ozarks

By Jacob McCleland, from the National Public Radio web-site (www.npr.org), 23 September 2014

Language lovers and locals of an isolated mining region of the Ozarks are scrambling to preserve what’s left of a dialect known as pawpaw French before it fades. The dialect once dominated this community in southeastern Missouri, but now, it is barely a whisper.

Kent Bone didn’t grow up speaking pawpaw French. But he listened to his grandparents gossip in the language, and as an adult, Bone decided to learn it himself. He says his mother, who’s 82, understands him when he speaks to her in pawpaw; it’s common for people who are now in their 70s and 80s to know some pawpaw French but not enough to be fluent.

Cyrilla Boyer, 78, has lived in Old Mines, Mo., her whole life.

“My father and mother spoke French very fluently, but they didn’t want us to speak it because it had such trouble in school,” Boyer says. She says in the 1920s and 1930s, teachers would smack students’ knuckles for speaking any French in the classroom. The language became stigmatized, so parents didn’t think it was worth passing on. Now, only a handful of people speak it, and most know only a smattering of words and phrases.

Pawpaw French — named after a local fruit-bearing tree — is a linguistic bridge that melds a Canadian French accent with a Louisiana French vocabulary. The French originally settled Old Mines around 1723, back when the area was part of upper Louisiana. Floods of workers from Canada and Louisiana came to work the lead mines. The dialect faded in other nearby towns like De Soto and Bonne Terre and Ste. Genevieve a long time ago. Pawpaw French persisted in Old Mines because it is much more remote.

Historian and musician Dennis Stroughmatt is pawpaw French’s ambassador to the outside world. He first visited Old Mines back in the 1990s for a class project while a student at Southeast Missouri State University. At the time, there were hundreds of pawpaw speakers there. Just like that, he was hooked.

Stroughmatt says he hung out in Old Mines every weekend to learn the dialect and the traditional Missouri Cajun fiddle tunes.

“It’s like eating candy when I speak pawpaw French. That’s the best way I can say. It’s a sweet French to me,” Stroughmatt says.

Stroughmatt says pawpaw French has what he calls “a big accent.”

“You can hear it, these big kind of like rolling things about it. You tip your jaw a little bit when you’re talking the language,” he says.

Stroughmatt harbors no illusions that the language will ever be spoken by many more people, but he hopes parts of it will survive and that kids will learn some phrases — something, anything that will help them retain some identity of Missouri’s pawpaw French here in the Ozarks.

4. Language Technology

New Diné Bizaad Language app.

By Kialo Winters, from Native Innovation page, Facebook
September 13, 2014 – The Diné Bizaad app seeks to provide a dictionary of Diné words and phrases including spoken word. Native Innovation, Inc. and the collaborators of this project have designed a unique way of promoting our Diné language. This project in its infancy was sometimes perceived as too ambitious, but the vision of Native Innovation, Inc. is to be just that – innovators and visionaries.

The Diné Bizaad app was originally developed January 2013 by Kialo Winters of Na’ Neelzhin – Torreon, New Mexico. This concept began January 2013 with a blog called Diné Web 2.0 which promoted Diné language learning by seeing and hearing spoken word by searching through categories of situational Diné words and phrases. The idea was also to create a space on the World Wide Web for collaborators and contributors to add Diné language samples. The Diné Bizaad app was made available on September 13, 2014 in the iTunes® store. The Diné Keyboard layout founded in 2012 by Jerome Tsosie and Florian Johnson has been integrated into the Diné Bizaad app and naturally makes searching words/phrases work seamlessly.

Kialo envisioned this language learning concept to be open source, with a community of Diné language enthusiasts contributing from anywhere around the world. In fact, this goal of community based sharing helped develop the move from a desktop browser to a mobile app design. The concept of crowdsourcing common Diné words and phrases allows us to input the regional variations of pronunciations and vocabularies spoken by our Diné people.

The Diné Bizaad app has two parts, a Diné-English vocabulary and an English-Diné vocabulary. The English words and phrases are all associated to Diné words and phrases. The synonyms element and antonyms element are important principal parts in searching correct Diné word and phrase associations within the app.

PURPOSE

The Diné Bizaad app is to use the World Wide Web as a repository to perpetuate Diné language communication and education. We do this with an inclusive ensemble of Diné language enthusiasts, who continuously add content shared from Diné communities and from their personal contributions into the Diné Bizaad app repository.

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

The first goal, education and the second, system management are goals stating what results the Diné Bizaad app will be. Since this is a mobile app, it’s difficult to measure the outcomes or return on investment and will have to go by local census and local language assessments, respectively.

You will be able to read and hear, through spoken word, enunciated Diné letter consonants, diphthongs, glottal & nasal sounds and vowels.

You will be able to identify self-help and intrinsic motivations to learn the Diné language through dialogue synchronously and asynchronously with friends, family and neighbors.

You will be able to use this as a language learning tool that accompanies language curriculums in any formal education institutions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Native Innovation, Inc.: Jerome Tsosie, President, Sevaleah Begay-Tsosie, LaVelda Charley, Kialo Winters (Founder of Diné Bizaad app), Randy Whitehair

Contributors: Freddie Johnson, Mildred Walters, Barsine Benally, Florian Johnson, Donovan Pete (Logo Designer), Lydell Rafael, Dee Yazzie, Alfredo Yazzie, Irvinson Jones, Terri Winters, Michelle Whitstone

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5. Obituaries

Tõnu Karma (1924-2014)

The noted Estonian linguist Tõnu Karma, long resident in Latvia, died on 9 September at the age of 90. He was born on 1 May 1924. Karma wrote and published extensively on linguistic and cultural relations between Latvia and Estonia, but most especially on the Livonian language, of which he was a fluent expert speaker. He was a recipient of the Order of the White Star, Class V, of Estonia, as well as an honorary member of the Latvian Academy of Sciences.

Tuulī Tuisk, translated by Chris Moseley
6. Publications, Book Reviews

Estonian journal devotes special issue to Livonian language

Issue 5-1 of the Estonian academic journal Eesti some-u gri keeleaduse ajakiri (Journal of Estonian Finno-Ugric Linguistics) is devoted entirely to research on the Livonian language, and is entirely in English (with Estonian and Livonian summaries) covering a wide range of topics associated with Livonian language, history and culture. Guest editors are Valts Ernštreits and Karl Pajusalu. Available from the University of Tartu Press.

7. Places to go on the Web

Indigenous languages of Peru

Sent by M. Yataco, Peru

Peru offers a number of possibilities to look at endangered languages in the region. If you would like to take a look at information about the very new Office of Indigenous languages recently established within the Viceministry of Intercultural Affairs in 2013. http://www.cultura.gob.pe/es/interculturalidad/lenguasindigenas

Fade Out: Documenting the death of Zaachila Zapotec

From the Ethnos Project web-site www.ethnosproject.org

Oaxaca state is one of the most linguistically diverse areas of the world. Nevertheless, this diversity is in danger of disappearing. Many indigenous languages, such as Zaachila Zapotec, are rapidly losing speakers. When languages disappear, the speakers may feel a loss of a source of identity and a way of expressing themselves.

Through the linguistic documentation of Zaachila Zapotec carried by two members of this team, we want to explore the experiences lived by the last speakers, find out what the main causes of the loss of their language are and what this loss entails. The main objective of this documentary film is to make visible what language extinction implies and how it is experienced.

The Zapotecan civilization has remained in Mexico since pre-columbian times. Archaeological evidence demonstrates that their culture goes back 2,500 years. They have coexisted with Mayans and Aztecs, fighting for the supremacy in the valleys of Oaxaca. Over 500 years after the Spanish conquest, the descendants of this civilization still employ more than 50 Zapotec languages, amongst them, Zaachila.

Like many documentary projects, they are trying to get started with a crowdfunding campaign. Visit the links [on the website] to learn more about the documentary and to help support the team behind it.

8. Forthcoming events

XII International Congress for Finno-Ugric Studies

The XII International Congress for Finno-Ugric Studies will be organized at the University of Oulu on the Linnanmaa campus on August 17–21, 2015. The congress program consists of plenary sessions, symposia and thematically organized sections. The congress as a whole does not have a specific theme.

http://www.oulu.fi/suomenkieli/node/25052

Workshop on Information Structure in Endangered Languages (ISEL)

Location: London, United Kingdom

Call Deadline: 31-Jan-2015

http://linguistlist.org/issues/25/25-4576.html

16-17. Symposium on Endangered Languages of Native America (SELCNA)

Location: Rochester, New York

Call Deadline: 01-Feb-2015


8-9. 18th Annual Workshop on American Indigenous Languages (WAIL2015)

Location: Santa Barbara, CA

Call Deadline: 15-Feb-2015

http://osl.sa.ucsb.edu/org/nail/WAIL
9. 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:

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

More important than this snapshot of proportions and populations is the outlook for survival of the languages we have. Hard comparable data here are scarce, or absent, either 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:

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

This is a tjala (honey ant) in Martu language of the Goldfields in Western Australia. The photo was taken during a school bush trip by a teacher at Wiluna Remote Community School.