Face-paint dancer: see the article by Kate Witt on Vanuatu in this issue (Photo. Vanuatu Daily Post)

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1. Editorial

Are languages always threatened by other languages? Sometimes it is not human agencies or other languages that endanger a language, but natural disasters. In Vanuatu, the subject of our cover story in this issue, the delicate balance of a highly multilingual society was upset in March this year, when Cyclone Pam tore through part of the archipelago. In this issue, Kate Witt describes the situation after the cyclone and the likely consequences for the more fragilely situated languages.

In this issue ‘Meet a Community Member’, our newly regular series celebrating the members we have in the category of Communities, organised collectives of endangered-language speakers, we’re introduced to the Tunica-Biloxi tribe of Louisiana, who are our hosts for the 19th FEL international conference, ‘FELNOLA’, at Tulane University campus in October this year.

John Barbry writes here on behalf of the community about the preservation of the Tunica language, the indigenous languages of the New Orleans area, and its use in education.

Details of our conference are also in this issue, below.

Christopher Moseley

2. Development of the Foundation

2015 FEL Conference: Theme – The Music of Endangered Languages

The theme this year will be to consider the role of music and songs in the revitalization and preservation of endangered languages. As always, FEL invites abstract of papers concerning any language in the world, if they address the conference theme.

The 2015 FEL Conference will be held in New Orleans, Louisiana, an international port city and gateway to America for many of the world’s languages since the 18th century, and home to a variety of languages, such as indigenous, creole and trade. In addition to its rich diversity and mixture of languages and cultures, New Orleans, well known as the birthplace of Jazz, enjoys many styles of music like rhythm & blues; salsa, merengue and Cajun, to name a few.

Indeed, New Orleans, and Louisiana in general, is a microcosm for the evolution and degeneration of languages in the modern world. Yet, the cultural origins of language still thrive in neighbourhoods and local traditions. Be it European, African, or the indigenous peoples of the region, language persists through songs and music. This rich variety of cultural origins and music of language provides an appropriate backdrop for exploring ‘cultural lifeways’ with an emphasis on ethnomusicology at this year’s conference.

There are many ways in which the music culture of endangered language communities is critical to sustaining and revitalizing language. Consider the following three categories:

- Songs are a vehicle for carrying forward the essence of history and culture. The repetitive, structured, danceable sounds of music are found in almost every society - along with language. What people perform or listen to becomes an issue of cultural significance.
- People use language in music to re-create and celebrate who they have been and establish what they wish to be. New words added to an old song look backward to earlier struggles and makes a statement about the present and future.
- Music is one of the ways that communities establish themselves and try to survive. Endangered peoples and cultures, not necessarily those in distant forests, are often large minority groups within nations that can suddenly erupt into civil war or persecution.
- Speakers of endangered languages can utilize the modern forms of music and musical instruments to make their language relevant, compatible to other languages and generate interest in their mother tongue, both from within the community and from outside.

FEL XIX thus calls for abstracts addressing the following, though not limited to, kinds of discussions in a number of areas related to the themes of music and endangered languages:

Language preservation and revitalization / increasing Language Awareness:
Where and to what effect are songs and music employed in the preservation of endangered languages? In what ways does this profit the communities? How does it assist language revitalization? What are the benefits and limits in the use of music in sustaining and revitalizing endangered languages?

Identity and Multicultural Urban Settings:
In what ways can languages and music be studied along the lines of maintaining cultural identity in a multi-cultural urban setting? How do cultural heritage and music feature in the linguistic landscape?
How do endangered languages speakers use their music to co-exist in urban and rural areas? What kind of knowledge is lost with language shift and how does such loss of such knowledge change communities? What is gained by maintaining indigenous perspectives on the local ecology?

Why should the music of endangered language communities be part of school curriculums? How is music used to advance the revitalization of endangered languages in school settings? To what kinds of advantages can indigenous language be employed in school education?

What is the influence of indigenous music in popular music? How can that popularity be parlayed into the development and teaching of indigenous languages and music? What is the role of music in language awareness? What models of intellectual property rights can best protect indigenous groups as they develop materials for education and cultural tourism?

How have local communities supported the music culture of endangered language groups as part of preserving regional identity? What kinds of resources does the music of heritage languages provide for specific economic activities such as tourism? How can the economic effect of heritage languages and music be explored for language planning and policy?

The 2015 FEL Conference will be held in New Orleans, Louisiana, an international port city and gateway to America for many of the world’s languages since the 18th century. As a colony under French, Spanish and American flags, Creole society coalesced as Islanders, West Africans, slaves, free people of color and indentured servants poured into the city along with a mix of French and Spanish aristocrats, merchants, farmers, soldiers, freed prisoners and nuns.

From 1820 to 1870, the Irish and Germans made New Orleans one of the main immigrant ports in America, second only to New York. New Orleans also was the first city in America to host a significant settlement of Italians, Greeks, Croatians and Filipinos. Just before the opening of the 20th century, thou-

sands of Sicilians came to New Orleans adding to a collective of disconnected suburbs, many divided by language. Among the indigenous languages in Louisiana are small groups of Koasati, Choctaw, Chitimacha, and Tunica who borrowed words from Spanish, mixing it with the Mobilian Jargon, a trade language of the Central Gulf Coast.

Immigrants from a wide variety of nations brought along their traditional music and added them to Louisiana’s rich cultural “gumbo.” Jazz emerged from African and African-rooted dancing, singing, and drumming in New Orleans’ Congo Square. West of New Orleans, across the Atchafalaya Basin into east Texas, lays the homeland of Cajun music and zydeco, exuberant dance-music genres of Southwest Louisiana where some half a million people still speak Cajun and Creole French. Other sounds include the Isleño ballads known as décimas of St. Bernard Parish, which are sung in a 17th-century Spanish dialect from the Canary Islands; Italian music, and its fascinating interaction with jazz and rhythm & blues; salsa, merengue, and other styles from Central America and the Caribbean; the music of such Asian nations as Vietnam and Laos; and many more.

Meet a Community Member: the Tunica-Biloxi tribe of Louisiana

(We are learning the Tunica language)

Today, there are no fluent speakers of the Tunica language. Like in so many American Indian communities, the effects of expansionism and assimilation have resulted in the dormancy of the Tunica language. In the case of America’s Native populations, the federal government engaged in systematic efforts to extinguish Native languages in a larger attempt to eradicate indigenous cultures. For more than a century, the Tunica-Biloxi Tribe of Louisiana has witnessed its traditional language and culture slip deeper into distant slumber.

The Tunica-Biloxi Tribe is a successor to the historic Tunica, Biloxi, Ofo and Avoyel tribes who allied in the 18th century and became amalgamated into one in the 19th century through common interests and outside pressures from non-Indian cultures. Into the 20th century, marriage with non-Indians had begun, perhaps because of the dwindling population. The modern Tunica-Biloxi Tribe is composed of Tunica, Biloxi (a Siouan speaking people from the Gulf coast), Ofo (also a Siouan people), Avoyel (a Natchezan people), and Choctaw. Although the ancestry is often mixed, tribal members identify either as Tunica, Biloxi, or Biloxi-Chocitaw. Focus on reclaiming the Tunica language is supported by a wealth of linguistic and other source materials. Less material is available on Biloxi language.
For generations, tribal families have passed down the Tunica language and traditions even though the last known fluent speaker passed away 60 years ago. There are currently 60 Tunica speakers with proficiency ranging from beginner to intermediate level. Two of the intermediate speakers learned Tunica as a second language with reinforcement of oral traditions passed down through their family. While they have a higher level of proficiency, they rely heavily on documented linguistic resources for continued learning.

In 2010, the tribe partnered with the Tulane University Linguistics Program, Department of Anthropology, to start the Tunica Language Project. In an effort to reawaken the Tunica language, plans were put in place to work with the tribal community to bring the language back. Dr. Judith Maxwell of Tulane assembled a team of graduate students in anthropology and linguistics, with periodic support from a visiting assistant professor and Tunica-Biloxi tribal members. Tunica language instructors, Donna Pierite and Elisabeth Mora, participate actively in the project work group contributing knowledge of their family’s oral tradition in language and Tunane researchers obtained written materials on Tunica from extensive work done by John R. Swanton, Albert S. Gatschet and Mary Haas between 1886 and 1953. With these and other basic materials, the Tulane team has reconstructed the phonological and syntactic structure of the language and is in the process of preparing introductory language materials. Much more work is needed to update the Haas’ Tunica grammar, Haas’ Tunica Dictionary, and other source materials. Planning and preparation is ongoing on curricula content for training. This work has laid a foundation for classes, workshops and summer language camps since 2012. The fourth language camp held this past June hosted 43 tribal children.

In an initial project, Tulane transcribed and reconfigured texts from Haas’ published narratives related by Sesostrie Youchigant, the last known fluent speaker of Tunica. The first volume of stories adapted for children was illustrated by a tribal artist and published in May 2011. The book was presented at the tribe’s general council meeting on the weekend of their annual powwow. Three tribal youth were recorded narrating the stories and the recordings were presented as gifts to tribal elders. Another volume is near completion and is waiting funds for printing.

As the Tunica language has been dormant for decades, the Language & Culture Revitalization Program (LCRP) was created by the Tunica-Biloxi Council in 2014 to establish a structural support for language and culture education, as well as a noticeable presence of the language on the reservation and throughout the extended community. LCRP supports preservation efforts through the development and facilitation of educational programming in traditional language, history, folklore, song, dance, and crafts. LCRP is working to revitalize the Tunica language by teaching basic, culturally relevant, useful words and conversational phrases that can be applied to the daily lives of tribal members in the classroom setting, in the home, in the tribal community.

To teach Tunica, the LCRP has adopted a modified immersion model pioneered by Dr. Maxwell which combines Total Physical Response, Immersion, and the Oxlajuj Aj methods. The Oxlajuj Aj method employs multiple instructors to enhance the learning experience and keep things moving rapidly with explicit use of regular games to summarize units. With the Tunica Language Teaching Model the LCRP department is expanding its in-person language program to include classes that range from beginners to advanced.

LCRP launched an introductory language workshop and established its first 8-week series of weekly Tunica language classes in August 2014 with 32 students enrolled. Weekly 8-week class series culminate in an Open House to engage family members. LCRP continues to promote and recruit more students from the tribal community. In an effort to reach more tribal members, LCRP developed a relationship with Northwestern State University (Louisiana) to use their distance learning system for providing online language training through WebEx. To date, LCRP has used WebEx to host 12 live sessions and post 12 recorded lessons for tribal members to view Wesley Leonard (Southern Oregon University) describes language reclamation as a way to achieve a level of “cultural fluency” based on what is relevant to the community. The Tunica Language Project has made traditional songs and stories accessible to tribal children and has reminded tribal adults of the importance of preserving their cultural identity. Continued use of the Tunica language is a natural way to preserve cultural knowledge and a way of expressing it through the language. Despite economic fluctuations and the perpetual effects of generational trauma, the Tunica-Biloxi still practice cultural traditions and yearn to pass them down to their children.

John Barbry
Director of Development & Programing
Language & Culture Revitalization Program
Tunica-Biloxi Tribe of Louisiana
3. Endangered Languages in the News

Chile agrees to official status for Mapudungun at the local level

*From the Nationalia.info web-site, 1 July 2014*

In a landmark decision, the Chilean state acknowledged that the municipality of Galvarino (Wallmapu) has the right to grant Mapudungun (the language of the Mapuche people) official status at the local level. Mapudungun had gained official status in Galvarino -named after a 16th-century Mapuche warrior- in August 2013, but the local authorities had requested an opinion to the Contraloría General (Comptroller) of Chile on whether the decision was appropriate or not.

The Contraloría General controls the legality of acts of the public administration. In its opinion 45,010, it says that municipalities have “authority” to "regulate the inclusion" of Mapudungun "as an official language, alongside Spanish, in the field of municipal activities." The decision adds that both languages "are used interchangeably by the inhabitants" of the municipality. "It is not permissible to consider that those people cannot use their respective languages on equal conditions."

The Contraloría further argues that no provision adopted in favor of Mapudungun can be aimed at limiting the use of Spanish.

Director of Galvarino’s Mapudungun language service Rodrigo Marilaf believes that the municipality should now pass a relevant bylaw allowing the introduction of a bilingual language policy. According to Marilaf, Mapudungun needs to be further used in schools and the media, and its knowledge should be expanded to the non-Mapuche too.

The decision by the Contraloría opens the door for other municipalities with indigenous population to declare other official languages at the local level. Apart from Mapudungun, other indigenous languages such as Rapanui, Aymara and Kawésqar (the latter seriously endangered) are spoken in Chile.

Alaska becomes second state to officially recognize indigenous languages

*By Casey Kelly, from the web-site ktoo.org, 24 April 2014*

Supporters of a bill to make 20 Alaska Native languages official state languages organized a 15 hour sit-in protest at the Capitol on Sunday [20 April 2014]. Their dedication paid off early this morning, when the Alaska Senate passed the measure on an 18-2 vote.

The Alaska House passed the bill last week, 38-0. It now heads to Governor Sean Parnell for his signature.

Dozens of people of all ages and races, many wearing their Easter finest, gathered in the hall outside Sen. Lesil McGuire’s office. The Anchorage Republican and chair of the Senate Rules Committee had the power to put House Bill 216 on the Senate’s calendar. But with end of the legislative session looming, the bill’s supporters worried it was getting caught up in last-minute, behind-the-scenes politics.

The group started their vigil just after noon, singing, dancing, and playing drums, and talking about why Alaska Native languages are so important.

HB 216 would add the state’s indigenous languages to a statute created by a 1998 voter initiative, which made English the official language of Alaska. While the bill is largely symbolic, Twitchell said it’s important to recognize all languages as equal.

“That’s all we want is equal value,” he said. “And there’s nothing wrong with standing up and saying that. It takes a lot of courage to do that. And it takes a lot of something else to try and go against that.”

Many elders who attended the sit-in recalled being punished as children for speaking their first languages. Irene Cadiente of Juneau said her teachers would hit her with a ruler when they caught her speaking Tlingit.

Cadiente said she’s proud that her great grandchildren are now learning to speak the language.

Heather Burge, a student in the Native Languages program at UAS, said she didn’t understand how HB 216 could become controversial.

“We should be at the point where this should be a non-issue,” Burge said. “But it’s still scary to some people, which is a little disheartening. But hopefully we can get past this.”

After the group had been outside McGuire’s office for about 30 minutes, the senator’s Chief of Staff Brett Huber announced the bill would be scheduled for a floor vote. McGuire later made an appearance of her own.

“We just got the bill, so we’re going as fast as we can,” McGuire said. “But it’s nice to see all of you. Thank you for coming, and thank you for your passion. I know you have support.”

It was 3 a.m. by the time the measure finally reached the floor.

Sen. Donny Olson, D-Golovin, who’s Inupiaq, said the bill would not have made it through the legislature without a groundswell of support.

“The elders, the youth, Native and non-Native,” Olson said.

Senate Majority Leader John Coghill, R-North Pole, took responsibility for the delay in getting the bill to the floor.
Coghill tried to explain what he hoped to achieve last week when he proposed amending the bill to create a new category in statute for “ceremonial languages.”

“I thought if you had them in that place of honor you would aspire to them and honor them,” Coghill said.

“Where if you put them in this place, they’re more likely to be under tension that I think would be harder to get to the honor and easy to get to divisiveness.”

Coghill said he was an apologetic no vote. He added that he would be willing to own up to it if he ends up being proven wrong. Sen. Pete Kelly, R-Fairbanks, was the other Senator to vote against the bill.

After the bill passed, supporters gathered outside Senate chambers to embrace each other and shed tears of joy. Twitchell summed up the feeling with a Tlingit phrase.

“We succeeded. We obtained,” Twitchell said after first saying it in Tlingit.

The bill explicitly says the official language designation does not require the state or local governments to conduct business in languages other than English. But Twitchell said putting them in the same part of the law builds momentum for future generations of Native language speakers.

If Gov. Sean Parnell signs the bill into law, Alaska will become just the second state after Hawaii to officially recognize indigenous languages.

Collections Strategy news

Press release from First Language Australia, 1 July 2015

We are excited to share the results of the National Library of Australia’s partnership in the FLA - Languages Collections Strategy, identifying language materials hidden within in the library’s manuscripts collections. The National Library’s 2014 Indigenous graduate Shannon Sutton is to be congratulated on his work in carrying out this research, which uncovered ‘original written manuscripts...that provide a glimpse’ into many Indigenous languages from across Australia.

“My great grandmother, a Krowathunkoolooong woman, could speak her language fluently yet only rarely did so,” Sutton says.

“As an Aboriginal person living on a mission during the assimilation era of the 1940s-60s, she was largely prohibited from speaking her traditional language and teaching it to her children - yet the odd word trickled down.”

As a result of Shannon’s work the NLA has developed a research guide of Australian Indigenous Languages Collections.

We’d like to once again thank National Library of Australia and the other state and territory libraries involved with us in the Collections Strategy which aims to find language materials within the collections and work to make these accessible for community researchers.

The indigenous Argentinians who hoped to see their president – but got the riot police instead

By Uki Godi, from the Guardian (UK), 6 July 2015

Félix Díaz stands before a line of colourful plastic tents on one of the broad strips of land running down the centre of Avenida 9 de Julio, one of the busiest thoroughfares in Argentina’s capital. “We have many gods,” he says. “The god of nature, the god of water, the god of air. But we no longer have the land we shared with them. They’ve taken our gods and now they’re taking what little is left of our land.”

Díaz, the chieftain of the Qom indigenous tribe, is leading the fight for the return of his people’s ancestral lands in the distant northern province of Formosa. Together with representatives of the Pilagá, Wichi and Nivaclé communities, the Qom activists have for the past five months camped out in Buenos Aires to demand the return of their territories.

But his words are drowned out by the din of traffic, and his message has been ignored by government officials.

Argentina is often thought of as a country of immigrants. Most of the current population consider themselves to be descendants of southern Europeans who arrived between the mid-19th and early 20th centuries. Díaz is attempting to change that narrative by making visible the displaced indigenous minority and reaffirming their rights – and their claims to lost territory.

“Argentina’s indigenous people suffer racism, discrimination and violence, says Nobel peace prize winner Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, who survived 14 months of torture and incarceration during the country’s 1976 – 1983 military dictatorship and is now leading a campaign for official recognition of indigenous leaders such as Díaz.

Far from responding to their demands, however, Argentina’s government has sent in the police. Riot officers in armoured vehicles recently launched a 3 a.m. raid in a failed attempt to evict the protestors from their camp. The attempted eviction was halted after the news went viral on social media. “We’re not murderers, we’re not delinquents, we’re not corrupt,” says Díaz. “We just want our human rights respected, and to be received by President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner.”

Fernández has cast herself as a defender of human rights, throwing her political weight behind the trials against military officials of the dictatorship era, but her government has consistently disregarded the rights claimed by indigenous leaders such as Díaz.
“The government talks about human rights during the time of the dictatorship while it violates the rights of the indigenous people today,” says Pérez Esquivel.

Pérez Esquivel has the ear of a powerful ally: the former bishop of Buenos Aires. In 2013, he arranged a meeting between Díaz and Pope Francis at the Vatican, and a striking photograph of the meeting between two white-clad leaders made front pages across Argentina. But even that media coup has failed to shake apparent public indifference to indigenous rights.

That is why in February Díaz brought his protest from Formosa, a steamy, sub-tropical and poverty-stricken province, to this makeshift protest camp in bustling central Buenos Aires.

After five months, the plastic tents are looking ragged, while the modular toilets standing in the middle of the avenue still look out of place. Few stop to express solidarity. Two small girls run barefoot perilously close to the curb as oblivious motorists speed by.

Part of the problem is that Fernández refuses to recognise the results of a government-sponsored 2011 vote in which the 50,000-strong Qom community elected Díaz as its representative to negotiate the land question. Díaz defeated his opponent in an 80% landslide. But Fernández dismisses Díaz outright. “The Qom don’t live in press conferences; they don’t live on 9 de Julio Avenue,” she said two years ago regarding a previous protest on the same spot. “They live in Formosa.”

Díaz counters: “In 2007 the government took away 2,042 hectares [5,000 acres] of our ancestral lands. Since then, it has ignored all our demands. Losing land for us is like losing a body organ. It means death to us if we don’t have our land for physical and spiritual nourishment, for our ancestral medicine.” Argentina’s last census in 2010 registered nearly one million people – out of a population of forty million – who consider themselves direct descendants of the nation’s indigenous inhabitants.

But the genetic make-up of Argentinians is more mixed than was once believed. “The ancestry information markers we carry in our blood show that genetically Argentinians are about 70% European, 20% indigenous and 5% African,” says Daniel Corach, director of the genetic digital tracing service of the University of Buenos Aires, who based the findings on wide-ranging DNA testing throughout Argentina.

Buit in the country’s northern regions, some communities have less mixed ancestry, says Corach. Among the groups with the least European blood are the Wichí and Qom communities in Formosa. “The economically dominant economic groups continue to displace those people even now, especially with the advent of extensive soy plantations, which have forced those native population to resettle in urban areas,” he says.

The Qom people fiercely resisted Spanish colonial encroachment and attempts to convert them to Christianity. But their ecosystem was devastated when the province of Formosa came under Argentinian rule in 1876 after a war with neighbouring Paraguay.

That ecosystem was destroyed by exploitation of the quebracho tree, known for its tannin and hard timber. And when white landowners turned to cotton production, the Qom people became the cheap seasonal workforce.

Since the nineteen-nineties their situation had deteriorated further. Communities have lost their lands to agriculture and suffer health problems caused by fertilisers, pesticides and water poisoning.

Father Francisco Nazar, a priest who went to work in Formosa 44 years ago, sees Díaz as Argentina’s best hope for coming to terms with the existence of its indigenous communities. “He’s imbued with the culture and spirituality of his ancestors, combined with a total belief in non-violence. He is a great man against very powerful enemies.”

According to Pérez Esquivel, the situation facing Argentina’s indigenous people is dire. “They are the object of systematic persecution while their lands are handed over to big international firms for mining, oil, gold, strategic minerals, fracking. They live like exiles in their own land.

I don’t think the president is going to change on this,” he added. “They are killing us with indifference.”

Blackfoot youth learn language through rap

From the CBC (Canada) web-site, 7 August 2015

With only 3,500 speakers alive today, the Blackfoot language is facing extinction unless it’s passed down to the younger generations.

Enter rap music.

“One of the elders I work with, Sandra Manyfeathers, said ‘You know, it’s nice all this work we do together on the elder speech,’ but she’s worried about the language not being carried on by the young people. So she had this idea that we could do language camps for the kids,” said University of Calgary linguistics professor Darin Flynn.

“Because I like rap, I had this idea of getting Blackfoot into rap music.”

The result is a weeklong camp that introduces local First Nations youth to their traditional language, culminating in a song performed entirely in Blackfoot.

“They were a little bit intimidated at the beginning, so we started with English and then on the next day we introduced words that they actually knew; that they forgot that they knew,” said Flynn.
"Now at the end is where they’re most intimidated because we’re doing all Blackfoot lines, so that’s pretty hard for them."

Karim Rushdy with The Rap Camp, an organization that teaches hip hop to youth and is running the camp, says the Blackfoot language is ideally suited for the medium. "I actually think it’s better than English for rapping, it’s built with so much rhythm in it," he said, adding he’s never worked with a First Nations language before.

Shanelle White-Quills, a 13-year-old participant, came into the camp knowing only a couple of words in Blackfoot, but says she’ll most likely continue learning after the experience.

“That’s really what they’re excited about is this idea that the Blackfoot gets passed onto the next generation, that it doesn’t stay with the elders, that it’s used by the younger people,” said Flynn, reflecting on the reaction of the elders after hearing some initial tapes. "And if the young people are using it in a medium that they like, there’s more chance of them grabbing it and taking it with them."

4. Appeals, news and views

Declaration for Indigenous Peoples

Submitted by Serena d’Agostino 22 June 2015
Wednesday 22 April 2015

We, the undersigned, are calling for a new approach to conservation, one that respects tribal peoples’ rights, for all of humanity.

Tribal peoples are generally the best conservationists; they have managed their lands sustainably for many generations. Forcibly removing tribal peoples from their land usually results in environmental damage. Such removals are a violation of human rights and should be opposed by conservationists. The cheapest and quickest way to conserve areas of high biodiversity is to respect tribal peoples’ rights – studies show reduced deforestation and forest fire rates, and greater biodiversity, on tribal land. The world can no longer afford a conservation model that destroys tribal peoples: it damages human diversity as well as the environment.


This has also been supported by the following indigenous organisations:

ALDAW Network, Palawan (The Philippines), Associação Huni Kui da Terra Indigena Hené Bariá Namakia – AHHBN (Brazil), Federação do Povo Huni Kui do Acre (FEPAHC) (Brazil), La Federación Nativa del Rio Madre de Dios y Afluentes – FENAMAD (Peru), First Peoples of the Kalahari (Botswana), Hutukara (Brazil), La Communauté des Potiers du Rwanda – COPORWA (Rwanda), Noroeste de Rondônia e Sul do Amazonas – OPIARA (Brazil), Organização dos Povos Indígenas do Acre (Brazil), Organization of the Agta People of Casiguran – SAKIBIBI (The Philippines), Programme d’Intégration et de Développement du peuple Pygmée au Kivu – (PIDP) (Democratic Republic of Congo), Taluk Soliga Abhivrudhi Sangha (India) and Zila Budakattu Girijana Abhivrudhi Sangha (India)

Threat to the endangered Kven language of northern Norway

From Aili Eriksen (aili.m.eriksen@student.jyu.fi)
The politicians in the municipality of Porsanger, in Northern Norway have decided to close the school and later the old people’s home in Børselv. Børselv school and Solbrått old people’s home are both located in one of the few villages where the Finno-Ugric minority language Kven is still spoken. This is decided despite the fact that the municipality of Porsanger is officially trilingual with Kven being one of the official languages.

The Kven as a group was in 1999 ratified under the general part II of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. There are approximately 2000 speakers of Kven and most of them live in the Porsanger and Varanger areas, and are in the age group 50-90. The Kven language on the other hand has had official status as a minority language in Norway since 2005. According to the ELDIA-project it is among the most threatened of the Finno-Ugric minority languages in Europe.

With Børselv school being closed and later Solbrått old people’s home, it may become harder to preserve Kven as a living language. Børselv school is the only school where the Kven language has a stronger profile and where the focus is not on Finnish.

I have recently started a petition on my own in order to save Børselv school and Solbrått old people’s home. At this point I have about 1200 signatures from all over the world, but mostly from Finland. The reason I chose a more global perspective in this campaign is that this is not only about the village, but the future of a threatened language and culture.
If you would like to support Aili Eriksen’s petition on behalf of Kven, please write to her at the e-mail address above.

Karelian is shrinking as a mother tongue

By Anneli Ahonen, from Helsingin Sanomat, Helsinki 16 July 2015 (translated by the editor)

The story of the Karelian language as a living mother tongue is coming to its final words.

In Russian Karelia only the progeny of individual cultured families or children living in villages with their parents’ relatives are still learning Karelian as their first language.

In the village of Nuosjärvi, in the kitchen of Vera Koppaleva, 73, the Anus Karelian, or Livvi, language is still babbling away, as she’ll still be exercising her skills a while longer.

“The children don’t speak Karelian among themselves. We would be regarded as foreigners or spacemen if we started speaking Karelian in town,” says Koppaleva.

The table is groaning with fried Baltic herrings, salads and pirogues filled with cloudberries.

The Finnish ear influences in the soft Karelian language from eastern Finnish dialects and Russian. In places you can understand speech, but not entirely.

“I don’t like the written form of Karelian, which is quite distorted. I like Finnish. That’s what we were once taught in school,” enthuses Koppaleva.

In Soviet times the Karelian language confronted what many other Finno-Ugric languages in Russia did: people were forbidden to speak their own mother tongue in public domains.

Parents no longer know the language well enough to speak it to their children at home. Russian has also guaranteed the children a gateway to a better life.

The position of Russian as a language of school teaching and as the main language of administration and entertainment is eroding the position of minority languages more than ever.

The hardy Koppaleva has carried on farming all her life and brought up seven children on her own. Her husband died when their youngest child was a few months old.

Koppaleva moved with her children in the nineteen-eighties to Nuosjärvi, which is now a Karelian village with 300 residents. It is 76 kilometres from Petrozavodsk.

The village is in Prääsi administrative district, where 37 percent of the population regard themselves as Karelian and 46 percent Russian. In Russia 25,600 people declare themselves to be Karelian speakers.

“I took water to the school by horse, and I worked as a milkler in a sovkhoz (collective farm). I had to get food, clothes and schoolbooks for the children,” Koppaleva says in the yard of her house.

There are so many mosquitoes that you don’t have time to swat one before another attacks, but Koppaleva isn’t deterred.

It’s hard for the old lady to understand why her granddaughter Natalia Ishkina, 22, who has come from a visit to Petrozavodsk, chose Karelian as her main subject at university. It doesn’t promise a brilliant career.

“I would have liked to study Finnish as my main subject, but I got to study Karelian,” says Ishkina, who graduated in June.

In her childhood her parents spoke Russian to her, so she had to start Karelian as a beginner at university.

“It was impressed on us there that Karelian is our second mother tongue.”

Ishkina grieves for the fate of the language and believes it is dying. At the university the students didn’t speak Karelian among themselves in their free time.

“In fifty years’ time not even half of the current speakers will be around. Karelian is being treated as a foreign language. It is lamentable.”

At the university Ishkina was taught new words of Karelian origin. So ‘beetroot’ is for Koppaleva syyokla, borrowed from Russian, but for Ishkina it is ruskiejuur.

In Karelia there is a shortage of skilled teachers of Finnic languages, because so many go to Finland when they graduate. Ishkina is travelling in the summer to Finland to sell strawberries, but is planning to move to St. Petersburg and wants to stay in Russia. In Petrozavodsk she works as a content producer and writes articles for various web-sites.

In multinational Russia a line is constantly drawn as to how much noise the national minorities may make about themselves. Since the Ukrainian war the mood has grown more intolerant. Even in the Karelian republic to administration is accused of Russifying minorities.

But although the number of mother-tongue speakers of Karelian is shrinking, its use continues in other forms. People who know Karelian use the language, for instance, for text messages. The reason is the price.

Karelian is written in Latin characters, Russian in Cyrilic. A text message will accommodate 160 Latin characters, but only 70 Cyrillic ones. Therefore it’s cheaper to text in Karelian.

The summer paradise of Nuosjärvi unites the old lady and Ishkina. Although the house still doesn’t have running water or an inside toilet, Koppaleva, who has just been cutting rushes with a scythe, has plenty of reason to be happy.

“From the lake we get fish and from the forest mushrooms, cloudberries, cranberries, lingonberries and blueberries. I get strength from working and I’m pleased to see the fruits of my work.”
On the Philippines’ diversity of languages

By Jorge Mojarro, from Business World Weekender, Posted on 05:24 PM, July 30, 2015

THE PHILIPPINES is one of the most linguistically diverse nations in the world. According to Ethnologue, a catalogue of world languages updated yearly, there are 171 living languages in the archipelago.

Many Filipinos wrongly tend to call “dialect” any language which is not widely spoken throughout the archipelago, like Bicolano, Chavacano, or Waray. This is a pejorative distinction that has no basis from a linguistic point of view. As the eminent linguist Max Weinreich said: “A language is a dialect with an army and a navy,” meaning clearly, that dialects are languages without political support.

Among the archipelago’s 171 languages, 61 have less than 10,000 speakers, and 30 are spoken by the Aetas, Itas, Agtas, and Negritos.

It is not a coincidence that the most discriminated indigenous people in the archipelago speak in languages that are the most endangered, because a long history of abuses has reduced them to indigency, semi-slavery, and even alcoholism, as reported by Danilo B. Galang in Among the Agta of North Sierra Madre (Anvil, 2006) and other scholars.

Globalization tends slowly toward uniformity, and language is mainly seen in the Philippines as a useful instrument. The consequence is that many parents do not talk to their children in their ancestral mother tongue, especially in the provinces. Gaddan is being replaced by Ilocano, for example, while Tagalog is replacing the Mangyan languages in northern Mindoro. A language is not endangered when it has a few thousands speakers, but when parents stop using it when they communicate with their children at home. A linguistic gap occurs and the cultural knowledge that the language carries may be threatened, too.

PREJUDICES

According to professor David Crystal in his book Language Death (2000), “When language transmission breaks down, through language death, there is a serious loss of inherited knowledge.” For instance, Filipinos cannot access the original sources of their history before 1898 because those are mostly written in Spanish, and as a consequence the Philippines is, I suspect, the only country in the world whose people have to read the national novel through translations.

That may explain why Filipinos tend to have very vague ideas about the pre-Hispanic and Spanish colonial period and not a few misconceptions and established prejudices, as already pointed out by scholars like Fernando Zialcita or critics like Nick Joaquin.

The situation is even more worrisome when dealing with languages without any written tradition. Filipinos might learn Spanish if they feel like and access a vast collection of good literature. But most of these endangered Filipino languages were not written ever: once the last speaker dies, there will not be a come back. Mr. Crystal added that “as each language dies, another precious source of data -- for philosophers, scientists, anthropologists, folklorists, historians, psychologists, linguists, writers -- is lost.”

I believe language loss in the Philippines is not something desirable.

Some people -- especially politicians -- think that “sharing a single language is a guarantor of mutual understanding and peace, a world new of alliances and global solidarity,” to quote Mr. Crystal. This was partly the idea behind the creation of the linguistic concept called “Filipino” as the common language for the whole archipelago, a clumsy invention, I dare say, also sanctioned in the Constitution. Examples showing a unifying language guaranteeing the opposite of peace are thousands: we could mention a couple of civil wars, as in Yugoslavia and Spain.

Not a few have also held that the adoption of English would be better for business. Against this idea the examples of Japan, South Korea, Denmark, or Finland are quite eloquent -- countries that did not surrender to the global language and yet succeeded. Moreover, it happens that economic success is what leads a nation’s language to prosper and gain prestige. Who really wanted to learn Korean 20 years ago? Icelandic is a national language spoken by merely 350,000 people -- even less than the population of Malabon. Yet they take pride in the language in which ancient epic sagas were written centuries ago and there are few chances of finding a job there unless you learn their treasured language. What would really be revolutionary for Filipino children is the possibility of learning any subject in their mother tongue, skipping the gap of learning in a second language. A study carried by UNESCO demonstrated that this language in the community level should be used in schools to learn any subject, at least during primary school. Wouldn’t it
be amazing to read Dostoievski in Waray, Flaubert in Tausug, or Rizal in Ibanag? It would reinforce undoubted-
edly those languages and encourage their use in many
situations and disciplines. The University of Naga is car-
ying out such a project with Bicolano: a praiseworthy enterprise.

**PRIMITIVE**

There are a lot of prejudices regarding languages and
language use.

Maybe the most common one is the idea that indigenous
languages are primitive. But according to Mr. Crystal,
"There is not such a thing as a primitive language: every
language is capable of great beauty and power of expres-
sion." As with the experience of almost any "established"
language, there will be as much "borrowing" needed in
order to improve the language and make it adaptable.
Words like "table," "government," "priest," "bay," or
"simple" come from French.

Few people know that actually 45% of English words
alone come from French. And nobody comes to say that
English is a "bastardized" language: the essence of the
language is not altered but invigorated.

In the same way, there is no connection between the
complexity of the language and the intelligence of the
speakers or the culture: both are language myths. If that
were the truth, the Eskimo would have the highest IQ,
thanks to the complexity of their languages. At the same
time, speaking English is not a sign of intelligence, as
anyone who has heard the ideas, comments, and pro-
posals of some politicians and celebrities would attest.

Languages also "promote community cohesion and vital-
ity, foster pride in a culture, and give a sense of self-
confidence to a community," Mr. Crystal wrote. Local
languages are a source of pride, as I have observed es-
pecially while wandering in Ifugao and Kalinga.

Cordillera is one of the few places where I have been
told: "You have to learn the greetings in our language. It
is a matter of respect." Being proud of their identity is
very helpful for a society in order to prosper and im-
prove. English should be reserved for situations in which
the speakers do not share the same language.

Languages are cultural treasures too. Linguists have col-
lected several definitions in order to highlight the im-
portance of languages in the cultural order. Professor
Michael Krauss, who has studied the endangered lan-
guages of Alaska, said, “Any language is a supreme
achievement of a uniquely human collective genius.”

Professor Vyacheslav Vsevolodovich Ivanov said, “Each
language constitutes a certain model of the universe.” Or,
as expressed in a more idealistic manner by the Ameri-
can scholar Oliver Wendell Holmes: “Every language is a
temple, in which the soul of those who speak it is en-
shrined.” Being a polyglot like Jose Rizal is a great luck:
speaking different languages clearly increases our
knowledge of the world. Each language is, in fact, anoth-
er view of the world, or, citing again, Mr. Crystal: “Each
language reflects a unique encapsulation and interpreta-
tion of human existence.”

**NEW LIFE**

Unfortunately, not too much is being made to save this
rich heritage in the Philippines. In many cases, an active
program of language revitalization would provide new
life to many languages. There must be a documentation
and recording of the endangered languages before they
vanish forever.

Not a few scholars doing field work continue to report
the phenomenon of this tendency by some Filipinos to
avoid belonging to a certain local community, as if this
were a source of shame or discrimination. In one provin-
cial capital that will charitably be left unmentioned, there
were residents who were polled, disowning practically
the language of their community and claiming to speak
only Tagalog. And yet, the more rare a language, the
more unique it is, and this is how everybody should re-
ard the languages.

In the European Union, in Taiwan (allegedly the birth
place of Austronesian languages), and in Australia, steps
have been made to preserve their respective language
heritage -- especially after a long history of discrimina-
tion against the Aboriginals, in the case of Australia. The
Philippines, being one of the richest countries in terms of
human biodiversity, does not even have a decent muse-
um of ethnology where Filipinos could learn about the
many cultures in the archipelago and children, in partic-
ular, could learn diversity and tolerance.

Filipinos cannot expect their government to develop pol-
cies to encourage the preservation of this precious but
vanishing linguistic heritage, since they, too, may regard
heterogeneity as a danger to the country's unity, when
on the contrary it works just the opposite: heterogeneity,
from the beginning, has always been the core of the real
prismatic identity of the Philippines. Unless something is
done, the country may lose much of this heritage in less
than a century. It would be like half the world gone in
one country, and that would be a silent cultural catastro-
phe. Keeping alive this intangible treasure depends on
the collective will of those who inherit it.
Globalization tends shallowly toward uniformity, and language is mainly seen in the Philippines as a useful instrument. The consequence is that many parents do not talk to their children in their ancestral mother tongue, especially in the provinces.

JORGE MOJARRO is a Spanish scholar and a doctoral candidate doing research on Filipiniana. He has been living in the Philippines since 2009, going around the country, walking Manila’s streets and taking the train. He also writes for interaksyon.com

Vanuatu A delicate balance

By Kate Witt

“Olsem wanem?” is heard up and down the streets during the morning rush in Vanuatu. Asking “How are you?” is a linguistic embodiment of the sense of community that remains an integral part of Ni-Vanuatu culture, especially after the severe damage of cyclone Pam in March 2015. Voted as the “Happiest Place on Earth” in previous years, Ni-Vans retain their smiles and friendly disposition in the face of recovery from the largest natural disaster in Vanuatu history. Life goes on in Vanuatu: fishing, copra (palm oil) harvest, and the replanting of traditional crops (taro, manioc, and sweet potato). Physical damage and health condition assessments are complete, and Vanuatu is on schedule to rebuild. However, what is the magnitude of intangible damage inflicted by cyclone Pam, and climate change in general?

At a population of 255,000(approx.), Vanuatu is the most linguistically diverse country in the world, currently with 112 languages (2015 Ethnologue Report). However, currently no efforts are underway to conduct a cultural heritage damage assessment on the loss of language and kastom (traditional practices). This is significant, as over 50 of the languages were in critical condition pre-cyclone, with some only spoken by 5 people or less, and the average age of those speakers was 80+ years (these are approximate numbers gathered from fieldworkers and volunteers who recently discovered elders in remote communities who are the sole speakers of their language). The majority of Vanuatu’s languages remain either undocumented, or the documentation is in outdated formats. The last significant ‘boom’ of local language publication was around 2000 by Terry Crowley, so in the past 15 years the evolution of local language and usage has gone, for the most part, unreported or researched for personal publication rather than added to language database the Vanuatu Cultural Centre (VKS) houses. Evélyne Bulegh, Ni-Van Fieldworker Coordinator for VKS, shared with me that the 130+ VKS fieldworkers are given annual field notebooks, in which many of them document local language and kastom. However, the notes are then kept by the village chief and never digitized. Suitcases of cassette tapes, film reels, and other media (even Beta!) containing folklore in local languages are pending archival processing and digitization, but the process is too costly for VKS to finish alone.

According to Ambong Thompson, a long-time Ni-Van advocate for language documentation, the current predicament of local language began with two social changes: 1) the arrival of missionaries and 2) intermarriage among tribes and islands. “When missionaries arrived, they observed which were the largest tribes on each island, and then utilized those dominant local languages, which forced the smaller tribes around them to abandon their language and use the tongue of the larger tribes” (Thompson translated from Bislama to English by author). Over time, these smaller languages died out, which means in reality we have no idea how many languages originally existed!

Intermarriage, which is increasing due to ease of communication between islands along with Westernization of dating and marriage practices, usually leads to the preservation of just one local language, or a blending of the two. More commonly, if the languages are too distinct, partners resort to using Bislama, the national language (a type of Pidgin English). Their children then learn Bislama, English, or French in public school. Also, due to traditional gender roles, the local language of the man would be preserved, as women continue to move to their spouse’s community and learn that community’s language.

With the missionary influence came a Western educational system, which allowed many of the local languages to be recorded in written form using the English or French alphabet. Thompson advises that the best way to document local language is through digital audio recordings, but to also ask the local elders how to write their language, as many of them were taught by descendants of the missionary era.

Joel Simo, who has conducted linguistic research on FEL grants in the past, shared his perspective on the continued consolidation of his country’s languages as a form of “coastal drift”: “Mountainous tribes have moved from their home to the coasts, which requires them to learn the language of the coastal communities” and thus abandoning their tribe’s original language. Simo states that this is partially due to job creation on the coast, and I would add that natural attributes, like active volcanoes and climate change, encourage tribes to migrate to more stable environments.

Another obstacle for local language capture is the idea of “tabu”, or forbidden, aspects of the language itself. Some
subject matters are gender and/or age restricted. This limits who may collect the language, who may share it, and once it is incorporated into a searchable database, who has access. For example, if one wants to access tabu folklore recordings, one must obtain permission from the speaker or that speaker’s family. Ethical questions arise when these recordings are digitized, as the digitizer may not have permission to hear the recording, but due to its cultural significance and age of the recording, must be digitized in order to remain accessible as technologies evolve.

Local language documentation is thus dependent upon accessibility. Vanuatu received its first solid internet connection via a submarine fiber optic cable in April 2014, less than a year before cyclone Pam. It’s impossible for most of us to imagine going from using SMS on a mobile to advanced communication patterns of the internet today. The delights and dangers of the ‘magic box’ computer are quickly becoming apparent in Vanuatu, which makes local language documentation ever more crucial. The Ministry of Education recently passed a Local Language Initiative, which encourages public schools to teach within the following parameters:

Kindergarten-2nd grade: subjects in local language (Bislama in urban areas)
Primary School: subjects and grammar in Bislama
Secondary School: subjects and grammar in either English or French (www.moet.gov.vu)

Due to lack of access to the available language documentation (which is dreadfully outdated), many schools on the outer islands find this initiative impossible without external help. The majority of language documentation is literally waiting in suitcases to be digitized. Once funding is obtained, the collection will be used to create an interactive database, complete with audio and visual dictionary sets that can be utilized by the educational system in Vanuatu, and can be used as a basis for further linguistic research.

Many linguists and language organizations are highly interested in conduction research and language collection in Vanuatu, including myself. So I asked my Ni-Van colleagues what researchers can do to aid in safeguarding Vanuatu’s rich cultural heritage and the answer was unanimous: fund sustainable documentation projects that train local language specialists to capture, upload, and teach fellow Ni-Vans local language using their material, recorded in their cultural context, to serve generations to come.

About the author:
Kate Witt currently serves as a Peace Corps Response Volunteer in Vanuatu, specializing in ICT (Information & Communication Technology) Language & Culture Documentation. Kate will continue her research on the interaction of Portunhol and social media as a Fulbright Scholar in Paraguay. Her fascination with language and technology began as a NSEP Boren Fellow in Brazil while receiving her M.A. in Intercultural Communication from UMBC in 2013.

A dying language is making a comeback

By Daniel Hieber, from Time magazine, 29 July 2015

In the summer of 1930, at the dawn of the Great Depression, a 21-year-old linguist named Morris Swadesh set out for Louisiana to record the area’s Native American languages, which were disappearing rapidly. Morris and his peers were in a race against time to document them, and in the small town of Charenton on the Bayou Teche, he encountered Benjamin Paul and Delphine Ducloux, members of a small tribe called Chitimacha – and the last two speakers of their language.

But today, if you visited the Chitimacha reservation, you’d never know that their language went unspoken for half a century.

Over the past several decades, many native American tribes have participated in what has become a robust language revitalization movement.

As their populations of fluent speakers dwindle and age, tribes want to ensure that their heritage languages are passed on to the next generation – before it’s too late. But because the Chitimacha tribe had no living speakers for a number of decades, it made the challenge that much greater. In the end, the story of the language’s decline, loss and rebirth is a remarkable example of cultural survival.

Why document a language?
Unlike some other cultural legacies, languages leave no trace in the archaeological record. There’s often no trace in the written record, either.

Only a small portion of the world’s estimated seven thousand languages are well-documented in places like dictionaries and grammar books. Those that are least well-documented are the most endangered.

Many dead or dying languages contain exotic features of verbal and written communication. Chitimacha, for example, doesn’t use a word “be” in phrases like “she is reading.” Instead, speakers must use a verb of position, such as “she sits reading” or “she stands reading.” These are things that challenge linguists’ understanding of how language works.

By working with Ben and Delphine, Morris was trying to capture a small piece of that linguistic diversity before it vanished.

One day, with Morris sitting on Ben’s porch dutifully scribbling down his every word in a composition note-
book, Ben finished a story (a riveting tale of how the Chitimacha first acquired fire by stealing it from a mythical old blind man in the west). He then went on to tell Morris:

There were very many stories about the west. I believe I am doing well. I have not forgotten everything yet. When I die, you will not hear that sort of thing again. I am the only one here who knows the stories.

Ben passed away three years later, and Delphine not long thereafter. After their deaths, it seemed the Chitimacha language was doomed to silence.

Why do languages die?
How does a language come to have only two speakers? Why have so many Native American languages become endangered? The causes are manifold, but there are two main ones: sharp reductions in the population of the community that speaks the language, and interruptions in the traditional means of transferring the language from one generation to the next.

In the past, the former caused the most damage. Native American peoples were decimated by European diseases and subject to outright warfare.

Prior to European contact, the Chitimacha were lords of the bayou, with a territory stretching from Vermilion Bay in the west to present-day New Orleans in the east. They were expert canoe-makers and wielded extensive knowledge of the region’s labyrinthine network of waterways.

But by the time the French arrived in present-day Louisiana in 1699, the tribe’s numbers had dwindled to around four thousand, their communities gutted by European diseases that spread faster than the Europeans themselves.

After a protracted war with the French, they retreated deep into the bayou, where their reservation at Charenton sits today. The 1910 census recorded just 69 people living there.

Only later did the second cause of language decline occur, when children on the reservation were sent to the infamous Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania, which interrupted the transmission of the language to the next generation.

Ben and Delphine, born in the latter half of the 1800s, were part of the last generation to learn the language at home. Eventually their parents and many of their peers passed away, leaving them as the last two speakers of the language.

Renaissance on the bayou
Ben probably never imagined that the efforts of him and Delphine would spark the tribe’s linguistic renaissance, awakening their language from 60 years of silence.

In the early nineteen-nineties, cultural director for the tribe Kim Walden received a call from the American Philosophical Society Library, informing her that they had all of Morris’ notebooks, and even his notes for a grammar manual and dictionary, which totaled hundreds of pages in all. Thus began the herculean effort to revive the language.

The tribe put together a small-but-dedicated team of language experts, who set out to learn their language as quickly as possible. They began to produce storybooks based on Ben and Delphine’s stories, and word lists from the dictionary manuscript.

In 2008, the tribe partnered with the software company Rosetta Stone on a two-year project to create computer software for learning the language, which today every registered tribal member has a copy of. This is where I came in, serving as editor and linguist consultant for the project, a monumental collaborative effort involving thousands of hours of translating, editing, recording and photographing. We’re now hard at work finishing a complete dictionary and learner’s reference grammar for the language.

Today, if you stroll through the reservation’s school, you’ll hear kids speaking Chitimacha in language classes, or using it with their friends in the hall. At home they practice with the Chitimacha version of Rosetta Stone, and this past year the tribe even launched a preschool immersion program.

The kids even make up slang that baffles adult ears, a sure sign that the language is doing well – and hopefully will continue to thrive, into the next generation and beyond.

This article originally appeared on The Conversation.

India speaks 780 languages, 220 lost in last 50 years – survey

By David Laimalsawma, from the Reuters.com web-site, 7 September 2013

No one has ever doubted that India is home to a huge variety of languages. A new study, the People’s Linguistic Survey of India, says that the official number, 122, is far lower than the 780 that it counted and another 100 that its authors suspect exist.

The survey, which was conducted over the past four years by 3,000 volunteers and staff of the Bhasha Research & Publication Centre (“Bhasha” means “language” in Hindi), also concludes that 220 Indian languages have disappeared in the last 50 years, and that another 150 could vanish in the next half century as speakers die and their children fail to learn their ancestral tongues.

The 35,000-page survey is being released in 50 volumes, the first of which appeared on Sept. 5 to commemorate the 125th birth anniversary of Indian philosopher Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, who was also the country’s second president. The last one is scheduled to come out in December 2014.
Ganesh Devy, who supervised the project, said this is the first comprehensive survey of Indian languages that anyone has conducted since Irish linguistic scholar George Grierson noted the existence of 364 languages between 1894 and 1928.

There is a major reason for the disparity in the government’s number of languages versus what the survey found: the government does not count languages that fewer than 10,000 people speak. Devy and his volunteers on the other hand combed the country to find languages such as Chaimal in Tripura, which is today spoken by just four or five people.

One of the most interesting aspects of the project is Devy’s view of language as a marker of the well-being of a community. Languages are being born and dying as they evolve – note how Old English is unintelligible today, and how different is Chaucer’s Middle English from ours – and that is a natural process. But bringing attention to Indian languages with small numbers of speakers, Devy said, is a way of bringing attention to the societies that speak them, along with the well-being of their people.

Here are edited excerpts from our interview with Devy:

Q: What is the need for such a project?
There has not been a survey of languages in the country for the last 80 years. We do not know how many languages there really are. There is no official statistics disclosed to the people since 1961.

Then there are all over the world serious alarms about disappearance of languages and culture. Considering all these, we thought it will be good to have a survey as a beginning of a much larger project. So now we have now completed the language survey of India. We will soon begin an ethnographic survey.

Q: What is the main finding?
That India has a fascinating diversity of languages unlike anywhere else in the world, with 780 languages reported in our volumes and maybe another 100 or so which we were not able to report. So it is like having about 900 living languages in a country, which is very exciting news.

Q: Who did the work?
They are linguists. Also our people are people who are linked with the language.

Q: In which areas of the country are language clusters mainly found?
In all the states and union territories, invariably, there are at least 10 languages or more, but in urban spaces, like Delhi or Bombay, or Hyderabad or Bangalore, nearly 300 language communities inhabit that space in a very substantial number for each community. In the northeast, there are more than 250 languages.

Q: On the other hand, language decline is more visible along the coast of India.
Because of change in the sea farming technology, local people have lost their livelihood. They are no longer into fishing, making of nets, ship breaking. They have migrated inward. So they have migrated out of their language zones... Wherever people move from one livelihood to another livelihood, they carry their language for a while. But in the second generation, or the third generation, a shift takes place. The third generation no longer feels related to the earlier language the same way.

Q: Where else do you find major decline?
Nomadic communities. We had a very terrible law brought in by the British called the Criminal Tribes Act, 1871 (Rescinded in 1952). Under that act, many communities were described as criminal by birth, not criminal by act. So those communities got stigmatised. ... They are mostly nomadic in habit, and today in India those people are trying to move away from their cultural identity. They are trying to conceal their cultural identity. Therefore they are giving up their language.

Q: Which other countries have rich language diversity?
Papua New Guinea. There is a claim that there can be perhaps 1,100 languages in that country. But the demographic statistics do not bear out that claim.

Then comes Nigeria, which has about 350 languages.

Q: How do you preserve a language?
Languages cannot be preserved by making dictionaries or grammars. Languages live if people who speak the languages continue to live. So we need to look after the well-being of the people who use those languages, which means we need a micro-level planning of development where language is taken as one factor.

Q: Are you working with the government on ways to preserve languages on the brink of extinction?
There is a desire from the part of the government to understand what we are doing. There is a willingness on our part to be of help to the government if the government asks for help.

Q: Extinct languages: are they mainly from small communities?
In history, very large languages also go down sometimes. Latin is one example. The (ancient) Greek language is another, Sanskrit is the third one. A language does not have to be small in order to face extinction. That is the nature of language ... In India linguistic states are created. If there is a very large language for which there is no state, then slowly that language will stop growing. This has happened.

For example, Bhojpuri is a very, very robustly growing language, but there is no state for Bhojpuri. So after some time the robustness will be lost ... So small is not the condition for the death of a language. Several external elements play a role. Often smaller languages move to the centre ... slowly grow and occupy centre stage ...
So this equation that the government will come, will do something, then language will survive, that has to be taken out of all thinking. It is a cultural phenomenon.

Q: There is a volume on sign language. Can you elaborate?

Because deaf people speak ... initially in a non-verbal symbolic system. And so if that symbolic system exists and is in practice, it was necessary for us to take note of it. It is very much a language... Similarly, transgender people have their language, thieves have their languages. We have documented the language of thieves, we are trying to document the language of transgender community.

Q: Can you explain?

The semantic rules work differently (for them). With transgenders, the interpretative ability of the brain is handled differently. They may use the same words as you and I use, but the meaning drawn out of those words by transgenders is different.

Q: What surprised you about your findings?

That India has so many languages came as a surprise for me ... When I began in 2010, I had assembled speakers of 320 languages, and I thought maybe one could go up to 500 because (George) Grierson’s estimate was around that. But when I found more and more, it was a stunning discovery.

Q: What’s the outlook for languages?

All over the world there is a concern about the disappearance of languages. Languages are dying in a very big way everywhere in the world. Secondly, wherever the English language has gone in the last 200 years, it has managed to wipe out the local languages... But in India, English did not manage to do that because Indian languages have a historical experience of having to deal with two mega languages in the past – one was Sanskrit, and after that, Persian... So Indians knew how to cope with English. And that is why even today, though so many of us use English as if it is our first language, we still do not pray in English, and we do not sing our songs in English.

Q: Can you name a few rising/thriving languages?

Byari in Karnataka, Bhojpuri in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, Khasi in Meghalaya, Mizo in Mizoram, Kumouni in Uttarakhand, Kutshi in Gujarat, Mewati in Rajasthan.

Q: What about falling/declining languages?

Every state has about four or five languages that are critically close to extinction: Mehali in Maharashtra, Sidi in Gujarat, Majhi in Sikkim (four people in one valley), Dimasa in Assam.

Q: Do you see English as a threat to other Indian languages?

A: I don’t. When a language imbibes words from outside, it grows. Languages grow by taking words from other languages. Every language is from beginning to the end, a polluted language. The threat will come. Hindi has its roots – there are 126 languages surrounding the Hindi belt... Because they are feeder languages, they feed into Hindi, they are the roots for Hindi.

English is the sky. The sky will not harm the tree, but if you chop the roots, a mighty tree can fall. This happened with Latin, and should not happen with Hindi. Out attitude of neglect towards smaller languages is a threat to larger languages.

Q: How do you revive small/declining languages?

Revival is possible only if the livelihood of those people is protected. I’m emphasizing that the language disappears when the livelihood options of the speech community disappears.

Racing to record Indigenous languages under threat from ‘onslaught of English’

By Monica Tan, from the Guardian (UK), 20 August 2015

Comprehensive documentation of several Indigenous Australian languages, some of which are highly endangered and at risk of extinction, has begun.

The Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for the Dynamics of Language is building a library of audio and video recordings, grammar lists and dictionaries for at least 10 languages.

Professor Jane Simpson from the Australian National University said Australia’s Indigenous languages remain “inherently fragile under the onslaught of English and government policies which make it hard to keep [them] going.”

A 2014 National Indigenous Languages Survey found that of 250 Indigenous languages only 120 are still spoken, with 13 of these considered “strong” – five fewer than when the survey was first conducted in 2005. Around 100 languages are described as “severely or critically endangered”.

Some of the highly endangered languages in the project include Dalabon from Arnhem Land, Warumungu from Tennant Creek and Ngarrindjeri from southern South Australia.

The work also examines the impact European settlement had on Aboriginal languages. Simpson said one of the first things to pique her interest in Aboriginal languages was reading an 1840 dictionary of the Kaurna language from Adelaide, and learning the words for glasses, razors and trousers.

“You can see the creativity people had when they came across new things,” she said. “They looked at the horse, for example, and saw a large animal that belongs to white people: a ‘whitefella kangaroo’ (pindi nantu).”

In Guugu Yimithirr, from far north Queensland, directions are embedded in language. “You have to say which
cardinal point something is,” said Simpson. “You don’t say this or that way. You say, this-south or that-east; you build directions into the language.”

The work, according to Simpson, is not only important for speakers of each language to document their past, but could be used in language revitalisation programs, such as those in schools.

It was also significant for the broader field of linguistics. “In order to understand the human language, we need to know about many different kinds of languages and what the possibilities of language are.”

Simpson said the dictionaries would be “treasure houses of information on language, society, natural history, land and cultural traditions”.

Key to documenting any language is finding a speaker who “really loves language – likes explaining it and thinking about its patterns”, she said. While it was easy to point at objects such as plants, animals or rocks, and ask for the word, gathering translations for more abstract concepts and emotions was trickier.

The project would also support the four-decade-long work being done on the biggest dictionary of any Australian language, the Warlpiri dictionary.

“There was a wonderful bloke, the late P Patrick Jangala, who worked with linguists on words someone like me would never have thought of.”

Such words which do not have a direct English translation include *jamulu-nyany*, which Simpson said roughly translates into “when people just look at someone who is hitting another person and don’t say anything or take part or intervene, or when someone sees a snake and doesn’t kill it”.

Other languages such as Mithaka from south-west Queensland no longer have any living fluent speakers. In this case, linguists rely on recordings, dictionaries of the past and draw inferences from languages of neighbouring regions.

Simpson said many Indigenous language programs struggle because they do not have the same abundance of teaching resources that other more popular languages, such as Chinese and French might have.

Projects such as the Living Archive of Aboriginal Languages, developing language apps and “localisation” of commonly used sites such as Facebook are vital to the preservation and increased accessibility to indigenous languages, she said.

She added that the new national curriculum for languages, while acknowledging the diversity of Indigenous languages and their varying health across the country, would only be effective if properly funded and implemented, including its recommendation to train more Indigenous teachers.

### Modern Aramaic makes a comeback as a language of entertainment

*By Eden Naby*

In 2007 when at the FEL annual conference (Kuala Lumpur) the participants adopted a resolution recognizing Aramaic as the oldest continuously written and spoken language of the Middle East, Assyrians, the main speakers of modern Aramaic, were already on the run for their lives in Iraq.

Now the same thing is happening in Syria.

But in that same year, a seed began to germinate in northern California, that is reintroducing Aramaic as a language of entertainment. The effort, spearheaded by Tony Khoshaba, Ph.D. computer engineer, began as a means to raise funds to help displaced Assyrian refugees in Iraq not through picnics and sponsored sports, or a begging bowl that tugs at the heart strings of Assyrians in the American diaspora. No, the focus was on entertainment together with fund raising. Apparently, there was a pent up desire to develop music, theater, choral music and other forms of stage performance. Mesopotamian Night, as the annual event has been called, just completed its eighth year.

The first performance took place in a walnut orchard in Modesto, CA (boyhood town of George Lucas). It consisted of a quartet playing western instruments as accompaniment to arias sung by American singers – but in the modern Aramaic dialect of the eastern Assyrians who, before the WWI period genocide, used to stretch from southeast Turkey to the western shores of Lake Urmiah and south through what was ancient Mesopotamia in present-day Iraq.

Mesopotamian Night has grown in popularity, expanded to ever larger theater settings, and has become an annual fixture at the San Jose Opera. In 2014, for the first time, part of its repertoire, with added local music and dance, went to Chicago. In May 2015, again using some of the same repertoire as San Jose, but with added poetic recitation and newly commissioned music, it was presented in Los Angeles.

A single evening’s performance, captured on DVD and CD, thus far, Mesopotamian Night has raised about half a million dollars for refugee causes, with expenditures of about the same amount in artistic commissions and production costs. Its contribution to the revival and expansion of Assyrian entertainment goes well beyond money: it has revived an interest in the music and song of the 20th century as developed among Assyrians in Iraq, Iran and Syria, encouraged wider knowledge of Assyrian poets and poetry, both living and deceased, and it has promoted musical composition that while drawing on Assyrian folk music, allows for greater polyphonic diversity.
How to Entertain a Scattered Ethnicity

Music, poetry and story-telling have constituted the mainstay of entertainment for lesser developed societies throughout the 19th century. Assyrians living in north-west Iran, largely through exposure to Western culture acquired with the active educational presence of American, French, German and Russian missionaries, expanded their appetite for entertainment prior to the genocide of World War I. Newspapers, translated novels and poetry, original novels and plays performed and printed, began to circulate in the increasingly sophisticated and western educated corner of an emerging Iran. Not until after WWII however, did the survivors of the genocide in eastern Turkey and northwest Iran, reduced by the two-thirds lost to death and emigration, begin to recover sufficiently to embark on cultural activities. Between the two wars, Assyrians had been reduced to the basic entertainment of singers and drum and woodwinds provided for circle dancing at picnics, weddings and church celebrations. Still some men and women continued to produce written materials, some not published until the turn of the 21st century in American diaspora.

For its primary content, the renewed Aramaic language entertainment germinating in California draws on the written plays, skits, songs and poems produced by such men and women. These creative individuals owe their sensibilities and opportunities to that progressive social, educational and cultural atmosphere made possible by missionaries initially, then by opportunities for international study, as in the cases of Hannibal Alkhas (1930-2010), and William Daniel (1903-1988). Following the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 when all Iranians, but especially non-Muslim ones, saw their loyalty to Iranian nationalism betrayed by the Khomeini constitution of 1981, wave upon wave of Assyrian emigration ensued, mostly to the United States and Australia.

The three decades of Baathist Iraq saw a similar depletion of Iraq’s Assyrian population, the largest in the Middle East, which had been augmented by flight to British held Iraq during the genocide from both Ottoman Turkey and Iran. The fall of the Iraqi dictatorship and the anti-Christian attitude that emerged in 2004 with extremist Muslim ascendency meant a drop in the Assyrian population of Iraq to 1/3rd of its population of 1.5 million.

The subsequent flight to the United States and Australia from the Middle East has helped to create a relatively compact and educated Assyrian presence in towns like San Jose, San Diego, Los Angeles, Phoenix in the United States, and in Sydney, Australia. These communities added to the core American Assyrian centers like Detroit, Chicago, and Turlock.

Filtered through families and churches, from that original push by 19th century missionaries to create culture in Aramaic outside the confines of classical ecclesiastical Syriac, a number of men, and some women, emerged who led a cultural revival, as volunteers with paid employment outside the cultural sphere. These same dedicated volunteers received their professional skills through the largely merit based educational system in Pahlavi era Iran (1923-1979) which created the extensive middle class of Iranian society across ethnic and religious divides.

In San Jose, engineers and some doctors, began to envision the concept that has created Mesopotamian Night: an event that takes its content from existing, if obscured, Assyrian poetry, commissions music, and draws upon church choir members to create an evening of a level of entertainment in Aramaic probably not experienced by any Assyrians since the days of empire 3000 years ago. Unlike other cultures, there is no state for the Assyrians to funnel money into culture. When cultural advances have sprouted, they have done so despite state censorship and discouragement. It is a brave cultural effort perhaps as unique as Aramaic itself.

The success of the use of Aramaic for entertainment depends on management, artistic and performance talent, and funding. The question before Mesopotamian Night organizers is whether community support would be forthcoming were proceeds from the events not dedicated to Assyrian refugees in the Middle East, schools, medical clinics, small commercial enterprises and so forth.

The Talent

Most of the talent on stage, especially for the singing, comes from church choirs across the spectrum of denominations represented in San Jose by seven churches. For centuries, the preservation of language and culture had relied on churches. Trained voices chanting the complex modes of music at services usually consisted of men. Indeed, women have not been allowed at the altar in the Syriac Orthodox Church & others thus leaving all functions of the service to the clergy and deacons. But gradually the adoption of women’s chorus has led to gender equality in the training of voices, knowledge of melodies and the classical Syriac content of chants. Many professional singers in the Assyrian (including Chaldean and Syriac) communities began their singing performances as five or six year old children in church choirs.

On the other hand, modern musical composition has largely developed from the talent of western-oriented persons familiar with orchestral instruments. Thus piano/organ, violin, and guitar added to an instrument array that had consisted of a horn (Zurna), drums (davula) as well as the more sophisticated oud, a stringed instrument that some Assyrian men continued to craft, even in diaspora.
The successful entertainment that is represented by Mesopotamian Night relies heavily on an orchestra, some of whose members are themselves Assyrian, though the preponderance is local American. The melodies and orchestration has increasingly become commissioned from Assyrians: Edwin Elieh, a transplanted Urmiah resident living and working in Los Angeles has proven particularly adept at both composition and orchestration. A fine example of his work is the music for the 2012 musical production: Malek Rama Lakhouma (http://smile.amazon.com/Malek-Rama-Handsome-Mesopotamian-Night/dp/B00B6A44SW/ref=sr_1_cc_5?s=aps&ie=UTF8&qid=1440452319&sr=1-5-catcorr&keywords=Mesopotamian+Night), based on a poem by Hannibal Alkhas, set to a fairly complex two-hour musical performance.

**Performance Reception**

Of the multiple cultural goals of the volunteers who work for months to produce the one night only performance, the primary one is entertainment through the promotion of Assyrian language performance based on Assyrian stories, poems, dances, and traditions. But a one-night stand can have limited long-term influence. Even the CDs and DVDs do not circulate widely though they are promoted through social media as well as Amazon and the Mesopotamian Night’s own website. The long-term success of this tremendous dedication and effort is in producing a set of musical scores, arrangements and poetic composition that becomes a cultural storehouse for future generations. Despite the loss of the works of many lyrical poets during the genocide, a repertoire is accumulating that can be tapped, as long as the written and spoken word can be preserved. Thus the body of material can be useful beyond the one night stand in Silicon Valley. As immediate proof we see the transportation of drama and musical pieces such as “Talibutha,” (The Engagement) a comic poem by William Daniel that was staged both at the Chicago and Los Angeles Mesopotamian Night events. The genocide themed poem, “The Tale of Badri,” composed by Jean Alkhas (1908-1969), and set to music by Shmuel Khangeldy, will likely see repeat performance in Chicago and elsewhere. The more serious performance reception question is whether Aramaic language performance for an Assyrian diaspora community can actually attract those beyond the first generation of immigrants. Will the strength of the performances bring in audiences whose grasp of Aramaic is diluted by schooling in an English-speaking milieu? Or will the music and attractiveness of performance draw even those who do not speak Assyrian well?

We have to go back to the churches for an answer: As long as the churches continue to promote Assyrian and train young deacons and girls who sing in the choirs, the talent and the audience may be hooked on entertaining performance. But thinking ahead, both funders and volunteers are seeking to expand the range of audience and performance by moving beyond the Assyrian community. In part, this can be done through translation from other Middle Eastern languages, as for example, “The Little Lantern,” an Arabic poem, translated into Aramaic, set to music by George Somi, and performed as the main feature of the 2014 Mesopotamian Night program. In future programming, music from the Nash Dedan ( a Jewish Aramaic speaking community almost swallowed within Hebrew speaking Israel) may be included. The Nash Dedan and the Assyrians are the only remaining communities that have Aramaic as a native language. The preservation of Aramaic as a spoken language goes beyond those with a heritage claim: Maronites and some other native Christian groups in Israel appear to be searching for ways to assert their separateness from the Arabs, most of whose culture is permeated by Islam and increasingly by radical animosity toward native Christians as well as other Christians. How far this adoption of Aramaic will proceed remains to be seen. But for the time being, it is through Assyrian entertainment that the force of Aramaic is surviving in American diaspora.

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**Inuit move closer to a single writing system**

*From CBC news web-site (Canada), 25 August 2015*

A two-day gathering gets underway in Iqaluit today that will help move Inuit closer to a single, unified writing system.

The Autausiq Inuktut Titaursiq task force, launched by Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, the national Inuit group, will spend the next two days discussing findings from a series of consultations that saw visits to three communities in Nunavik, three in the N.W.T.’s Inuvialuit region and six in Nunavut.

The goal is to come up with a recommendation to provincial, territorial and Inuit government recommendations on how to standardize the written Inuit language.

Right now, both the spoken and the written language vary widely across the four Inuit regional groups, from the N.W.T. to Labrador.
"We've counted up to 12 main dialects, and of course there are sub-dialects within those main dialects," says Jeela Palluq-Cloutier, who's been leading the task force since it was established.

The written language also varies widely, with some Inuit relying on syllabics originally brought in by missionaries, while others use roman orthography to transcribe the language.

The project came out of ITK’s 2010 national strategy on Inuit education, which sought ways to improve the overall graduation rate. At the time, it sat at approximately 25 per cent.

"There are so many different writing systems being used that educational materials and resources are not easily shared between regions," Palluq-Cloutier said.

She says the goal of this week’s summit is to clarify issues surrounding a unified language before the task force makes final decisions or recommendations.

Delegates at the meeting will represent all four Inuit regions of Canada. One delegate from Alaska and one from Greenland will also take part to share their experience.

The meeting, which is closed to the public, wraps up Wednesday.

Bellegarde said his “ultimate goal” would be to have translations of all those languages on consumer products. Again, logistically impossible, and economically unfeasible. No U.S. company exporting food to Canada is going to spend zillions of dollars to include 62 official languages on its products, and there’d be no room on any box or jar for all that.

His zeal to protect and preserve these languages, the majority of which are at serious risk of dying out, is completely understandable and well-placed. Languages are precious and they deserve to survive, for they represent the unique and irreplaceable way their speakers perceive and think about the world.

The AFN wants Ottawa to set money aside to revitalize these dying languages. The money would go to establishing a language institute, programs, immersion and other preservation and teaching initiatives. Yet, Ottawa has already done all that and more, so why is there a pretence that we have to start from scratch?

The programs and institutes Bellegarde is calling for already exist, and tremendous sums of money are spent annually on revitalizing and preserving aboriginal languages. The problem is being dealt with through an impressive array of initiatives and programs. The question is whether people are actually bothering to participate in them.

In B.C., for example, there is the First Nations Cultural Council, a “First Nations-run Crown corporation with a mandate to support the revitalization of aboriginal language …”

There is First Voices, partly funded by Canadian Heritage, that promotes “language legacies celebrating indigenous cultures.” First Voices provides such things as tutors, indigenous language apps, interactive dictionaries and online language labs. Five years ago, Ottawa announced it would quadruple funding for aboriginal language preservation in B.C. alone, including instructional material and youth language camps.

The government of the Northwest Territories has had an Official Languages Act since 1984, and its policy supports “various programs in support of community language activities and the development of aboriginal language programs for students and teachers.”

The federal government’s First Nation and Inuit Cultural Education Centres Program “funds approximately 100 First Nation … centres to help preserve and strengthen their unique cultures, traditions and languages.”

Lakritz: More money won't save aboriginal languages

NAOMI LAKRITZ, CALGARY HERALD
More from Naomi Lakritz, Calgary Herald
Published on: July 11, 2015

If anyone thought that Perry Bellegarde would be a practical and pragmatic leader as national chief of the Assembly of First Nations, his foray this week into language preservation should have dispelled that illusion.

Bellegarde wants Canada’s 60 or so aboriginal languages to be all declared “official” alongside French and English. Sorry, Chief Bellegarde, but the cost to the federal government to have every document, every report, every piece of letterhead and everything else translated into 62 languages would be astronomical. Not to mention logistically impossible. A civil servant’s business card, for example, would have to be the size of a pizza box to accommodate 62 official languages.
Nine years ago, Ontario established the Anishinaabek Mushkegowuk Onkwehon:we Language Commission “to support each of the 13 First Nation languages in Ontario.” The federal government’s Aboriginal Languages Initiative provides funding for community-based language preservation and teaching programs. A Mohawk immersion program exists in Quebec. Dogrib, Ojibwe, Cree and other indigenous language dictionaries are among the vast linked resources available through Alberta’s Bearpaw Institute, including Cree flash cards and an Oji-Cree medical dictionary for health-care providers.

The University of Alberta’s Canadian Indigenous Languages and Literacy Development Institute holds an annual summer school to “train First Peoples speakers and educators in endangered language documentation, linguistics, language acquisition, second language teaching methodologies, curriculum development, and language-related research and policy-making.”

Mount Royal University offers courses in Blackfoot and Cree. Aboriginal Head Start has taught indigenous languages to 9,000 First Nations children since 1998 at a cost of $59 million a year.

How can all this not be enough? If languages are dying out and remaining unlearned despite the millions of dollars spent annually on teaching and preserving them, the problem is not a lack of multimillion dollar initiatives. At some point, people have to take advantage of the opportunities offered. If they won’t, that’s not something more money and more programs can fix.

Naomi Lakritz is a Herald columnist.

Help appears for vanishing languages

By David Montgomery, form the Durango Herald / Washington Post web-site, 21 August 2015

The Smithsonian’s Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage this week received the largest gift in its history – $1.24 million – to support research into sustaining and revitalizing endangered languages in Europe.

The five-year project will evaluate different approaches to keeping languages healthy, taking into account social, cultural, political and economic influences, said Michael Atwood Mason, director of the center, which is best known for putting on the annual Folklife Festival on the National Mall.

“There’s an enormous amount of excitement about developing well-researched and well-documented evidence about what’s working and what’s not,” Mason said.

The money is coming from Ferring Pharmaceuticals, a manufacturer of drugs for reproductive health, urology and gastroenterology, headquartered in Switzerland.

The very name of the company is derived from an endangered language: Fering, spelled with one r, is a dialect of North Frisian, spoken on the German island of Fohr in the North Sea.

The company’s commitment to cultural and linguistic preservation is a passion of Ferring’s founding family. The late Frederik Paulsen, a medical student and researcher who fled Germany in the 1930s after being jailed by the Gestapo for political dissidence, founded the company in Sweden in the 1950s and named it in tribute to the community of Feringers on Fohr. Paulsen’s son, also named Frederik, now is chairman of Ferring and is on the advisory council of the Folklife center.

“My family heritage includes Frisian, an endangered language, so I am keenly aware of the importance of language to our identity and our humanity,” the younger Frederik Paulsen said in a written statement.

Thousands of languages around the world are estimated to be in danger of losing their daily use this century. Scores of those are in Europe, from Aranese in the Pyrenees, to the Sami languages in Scandinavia, to Breton in France, Mason said.

All manner of formal and informal efforts are underway to save languages, which are precious conveyors of identities and cosmologies as well as isolated practical knowledge, such as the properties of local plants. The new grant will support six research teams in collaboration with several international organizations to assess various strategies being used to breathe new life into languages.

Europe is a good laboratory because conditions across the continent are relatively even, allowing for comparison and potentially yielding lessons that could be applied elsewhere, Mason said. The languages to be studied haven’t been decided yet.

Language sustainability is a priority across the Smithsonian, whose “Recovering Voices” effort teams the Folklife center with the National Museum of Natural History and the National Museum of the American Indian.

Two years ago, a theme of the Folklife Festival was “One World, Many Voices: Endangered Languages and Cultural Heritage.”
5. Appeals from endangered speech communities

Fund-raising for revitalization of Minderico

Vera Ferreira <ferreira@cidles.eu> is requesting help with her crowdfunding campaign to raise money for the revitalization of Minderico: https://hubbub.net/p/minderico The Foundation is happy to help her in getting the word out.

6. Obituaries

John Wayne King (1952-2014)

Born in Louisiana in 1952, Wayne, as he was known, studied history as an undergraduate at Calvin College. He then went on to study Linguistics at the University of Oklahoma and the University of Texas. He arrived in Sabah, East Malaysia in 1981 as a researcher with SIL and married his wife, Julie. Together they edited the initial language surveys conducted by SIL researchers under a Memorandum of Understanding between SIL and the Sabah State Government. In 1984, these surveys were published by Pacific Linguistics in Languages of Sabah: A Survey Report. It was reprinted in 1997 and remains a source of basic information about the languages in Sabah.

The Kings spent many years researching Tombonuo or Sungei, a Paitanic language of northern Sabah and produced numerous linguistic papers, literacy materials, a phrase book, folktales and a dictionary. They also worked with Tombonuo Christians on a translation of the New Testament and parts of the Old Testament into Tombonuo.

Wayne was Director of the Malaysian Branch of SIL International from 1991 till 2001. He then became pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church, Baton Rouge, Louisiana. He died on 20 September 2014 after a hard battle with thymic carcinoma, the seeds of which were sown when, as a five-year old, his tonsils were radiated. Adapted from a Memorial (with bibliography) published in the Borneo Research Bulletin, 2014, vol 45, pp 25-28.

Hope Hurlbut (1934-2014)

Hope was born in Ontario, Canada on 10 May, 1934. She trained as a nurse and spent some time in Hong Kong where she became fluent in Cantonese and Mandarin. In 1962/3 she was invited to help establish a small clinic in the remote interior of North Borneo (later Sabah), in an area where the local language was Eastern Kadazan. In order to communicate better with her patients, Hope learned to speak the various Eastern Kadazan dialects.

In 1971 she left Sabah to do a one year midwifery course in England; during this time she also took the basic linguistics course offered by SIL at Horsleys Green, near High Wycombe.

From there she returned to work in Hong Kong, but visited Sabah on many occasions to collect stories, record music and do linguistic research which culminated in her obtaining a Master's degree in Linguistics.

In 1978, she returned to Sabah as a member of SIL, and took part in the survey of Sabah Languages that was later edited by Julie and Wayne King and published by Pacific Linguistics (1984). In the following years she produced linguistic papers, literacy books, collections of folk tales and a dictionary with over 12,000 entries on the Labok-Kinatabatangan Kadazan language. She also documented the traditional belief system, social organization, farming systems, childbirth practices and infant mortality of the people. She helped with the translation of the New Testament that was published in 1996.

From 1999-2010, Hope was a consultant with SIL. She had become interested in sign language for the deaf throughout south-east Asia and worked on this project in Eastern Kadazan, Malay, Cantonese, Mandarin, Thai languages, Philippine languages, Indonesian languages and latterly on the French sign language of Quebec.

She returned to Canada in 2010, and in October 2013 was admitted to a long-term care home suffering from ALS, where she died on 21 September 2014.


7. Book Reviews

Honoring our Elders: Culturally Appropriate Approaches for Teaching Indigenous Students

Edited by Jon Reyhner, Joseph Martin, Louise Lockard, Willard Sakiestewa Gilbert

This is the third monograph published by Northern Arizona University’s College of Education in conjunction
Grains of Gold: an Anthology of Occitan literature

This book arrives as number 7 in Boutle’s estimable series of literary anthologies of lesser used languages of Europe; but when the series is complete there will be as many more. So much to look forward to!

Its breadth of coverage, with fragments gathered over ten centuries from 950 to the work of one born in 1951, means that the book defies summary, let alone characterization. A language is just a means of expression, which enables a host of different spirits to say what is on their mind. If it has a unity, it is a negative one: despite being citizens of France, these writers have not expressed themselves by the canons of Parisian French. Political vagaries – and above all, the exceptional military success of the Franks in the latter first millennium, which unified Gaul under their leadership – have determined that Occitan – the language of “Oc” for Yes – would not become the language of the French state, but rather the noblest of patois, pointing back not to a capital city, but to a tradition of Romantic verse embellished by the aristocrat Guilhem IX, duke of Aquitaine and seventh count of Poitiers, in the early twelfth century. This anthology shows that he was not all high sentence, but could just as well immortalize a romp of three in a bed, enlivened by the claws of ginger cat. And for good measure, we are introduced to Trobairitz, the women who gave the better-known Troubadours a run for their money.

This anthology is not just a series of well-chosen texts, with translation into English of everything for those who are impatient to get at the meaning, but also a guided tour through the archipelago of Occitan literature. If you follow it through the centuries, you will at last gain a sense of the Félibrige, the many-stranded Occitan literary movement which has flourished on and off since 1845 (perhaps named after the li sèt felibre de la Lèi – the Seven Doctors of the Law with whom Christ conversed in the Temple). This will lead you to the great epic poet of the language, Frédéric Mistral, who – on the evidence of the selections here from Mirèio, his “pastoral epic” had much the same preoccupations as Guilhem IX:

--Bella, s’acò’s ansin, dounas-me voste amour!
--Jouvènt, l’aurés, diguè Mir’èio;
Mai ’quéli planto de ninféio
Pourtaran pervawns de rasin coulumbau!
Auperavans vosto fourcolo
jitara flour; aquél colo
Coume de ciro vendran molo
E s’anara per aigo à la vilo di Bau!"

--Sweetheart, if it be so, then give me your love!
--Youth, you’ll have it, said Mireille;
But first these white water lilies
Will bear the fruit of red and purple grapes!
Before this comes to pass, your trident
Will become as soft as wax,
As they’ll travel by boat to the town of Les Beaux!

The book is full of unexpected delights, both in poetry and prose, expressing unfamiliar literary thought as well as an unknown literature, and so making indisputable the value of refusing to be content with a single “vehicular” language for the whole of France. And all this is accessible now without negotiating a way past a French doorman.

The last chapter of the book presents some evidence that Occitan has overcome the dip in its fortunes which came with the middle years of the 20th century, even if, as it seems, the pen has outperformed the tongue in these last decades. Some parting words from Jànulc Sauvaigo’s Ship of Fools:

Entant tu
Ti piantaías durment
De la faula dau gaug permanent e audes
8. Places to go on the Web

Oshkaabewis Native Journal

From the web-site www.bemidjistate.edu

The Oshkaabewis Native Journal is an interdisciplinary forum for significant contributions to knowledge about the Ojibwe language. Contributions include monolingual and bilingual Ojibwe stories in the double vowel orthography, scholarly articles, and reviews of Ojibwe language material. The ONJ was first published in 1979. Publication schedule accelerated and the volume expanded in 1995 when Anton Treuer started as Editor. The ONJ is currently produced at a rate of two issues per year and audio material accompany all texts.

Eisel Mazard, who sent the link to the Editor, comments: Admittedly, I have not seen a copy of this publication myself, but... in principle, this sounds like a very exciting project (and much more positive than anything going on with Cree, to my knowledge).

http://www.bemidjistate.edu/airc/oshkaabewis/

If you're wondering, "Where is Bemidji?", the answer is, "Not that far south of Thunder Bay". Quote, "Bemidji State University is home to the first college Ojibwe language program in the United States, starting with adjunct classes in 1969 and a full three-year sequence of language courses starting in 1971." I assume that the university's major connection is to the Red Lake Ojibwe, who have significant land holdings stretching all the way up to the Canadian border (even north of the 49th parallel).

"With the advent of tribal schools and Ojibwe immersion programs in Reserve (Wisconsin), Bena (Minnesota), Red Lake (Minnesota) and Ponemah (Minnesota), BSU seeks to train a new generation of fluent speakers who have training and credentials necessary to accelerate this critical dimension of the Ojibwe language revitalization movement."

Heidi Stark adds:

Hello Everyone

Thanks for sending this link. The Oshkaabewis Journal is amazing and the main editor has been Anton Treuer, a well respected second language speaker from Leech Lake who is a Mide leader and has worked tirelessly with numerous first language speakers across the MN, WI and ND Ojibwe communities. The journals have been published for decades and I would encourage anyone interested in the language to check them out. Tony also edited a book called Living Our Language (with MHS Press) with some of those stories reprinted. The audio with the Oshkaabewis Journal is what's really great.

Bemidji is in MN and close to three Ojibwe nations (Red Lake, White Earth and Leech Lake) and so has strong connections with all three.

Weweni

Heidi

Te Kōkō Tātākī

The June 2015 issue of Te Kōkō Tātākī, the newsletter of the National Māori Language Institute / Te Ipukarea, is out, and as usual it provides an example of what can be done in the field of language revitalization at a national level. It is nice to see the Institute has had visits from some good friends of FEL, Dr. Mari Jones and Prof. Emeritus Bernard Spolsky. You can view the newsletter on-line at www.teipukarea.maori.nz

9. Forthcoming events

Austronesian & Papuan Languages conference, London

The Austronesian and Papuan Languages and Linguistics research group is pleased to announce its eighth international conference APLL8 to be held at SOAS, University of London, on 13-14 May 2016. APLL8 follows the highly successful APLL7 conference held in 2014, and the Austronesian Languages and Linguistics (ALL) conferences held at SOAS and St Catherine’s College Oxford in previous years. For APLL8 we are grateful for generous sponsorship from University of Edinburgh, University of Oxford, Surrey Morphology Group, University of York and SOAS University of London. The purpose of the APLL conferences is to provide a
venue for presentation of the best current research on Austronesian and Papuan languages and linguistics and to promote collaboration and research in this area. All papers will be subject to assessment by the Program Committee.

Abstracts are now invited for the APLL8 conference. Presentations will be 30 minutes followed by 10 minutes of discussion. Each individual may present up to one single authored paper and one joint paper. The deadline for the submission of all abstracts is Friday 6 November 2015.

Applicants will be notified of abstract acceptance by Friday 11 December 2015. For further information about the conference go to: http://www.soas.ac.uk/linguistics/events/apll8-conference or email apll8conference@gmail.com.

6th Annual Indigenous Language Institute Symposium 2015 (ILIS)

"To App or Not to App: How Technology Impacts Language Learning" Oct 19-21, 2015, Isleta Resort, Albuquerque NM

http://www.illinative.org/workshops/ILIOct2015WSRegForm8.27.15.pdfeta (Albuquerque, New Mexico).

KEYNOTE SPEAKER
Gregory Cajete, Ph.D. (Pueblo of Santa Clara), Professor of Education and Director of Native American Studies at University of New Mexico.

This year’s theme is "To App or Not to App: Looking at How Technology Impacts Language Learning”. We are inviting presenters to showcase language applications and programs that: 1) engaged community members or program staff to design them; 2) utilized easy-to-use and affordable programming tools to develop them; 3) established an effective community-professional team to develop the app/program; 4) developed apps/programs that have impact on language learning, also

1. Matthew Rama (Lakota) and Peter Hill, Lakota Immersion Daycare in Pine Ridge, South Dakota. Technology with a Limited Budget

Have you ever asked yourself, "How can I integrate technology into my language lessons when there are no existing resources?” or, "How do I develop multimedia materials when I don’t even know where to start?” Our program was in this situation a few years ago, and we decided we needed more to ensure that our students had an enriched learning experience. We searched widely for online programs and software that would be cost-effective and appealing to our students. We want to share what we found, and offer tips so that you can better utilize technology in your own language programs.

2. Manuelito Wheeler and Jennifer Wheeler

How Nemo Found His Voice - In Diné!

After the dubbing of "Star Wars" into Diné, the team pursued another project. This time it was working with Disney to dub "Finding Nemo" into Diné. Adult voices were not difficult to recruit but the challenge was to find a young boy fluent in Diné to do the voice over. The presenters will share how the project was conceived and carried out, and illustrate to our young that your language can land you a "cool" project and possible career!

3. Darrick Baxter (Ojibwe) Language Apps - using technology to teach ancestral languages

Capturing the imagination and attention of young people in the digital age is difficult and requires innovative technology that connects users with their past using modern tools. Young people hold in their hands the future of language learning and will decide if Native languages live or die. Tribal language apps can preserve and revitalize endangered languages by archiving the spoken word and creating volumes of resources and catalogs of words, phrases and historic locations, traditional sacred tribal objects and endangered oral history.

4. Robyn Perry Introducing Aikuma: A Free App for Recording and Interpreting Stories in Any Language

This presentation will highlight Aikuma, the free app that enables digital audio recordings and phrase-by-phrase interpretation. Ms. Perry will discuss why it is important for worldwide language revitalization efforts, as well as our current project using it in US diaspora communities. She will also facilitate a conversation with participants about how Aikuma might amplify revitalization efforts in indigenous communities in the US and beyond. Because Aikuma enables interpretation between any languages, she will also invite participants to explore deepening cross-cultural understanding of historical experiences between distant indigenous communities.

5. Ishmael Angaluqu Hope (Inupiaq/Tlingit)

"Never Alone" - Video Game of Culture & Language "Never Alone" was launched in 2014 and has received numerous awards. Ishmael helped write the script to ensure that these elements closely align: a good game, a rich experience, a great story, empowering indigenous people, and healing and building bridges along the colonial divide .

6. Daryl Baldwin (Miami Tribe of Oklahoma)

Horse Before the Car: Let Community Needs Drive Tech

New this year is a training session on how to implement the "How Do I Say...? Learner-Driven Language Learning Method". The registration fee includes the How Do I Say...? Workbook.
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, often because of the sheer variety of the human condition: a small community, isolated or bilingual, may continue for centuries to speak a unique language, while in another place a populous language may for social or political reasons die out in little more than a generation. Another reason is that the period in which records have been kept is too short to document a trend: e.g. the Ethnologue has been issued only since 1951. However, it is difficult to imagine many communities sustaining serious daily use of a language for even a generation with fewer than 100 speakers: yet at least 10% of the world’s living languages are now in this position.

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

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

1.2. The Likely Prospect

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

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

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

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

1.3. The Need for an Organization

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

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

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

- by recording as much as possible of the languages of communities which seem to be in terminal decline;
- by emphasizing particular benefits of the diversity still remaining; and
- by promoting literacy and language maintenance programmes, to increase the strength and morale of the users of languages in danger.

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

2. Aims and Objectives

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

To raise awareness of endangered languages, both inside and outside the communities where they are spoken, through all media;

To support the use of endangered languages in all contexts: at home, in education, in the media, and in social, cultural and economic life;

To monitor linguistic policies and practices, and to seek to influence the appropriate authorities where necessary;

To support the documentation of endangered languages, by offering financial assistance, training, or facilities for the publication of results;

To collect together and make available information of use in the preservation of endangered languages;

To disseminate information on all of the above activities as widely as possible.
Women of Tanna (Copyright Len Jacob Tafau)

Man dance, Tanna, Vanuatu (Copyright Len Jacob Tafau)