Effalah Radio show, discussion on preventative health.

From Right to Left, Dr Simon Tendeng (Physician); Nestor Diatta (Co-presenter) and Serge Sagna (Linguist)

See Serge Sagna’s article on the Eegimaa language of Senegal in this issue.

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Editorial

The Foundation for Endangered Languages is now more than twenty years old, and this year will see its twentieth conference. In fact we may hold two conferences this year. It’s been our custom all along for our conference hosts to offer themselves, rather than us seeking out a venue. That is because we have built up such a solid and friendly network of endangered-language specialists over the years. This year is no exception - and we have two events to boast of: one is our full-blown conference, due to be held in Hyderabad, India, in early December 2016 – details being finalized as we go to press; and the other in affiliation with SOILLSE, in Glasgow from 6 to 8 June, entitled ‘Small Communities in Crisis’. FEL is proud to be associated with this conference and honoured to be participating. Details have already been published in the pages of Ogmios.

As this issue went to press, the launch of the World Languages Institute at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London was about to take place. This new and ambitious institute is bound to have a great impact on the study and documentation of the lesser used languages of the world, and we hope to report on its initiation in the next issue.

Christopher Moseley

1. Development of the Foundation

Our next regular FEL Conference – FEL XX – in Hyderabad, Telengana, India: 2-4 December 2016: Long-term effects of colonization

The next FEL conference will be held 2-4 December 2016 at the university of Hyderabad, India. The theme will be Language colonization and endangerment: long-term effects, echoes and reactions

The XX FEL conference aims to examine language endangerment during the colonial era and explore the impact of colonization on the subsequent efforts of the independent nations and communities to revitalize minority languages. The conference will look at the continuity and changes in the approaches of the states and communities to engage with language revitalization in different forms and times.

Hyderabad was a princely state before and during the British raj, and home to considerable diversity. Telugu and Urdu are both official languages of Hyderabad, and most Hyderabads are bilingual. The Telugu spoken in Hyderabad is called Telangana Mandalka, and the Urdu is called Dakhini. A significant minority speak other languages.

A full call for abstracts will shortly be distributed to all members of FEL, and other interested parties. Enquires can always be made to the FEL Chairman at nicholas@ostler.net. The Local Chair for the conference will be Prof. Panchanan Mohanty.

As this is to be our twentieth annual conference in twenty years, we hope we can permit ourselves to celebrate, even though our theme – as ever – is focused on the nature of the threat to smaller languages.

Documentation, Standardization and Teaching of Endangered Languages in Northern Eurasia: Murmansk, Russia, 25-26 Nov 2016

This symposium is organised by FEL, and made possible by the joint efforts of Russian and Dutch institutions, including Mercator Research Centre. The purpose is to set up a Regional Interest Group and bring together knowledge about the arctic and subarctic regions between Fennoscandia and the Pacific Rim.

The leader of this initiative is Prof. Tjeerd de Graaf, who is our Committee member in charge of FEL Regional Interest Groups/

Contributions are welcome until July 31th and may concern endangered language documentation, preservation and revitalization in the northern Eurasian area.

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- 2016-04-30 First call for papers
- 2016-05-31 Second call for papers
- 2016-07-31 Deadline for the submission of abstracts

More information may be found at

www.mercator-research.eu/fileadmin/mercator/conferences_files/symposium_FEL_11-201

SOILLSE, with Foundation for Endangered Languages – Small Language Planning: Communities in Crisis – Glasgow 6-8 June 2016

Building on the success of the Soillse conferences held in 2011 and 2015, this conference aims to provide a forum for minority language researchers, policy makers, practitioners and activists to exchange research findings and experiences in order to stimulate fresh perspectives on minority language revitalisation and to identify new areas for collaboration. Although not limited to small language planning, the particular focus of this year’s conference lies in issues pertinent to language planning at the meso and micro levels, strategic interventions in support of minority language groups with weaker demographic densities, as well as to minority languages considered ‘stateless’ and/or without state support.

Presentations may cover any of these themes:
The Comanche, Bannock, Ute, and Shoshoni were once one tribe: the Shoshoni. They spoke one language – Shoshoni, the roots of which date back thousands of years to an Uto-Aztecan language group.

The tribal stories tell that the coming of the Spaniard with horses had a profound effect on the Shoshoni people. They could now travel further and faster than they ever had on foot. The Shoshoni have always been known for their restless nature, and the people began to argue among themselves. It was during this time that the Shoshoni tribe broke into many smaller family groups that wanted to separate and explore new regions. The Bannock family group moved north and west, as did the Ute. The Shoshoni moved further north and the Comanche moved southward.

In the early nineteenth century, when Americans began to move into their homeland, the Comanche territory included modern-day Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas—all the way south to Mexico.

There have been specific moments in the Comanches’ past when the use of the Comanche language directly impacted the course of history. The first instance of language changing history was during the Red River Wars of 1872-1875. The Nokoni band of Comanche roamed the area that includes present-day Dallas to present-day Lone-star, Texas, and South to Mexico. The Nokoni Comanche were under the leadership of Peta Nocona, the father of famous Quanah Parker. (Quanah Parker was the half-reed son of Peta Nocona and Texan Cynthia Ann Parker). In 1864 Peta Nocona was killed, which left his son, 16-year-old Quanah, too inexperienced to take over the leadership. The Nokoni band then divided up, families joining other bands with close familial relationships. What remained of Quanah’s family chose to remain ‘wild’ and join the Kwahadi Comanches, who were under the leadership of Chief Paraakoom. The Kwahadi band of Comanche controlled the area of west Texas (Palo Duro Canyon region running north from Colorado and south to Mexico).

In 1872 Quanah was about 23 years of age. Early that year, Chief Paraakoom was to meet with Colonel Ranald McKenzie to negotiate an agreement that McKenzie hoped would bring the Kwahadi Comanches, Kiowas, Cheyenne, Arapaho, and a family of Sioux to surrender at Fort Sill. Paraakoom had refused to learn English and had been using Quanah as his interpreter. Quanah met with McKenzie secretly and allowed the army to think he was the chief. That moment, Quanah’s use of language changed the possible history of the Kwahadi Comanches. The American soldiers named the half-breed the Chief of the Comanches, casting Paraakoom and his family aside. It was another three years of bloody war for the southern plains—and the Paraakoom family has never forgiven Quanah Parker, nor the Parker family, for the betrayal, even today. Kenneth Geimausaddle’s family were members of the Kwahadi Comanches; his mother’s maiden name in English is Naquaddy, in Comanche it was Na Kwahadi (meaning Just Kwahadi). They did not marry outside the Kwahadi band. He is closely related to the Paraakoom descendants, now the Timbo family.

The second moment of language changing history was a big one: World War II – 1944, the D-Day landings in Normandy.
On June 6, 1944, fourteen men of the Comanche tribe communicated orders from 4th Infantry Division down to the troops on the beach. They were using their language to serve in the United States Army. According to the US Army, the language saved them from losing World War II. What did the Comanche get in return?

The U.S. government classified the language as a Secret Code, and informed the Code Talkers, the best speakers of the men's dialect of Comanche, that they would be arrested and imprisoned in Fort Leavenworth if they ever spoke their language again.

The language was a Top Secret Code, and would endanger the security of the United States if a future enemy learned it. The men were forced to swear an oath to the government. During their military debriefing, they took an oath not to speak or teach their language again. In the decades ensuing, the men were true to their oath. Occasionally they would speak to one another in their language, but they did not attempt to teach anyone Comanche. In an attempt to preserve the Comanche language, the women began teaching everyone the women's dialect. Better that men speak like women than not at all. In 1996 the US Government finally declassified the Comanche language. All but one of the Comanche Code Talkers were dead.

The third moment of language changing history came almost a decade later. In September of 2005, some 60 years after the men's dialect was classified by the U.S. Government, Kenneth Geimausaddle began teaching it as an assistant instructor to college professor Geneva Navarro. Kenneth (born in 1957) had grown up hearing the language and speaking the language. Edward Naquaddy, Kenneth's grandfather, was a "Road Man" of the Native American Church peyote religion. Often meeting in secret, his family held prayer and healing meetings. In the course of these only the men's dialect was spoken. Three of the fourteen Code Talkers were Kenneth's immediate relatives and Kenneth grew up listening to them tell war stories to one another in Comanche. When Kenneth started school at age 5, he was failed and sent home because he only spoke Comanche. The grandparents raising him were threatened by school authorities that if Kenneth did not speak English by the time he started school the next year, the U.S. Government would confiscate the treaty land upon which the family lived. This moment was not a big moment in history, but it could be a big moment in the preservation of the language. In 2005, out of the 50 fluent Comanche speakers, there were only four speakers of the men's dialect: the last Code Comanche Code Talker - Charles Chibitty (who died in July 2005), Carney Saupitty (who died in 2008), Morrison Tahmakaera who also died in 2008, and Kenneth Geimausaddle, who will soon be 59 years of age.

Most Comanches living today don't even know that a men's dialect exists. It is estimated that as of January 2015 there are only 15 fluent Comanche speakers left, none of whom speak the men's dialect. On that September day in 2005, Kenneth Geimausaddle started a journey to preserve the men's dialect of Comanche that has resulted in 10 years of working toward developing a curriculum that will hopefully lead to the most important moment of language changing history.

The next moment of language changing history - when a member of the next generation becomes fluent enough to become the next teacher of the men's dialect of Comanche!

Kenneth Geimausaddle had this to say: "In December of 2005, I prayed in Comanche, for help making sure that the Comanche language did not die. I went to the tribe, and they refused to help me. Ten days later Nakima RedFox came into my life. Ten days after that we were married. Ten years later, and I now have not only Nakima's help, but the help of the entire staff of Celebrating Traditions. I know that I am fighting a battle against time, but now I have hope that I can win that battle."

[See the pictures on the back of this issue – Editor ]

‘Research impact’ and how it can help endangered languages

By Serge Sagna

Research Councils in the United Kingdom increasingly emphasise the need for funded research to show impact, i.e. ‘the demonstrable contribution that excellent research makes to society and the economy’ [1]. In the literature on endangered languages, a number of authors (e.g., Dobrin & Good 2009) have raised concerns that research by academic linguists generally only benefits academics, but has very little impact in language communities, in contrast with linguists from organisations like SIL who are involved in language development programmes. This paper is a short progress report on some initial language maintenance activities I carried out as part of an ESRC Future Research Leaders project on Eegimaa [2]. I show that research impact can be an opportunity for academic linguists to contribute to language revitalisation and language development. The initiatives taken for my project as initial steps towards a bigger language maintenance project for Eegimaa are discussed in Section 2. But first I introduce the sociolinguistics and the endangerment situation of Eegimaa in Section 1.

1 Eegimaa as an endangered language:

Eegimaa (Güjolaay Eegimaa (ISO 639-3: buj)) is a member of the Jóola (also spelt Diola) cluster of languages and dialects of the Atlantic family found in The Gambia, Southern Senegal and Guinea Bissau. The homeland of Eegimaa, also known as Banjal (or Bandial), is West to SouthWest of Ziguinchor in the South of Senegal.

The number of speakers is estimated to be between 7000 and 13000 (Bassène 2007; Lewis, Simons & Fennig 2016) [3].

1.1 A sociolinguistic overview of the Lower Casamance

Eegimaa is spoken in the highly multilingual context of the Lower Casamance (Southern Senegal). The linguistic landscape of the Lower Casamance is characterised by two types of linguistic areas: multilingual and monolingual. The former are multiethnic settlements like cities and some villages, and reflect societal multilingualism. Daily intravillage or intracity communication is characterised by use of several different languages.
Bainounk villages (Ducos 1980; Lüpke 2009; Cobbinah 2013) and villages around the City of Ziguinchor are examples of the multilingual type. Most villages of the Lower Casamance are traditionally of the monolingual type, however. They are predominantly occupied by monoethnic communities such as the Jóola; the Mandinka; the Mankagn and the Manjack. Jóola people constitute the majority of the population of the Lower Casamance. Monolingual areas are characterised by societal monolingualism where daily intravillage communication is mostly carried out in a single dominant language. Eegimaa speaking villages are monolingual areas like the vast majority of Jóola villages.

The decades following the independence of Senegal have seen a massive increase in rural to rural and mainly rural to urban migration in search for salaried jobs (Lambert 1994; Linares 2003). This has contributed massively to the increase in individual multilingualism among people from monolingual areas, but also a decrease in intergenerational transmission of minority languages like Eegimaa.

1.2 Language endangerment

Eegimaa is endangered due to a combination of factors [4], the most important one being a growing decrease in intergenerational transmission in the diaspora. Most Eegimaa speakers live in cities and non-Eegimaa speaking villages, where a heavy shift to French and Wolof has been observed among migrants in the last decades.

French is the official language of Senegal and the language of government business. It offers the best opportunity for prestigious employment in the government and the private sector. It is the language of formal education and functions as a language of intellectual evaluation, while Eegimaa is banned in the schools. Children speaking Eegimaa (and also other local languages) in schools are made to wear ‘le symbole’, a kind of necklace made of a rope to which a bone or the skull of a dead animal is attached as punishment. Wearing ‘le symbole’ is a humiliating and traumatic experience. Formal schooling, is therefore one of the first environments where Eegimaa children begin to develop a negative attitude towards their language (see Sagna 2008 for details). Today more and more Eegimaa speakers, especially educated ones, transmit French as the only language to their children. It is generally argued in the literature on African endangered languages (e.g. Batibo 2005) that African lingua francas pose a bigger threat to endangered languages, but the short and long-term impact of colonial languages such as French cannot be underestimated, as argued by several authors (Schaefer & Egbobhare 1999; Connell 2015), especially because their acquisition by schoolchildren is often coupled with the stigmatisation of African languages.

Assimilation to Wolof ways and the transmission of Wolof instead of Eegimaa is a major concern among Eegimaa speakers. Wolof is the main lingua franca of Senegal and is growing as the language of national identity (McLaughlin 2008). It has expanded due to historical factors, and nowadays, mainly through trade, media and popular culture. This process, known as Wolofisation, has been discussed in several works (Calvet 1967; Barry 1987; McLaughlin 2008; Sagna 2008). Wolof has been successfully promoted in the audiovisual media as the language of ‘la culture sénégalaise’ (‘Senegalese culture’). It is the language of urbanisation and is associated with good fashion and modernity. Wolof has become the language of dating among young people, whereas Eegimaa is associated with an ancestral/backward mode of life. There is also a strong shift to Wolof among Eegimaa migrants to cities both in mixed and non-mixed marriages.

In short, French and Wolof are the languages that help fulfil aspirations to what is seen as a ‘modern’ way of life and to ensure upwards socioeconomic mobility. Transmitting these languages is often seen as a way to facilitate children’s integration to the new environment they live in, but unfortunately in most cases it means abandoning Eegimaa.

2 Research impact in Eegimaa

Funding for endangered languages is mainly available for language documentation and description and rarely for language maintenance and language revitalisation (Austin In Press). But the new focus on research impact can help academic linguists make a larger contribution to saving languages. The research activities which were carried out as part of my project include organising the Effalah radio programme (cf. 2.1) and producing educational and health reading material (cf. 2.2).

2.1 The Effalah radio programme

The Effalah radio programme was organised in close collaboration with members of the Eegimaa community, including a co-presenter, and consisted of sixteen shows. It was hosted in ZigFM, a local regional radio station and was broadcast between March and May 2015 throughout the Casamance area. Thus it was possible to reach speakers living in other villages of the Casamance. Two and sometimes three guests were invited to the radio for every show from the Eegimaa speaking villages or from the city of Ziguinchor to share their expertise on topics under discussion. Callers had an allocated time to contribute to the debates. The radio programme had the following goals.

2.1.1 Increasing the visibility of the Eegimaa language in the public domain

The Effalah radio programme was the first ever radio programme in Eegimaa, and was understandably the most impactful aspect of this project among Eegimaa speakers [5]. Effalah is the name of the place where Eegimaa people meet to discuss some of the most sensitive issues in the life of the community. The use of this name for the radio programme was well received by Eegimaa speakers and this became apparent from the enthusiastic participation in discussion on individual shows and the feedback from callers. One of the most regular comments was: “we are the only language community not to have a show on the radio.” The feeling of empowerment born from hearing debates in Eegimaa, on topics which are commonly discussed in French or Wolof is perceptible from the selection of comments from the callers to the individual shows (see http://www.smg.surrey.ac.uk/languages/eegimaa/radio/shows/).

The radio programme included discussions aimed at promoting a positive attitude towards the language, by raising awareness
of the language endangerment situation in order to lead speakers to make an informed choice that Eegimaa can be harmlessly included among languages they transmit to their children.

2.1.2 Reinforcing cultural knowledge

Half of the sixteen shows focussed on reinforcing cultural knowledge. Due to massive rural exodus, most Eegimaa speakers do not have enough exposure to life in the Eegimaa-speaking environment and much of the cultural knowledge is lost amongst the majority of speakers, especially the younger generation. Most cultural practices are in serious decline due to the influence of the new education system, new religions (Christianity and Islam) and urbanisation.

Speakers with expert knowledge on different topics were therefore invited to explain the Eegimaa kinship system, marriage, inheritance and the link between them, as well as the significance of endangered rituals such as funerary rituals and the birth or fecundity ritual (Gagññalen/Kañalen ritual), which is practiced to help prevent miscarriages and infant mortality (Sagna In Press).

2.1.3 Facilitating access to vital information on current issues

One of the most important goals of the radio programme was to facilitate access to information on preventative health, education and politics. A native speaker physician was invited to the radio to discuss preventative health, and steps to take in case of contracting diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, or to deal with diabetes. This information is available to speakers and readers of French and to Wolof speakers to some extent, but not Eegimaa speakers.

There were also discussions of the benefits of using Eegimaa as a medium of instruction in the early years of formal school. Most speakers regard French as the only language worth teaching in schools, although the Senegalese educational authorities encourage the use of local languages in the first two years of education. After that stage however, the only language allowed is French. Part of the discussion on education consisted of raising awareness on the importance of helping children integrate formal school by teaching in Eegimaa instead of accepting its occasional use only in the first two years of primary schools.

Local governmental bodies were also invited to one of the shows to explain their projects and new policies. The deputy mayor of the Eegimaa area and one of the mayor’s advisors were invited to explain new projects, like rural electrification using solar energy, a new tax system and other issues they face in their daily work.

2.2 Reading material

There is a general negative attitude towards reading and this is mainly due to the way reading is taught in schools. The fact that children suffer corporeal punishment in the process of learning reading skills means that rather than seeing reading as a pleasurable activity, it is actually associated with punishment. This significantly affects performance in schools in the short term and a long-term consequence is the obvious lack of reading habits among most adults.

Part of my research impact was to foster reading among children and adult speakers of Eegimaa by producing humorous reading material like the folklore booklet distributed to the community as part of the Documentation of Eegimaa funded by ELDP (see http://www.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/mediabrary/lc/files/sagna/sagna.pdf), and informative reading material like health booklets. A booklet is in progress about the prevention and treatment of Malaria, with a child sleeping in a bed without a mosquito net and later in a physician’s office to be treated.

The goal in producing reading material whose content Eegimaa speakers can relate to is to not only contribute to enhancing literacy [6] and improving health, but also to renew their interest in the language. Children who learn to read and write in Eegimaa will be able to transfer their reading and writing skills when they begin formal school in French [7]. One of the long-term goals is to lead speakers to write in their language on various topics. Another advantage is that children who learn to read in Eegimaa will have a strong cultural understanding and positive attitude towards their language before moving to environments where the language is undervalued.

3 Summary

Research impact activities alone will not save languages, but they can ensure that academic research is also useful to communities where research takes place. Among possible contributions to communities are the organisations of radio programmes to contribute to increasing the visibility of endangered languages and foster positive attitude towards these languages. Such activities can also help contribute to language development by producing reading material to enhance literacy among school children and adults. This material should have content which speakers can relate to, for example, vital information on health. These contributions can be initial steps towards larger projects of language revitalisation.

References


1. Due to space limitations, this paper only focuses on the impact of my research in the language community where my research took place. Further details on research impact and what it involves are given on the relevant Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) webpage: http://www.esrc.ac.uk/research/evaluation-and-impact/what-is-impact/.

2. The support of the ESRC (Future Research Leaders Scheme), Grant no. ES/K001922/1 is gratefully acknowledged. I would like to thank Dunstan Brown, Marilyn Vihman and Bruce Connell for reading and commenting on this paper. I also thank Greville G. Corbett and the other members of the Surrey Morphology Group for discussions on my research impact which encouraged me to write this paper.

3. These are only estimates. The censuses on which these estimations are based are not given by the authors.

4. UNESCO has proposed criteria which can be used to assess the level of endangerment of a language. Several works on African linguistics (e.g. Lüpke 2009) have pointed out that some of these criteria have been proposed based on other parts of the world (e.g. Australia), but without regard to factors specific to Africa. Due to the lack of space I focus on the language shift and intergenerational transmission in Eegimaa. The relevance of the individual UNESCO criteria will be discussed in future publications.

5. I have shared many of the video recordings on Eegimaa cultural practices taken during the documentation of Eegimaa. Some of these videos will be made available to speakers on social media e.g. in the Eegimaa people’s Facebook page which has over 1000 members.

6. From a language documentation perspective, standardising and writing an endangered language does have negative consequences on language diversity (Ameka 2015 for discussion). In the paper, I look at this issue from the perspective of language development i.e., how writing a language can help improve education, health as well as foster a negative attitude towards a language.

7. Part of my research impact includes producing educational material on numeration in Eegimaa to help children’s acquisition and development of mathematics knowledge, which is only taught in French.

And the winners of the 2016 Linguapax Award are...

The International Linguapax Award 2016 acknowledges two complementary visions of language diversity. Two associations advocating for Aboriginal languages in the Northern Territory of Australia and for heritage languages in Canada as joint winners of the prize:

- On the occasion of International Mother Language Day, focused on quality education and languages of instruction, Linguapax announces the winners of the 2016 International Linguapax award.

- Joint winners are Yamirrpá School Council/Djarra Action Group of the Yolngu community of Yirrkala in the Northern Territory of Australia, and the International and Heritage Languages Association from Canada.

Since 2002, Linguapax commemorates the International Mother Language Day, proclaimed by UNESCO to highlight the importance of linguistic diversity, announcing the winner of the International Linguapax Award granted to linguists/researchers, activists and civil society organizations that have distinguished themselves for their commitment in favour of linguistic diversity and multilingual education.
This year, the jury made up of forty international experts has decided to award the prize *ex aequo* to two organizations that are geographically distant and diverse in their approach of promoting diversity. Both, however, share the perseverance and the will to preserve languages that are either threatened in their own territory or are part of the assets of displaced individuals and populations.

One winner is the Yambirrpa School Council/Djarrma Action Group representing 14 Aboriginal language groups of the Yolngu people of Yirrkala and Laynhapuy in Arnhem Land (Northern Territory, Australia).

These institutions carry on the struggle initiated more than 40 years ago by the community elders to convey the cultural and linguistic heritage of their people through bilingual teaching programmes in Yolngu, in steady decline since 1980 due to government action.

The other winner is the International and Heritage Languages Association IHLA, founded in 1977 in Alberta (Canada) to help build a multicultural and multilingual country. The IHLA advocates for the acknowledged, accreditation and legitimacy of heritage languages learner’s skills in high schools, for the recognition of heritage language teachers’ backgrounds, for raising awareness among young people, general public and politicians and decision makers of the value of multilingualism.

Further information on the International Linguapax Awards:
http://www.linguapax.org/english/what-we-do/linguapax-award

Further information on the International Mother Language Day:

Further information on bilingual teaching in Yolngu:

Further information on IHLA:
http://ihla.ca/IHLA/Home.html

Myanmar Language Policy Conference Champions

Minority Language Education

Trent Newman, PhD Candidate, University of Melbourne

From 8th to 11th February 2016 the University of Mandalay, Myanmar hosted the inaugural International Conference on Language Policy in Multicultural and Multilingual Settings. This landmark conference brought together 387 delegates from 37 countries – including a diverse array of academics, community representatives, language teachers, government representatives and NGO representatives – in discussion around best practices and policy options in language maintenance and multilingual education in the context of peace building initiatives in contested settings. Perhaps most importantly, the conference represented a milestone in the process of producing a ‘peace promoting national language policy’ for Myanmar through dialogue and democratic consultation.

Myanmar is one of the most multilingual societies in the world, counting some 135 spoken languages, along with the official language Myanmar (formerly known as Burmese), at least two main sign languages, many dialects and a number of foreign languages. The current education system is dominated by the Myanmar-language, which tends to disadvantage children in remote areas and from ethnic minority groups.

Lessons in native languages are only allowed after regular classes finish and little or no funding is being provided by the central government for teacher training or literacy resources, with maintenance efforts falling to self-formed ‘Language and Culture’ groups in each state. As noted in a Myanmar Times report on the conference, ‘Burmanisation’ and forced assimilation of ethnic minority groups under the military regime has threatened the richness and diversity of cultures and languages among Myanmar’s minority population, leading to much distrust of the government among minority group, as well as conflict and unrest.

With the aim of resolving these tensions and conflicts, the national language policy consultation and planning process in Myanmar has been underway in the country since 2013. It is led by Prof. Joseph Lo Bianco from the University of Melbourne and sponsored by the Language and Social Cohesion (LESC) initiative of UNICEF, in partnership with the Myanmar Ministry of Education. Over the past three years it has involved 16 ‘Facilitated Dialogues’, several research projects, and a large number of direct consultations, site visits, interviews, observations and professional training activities. The Mandalay conference in February was a key step in this process of building a national language policy for Myanmar, providing an invaluable opportunity for usually silenced groups to be heard alongside the more privileged voices of government officials and national and international academics.

The transformative effects of this open dialogue were evident from the very first day of the conference when the Director General of Myanmar Education Research, Dr Khine Mye, following his presentation on the legal framework for language policy in Myanmar, was faced with some rather direct questions from a Naga man about the lack of government action on language maintenance and minority education issues. These same questions were then picked up in a press conference later that day where media representatives pushed the Director General to explain the government’s neglect of minority language education. Though unaccustomed to such direct challenges, Dr Mye appeared to take this experience as an opportunity for learning. Rather than retreating from his attendance at the conference, Dr Mye was seen attending sessions throughout the four days, listening attentively to presentations comparing multilingual policies and practices across countries and contexts, including several presentations on the production and use of mother tongue-based early literacy resources. Particularly significant were presentations by the Language and Culture Groups from Mon, Kayin, and Kachin states in which they shared their experiences, as well as their ongoing concerns, of language policy development for their communities, and their strategies for maintaining their own languages and cultures.

“We have maintained our literature and culture on our own,” said Khun Min Aung, a Pa-O member of the Ethnic Language...
Committee of the Kayin Literature and Culture Organisation, “but with a lot of difficulties and problems. We need financial support and a strong policy from the Union government.”

The conference was also an opportunity for a number of organisations to report on the successes of their current multilingual and mother tongue-based education projects, in quiet contradiction of government fears – in Myanmar and elsewhere – that such initiatives could somehow threaten national unity. During the four days, UNICEF launched publications on the multi-country LESC initiative, supported by the organisation’s East Asia and Pacific Regional Office. The publications include research from Myanmar, Malaysia and Thailand and highlight the importance of mother tongue-based multilingual education, particularly in minority ethno-linguistic communities in the region. There was also a plenary presentation from Ms Kirsty Sword Gusmão, former First Lady of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste and current Goodwill Ambassador for Education, on the early successes of a mother tongue-based multilingual education pilot project in three Timorese districts.

By the end of the conference, the tone and emphasis of Dr Mye’s speech had changed. He focussed less on the preservation of the Union and the importance of upholding the national constitution and its monolingual bias and, instead, presented a more inclusive and participatory vision for a national language policy, using terms like ‘bottom-up’ and ‘multilingual education’. Closing remarks from Dr Cliff Myers, Chief of Education for UNICEF included the announcement of plans to expand the facilitated dialogues process to Chin, Kayah and Shan states, with the goal of gathering language policy statements from all districts of the country over the next year in order to produce a consolidated policy proposal.

Following on from the conference, the next step is for an agreed language policy draft containing principles, policy aims and implementation plans to be submitted for approval to the Myanmar government. As a direct result of the success of the conference, the national language policy process now has the full backing of the government, which will be invaluable as national consultations continue. Prof. Lo Bianco emphasises that the aim is to do a language planning process “for the whole country”, which values every language as an important resource. “We should cherish every language,” he said. “That is what will bring peace and unity.”

Learning from Knowledge Keepers of Mi’kma’ki

From the Cape Breton University web-site www.cbu.ca, 17 December 2015

Learning from knowledge keepers of Mi’kma’ki is the focus and title of a new course being offered at Cape Breton University (CBU) starting in January 2016. Responding to the recommendations made by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), this course will provide CBU students and the public with an opportunity to learn about the rich cultures, ceremonies, history, knowledge, ways of knowing and wisdom of Mi’kmaq people in Unama’ki and Mi’kma’ki. The course will be facilitated by Stephen Augustine, Dean of Unama’ki College and Aboriginal Learning at CBU and a Hereditary Chief on the Mi’kmaq Grand Council, as well as invited guests from throughout Mi’kma’ki.

“One of the recommendations made by the TRC was that institutions of higher education should work with Indigenous people to start to incorporate Indigenous knowledge and ways of learning into curriculum. This is something that CBU has been doing for more than 40 years. This course builds on CBU’s history of success in Aboriginal teaching, learning and research and signals our continued commitment to the indigenization of the university. The plan is for this course to one day be mandatory for all CBU students,” says Augustine.

Topics covered in the course will include the Mi’kmaq Creation Story, oral history and traditions, Indigenous governance, the ongoing legacies of residential schools, the impacts of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and moving from challenges to strengths and resilience within Mi’kmaq communities.

This course will be offered through a dialogical approach, incorporating talking/sharing circles into each class to allow for participant engagement and to resonate with Indigenous ways of teaching and learning. Participants can engage with this course through several avenues:

1. As a for-credit in-class CBU course (requires course registration and the completion of academic assignments).
2. As an interested participant, open to all CBU students, staff, faculty, and the general public.
3. As an open-access, online course, through live-streaming technologies (for-credit option available with registration).

The course is 12 weeks in duration and is being offered on Mondays at 6 p.m.

Passamaquoddy tribe looking to children to preserve language

By Jennifer Mitchell, from the MPBN news web-site www.news.mpbn.net (Maine, USA), 23 December 2015

Languages across the world are disappearing as fewer people learn to speak, read and write the words of their ancestors. Research suggests that roughly half of the seven thousand languages currently spoken will be gone by the start of the next century.

In the U.S., at least three native languages have become extinct over the last ten years, part of the long-term consequence of English-only laws and cultural assimilation. But in Maine, the Passamaquoddy tribe is determined to ensure its language will not meet the same fate.
"My age group is probably the last group of truly fluent people," says Wayne Newell, now in his early seventies.

When Newell was a child in Pleasant Point, speaking Passamaquoddy was an everyday occurrence. But by the mid-nineteen-sixties, Newell says his younger siblings, who understood their native language, began talking exclusively in English.

“That was about the time television was introduced into the homes,” he says. “And that was a major factor I think. We did not notice it until later on though, that that was harming our ability to communicate in our own language, our native language.”

Newell says it’s essential that he, and others like him, encourage those who comprehend Passamaquoddy to speak it as well.

With only about 3,500 members in the whole tribe, and the fluent generation rapidly aging, the fear is that the language could be lost. So Newell and other members of the tribe are learning to teach what they know.

Speaking Place is a Rockland-based non-profit that works to restore endangered languages and support the communities that speak them. As a linguist, Speaking Place co-director Julia Schulz has worked extensively in Acadian communities and developed a Penobscot language teaching program.

Now she’s doing something similar with the Passamaquoddy tribe as part of a three-year grant from the Administration For Native Americans.

“We’re working on the assumption that the language that you’re exposed to as a child is in your brain – your brain is hardwired for it,” Schulz says. “So even if you don’t use it for many many years, there are vestiges of that language and they can be brought back to life.”

While not a speaker of Passamaquoddy herself, Schulz knows how to get lapsed speakers and new speakers speaking.

Eleanor Stevens is one of the fluent speakers helping with the class. She says her age group didn’t realize how much knowledge was being lost.

For example, she says Passamaquoddy humor and jokes just don’t work in English. And she says the right language is important for conveying certain cultural moods.

“If I was going to relate to you how my weekend was, I’d probably, it probably would be easier for me to speak it in Passamaquoddy than in English,” Stevens says.

Stevens will help members of the tribe achieve the fluency they’ve never had. Her part of the project involves the creation of a Passamaquoddy language immersion school for the tribe’s littlest members. Lesson plans will include songs, pictures, stories and miming techniques.

Donald Soctomah, the tribe’s cultural preservation officer, is the grant’s administrator. He’s a Passamaquoddy comprehender, but says after a lifetime spent absorbing English, he struggles to speak his naïve tongue.

Fortunately, he says, it’s not too late for the Passamaquoddy. “At least 10 per cent of our population are fluent speakers,” Soctomah says. “And if you look at the whole nation, that’s a high percentage.”

Additionally, Soctomah says a good number of Passamaquoddy Gen-Xers are able to understand the language fairly well. And their young kids, he says, have been learning bits of the language in the tribal schools.

“But they have to have that parent acknowledgement at the other end, and if the parents are comprehenders, they’re not speaking,” he says. “So it’s sort of slowly disappearing. But we see this as a new start. A new hope for us.”

The tribal comprehenders in the class will continue to work with Schulz and the elders for several weeks to become language apprentices. Then, in late January, they’ll begin teaching 3- to 5-year-olds what they know, while continuing their own practice.

The pilot class will teach seven children. If successful, that number will double. By the time the grant ends, Soctomah hopes that 21 tribal tots will be well on their way to a lifetime of Passamaquoddy fluency, and a generation of comprehenders will at last be able to speak the language of their parents.

Aboriginal grandmothers play increasing role in raising Saskatchewan children

From the CBC News (Saskatoon) web-site, 9 November 2015

Aboriginal grandmothers who are raising their grandchildren need more support as their numbers increase in Saskatchewan, says Jen Billan, a researcher and former master's student at the U[University] of R[egina] who is studying this area.

The province has three times as many grandparents raising their grandchildren as the Canadian average. That number has jumped 20 per cent since 1991.

"Grandmothers maintain an essential role within their families and communities through their guidance and attention to relationships and caring for their family as well as grounding grandchildren in culture and identity," Billan said.

She said the aboriginal grandmothers she spoke to said they were blessed to be able to spend this time with their grandchildren. But they also face many challenges.

"Dealing with financial pressures, lack of respite care," Billan said. "The grandmothers often have to provide constant verification that the grandchildren are indeed in their care."

She noted that many are worried over the health and safety of their grandchildren. Billan recommends policymakers pay more
attention to the role aboriginal grandmothers play when dealing with family-related policies.

**Learning to speak across the ages with Wampanoag Language Program**

By Alex Elvin, from the Vineyard Gazette

The Wopanaak Language Reclamation Project, based in Mashpee, plans to launch a language immersion preschool next fall, marking a major milestone in its efforts to revive the original language of the region. The preschool will occupy space in the Montessori Academy of Cape Cod in North Falmouth. Participating families will have access to state and federal child care vouchers to help cover the costs. “It’s been a continuum of grant funding efforts since 2010, working toward this longer range goal of opening some sort of language immersion school,” Jennifer Weston, director of the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe Language Department, told the Gazette this week.

The group also plans to begin offering an after-school language program for students in kindergarten through eighth grade in Mashpee in January. That effort is aimed partly at implementing the vast amount of language curriculum the group has developed since 2012. Both programs will be open to members of the Mashpee and Aquinnah tribes, along with the Assonet and Herring Pond bands and other Wampanoag communities. Earlier efforts to open a language immersion charter school on the Cape had failed to gain the required state support. A second application this year made it to the final round in October, but in light of pending state legislation related to charter schools, the WLRP decided to change course.

“We wanted to make sure that we could guarantee some kind of immersion school for tribal families this fall,” said Ms. Weston, who is coordinating the immersion school efforts. “Unfortunately, the charter application process just didn’t offer that level of certainty.” Last summer, a partnership between the Mashpee tribe’s child care program and the Montessori Academy initiated a training program for WLRP teachers to obtain Montessori certification. That led to a new focus on preschool and kindergarten programs. But with the proposed charter school, the nearly two-hour daily commute to North Falmouth would likely be a major hurdle for families living on the Island. “I think that will be very difficult,” said Durwood Vanderhoop, a tribal member who lives in Aquinnah with his wife and two toddler sons. “That’s kind of self-defeating if we’re sending people over on the boat. It’s really difficult to send a preschooler over, especially.”

Mr. Vanderhoop taught an after-school program in traditional Native American singing in Aquinnah this fall, incorporating elements of the Wampanoag language. Along with the regular classes in Mashpee, language programs in Aquinnah happen throughout the year, he said, but the shortage of certified teachers in Aquinnah limits the options for the Island. “Last summer we brought 10 to 12 Aquinnah students to participate in our Summer Turtle Program every Friday and we ended up spending probably two-plus hours of that time in traffic, just on this side of the ferry,” Ms. Weston said. “So it is definitely a challenge.” The WLRP has discussed the possibility of a dedicated tribal van to bring students back and forth for the programs, but Ms. Weston noted that it might not be suitable for preschool-aged children to have to travel to Mashpee and back every day. She believed a more realistic plan would be to develop a separate Island school in the future once the Mashpee school gets off the ground. “I think it has been part of the big-picture discussions for a number of years now,” she said. The language reclamation project started in 1993 under the direction of Jessie Little Doe Baird, and the late Helen Manning of Aquinnah. She also studied Algonquian linguistics at MIT as part of her efforts to research and standardize the Wopanaak language. In 2010 Mrs. Baird won a prestigious MacArthur grant in recognition of her work. The 2011 PBS documentary We Still Live Here follows the work of the project, and features several members of the Mashpee and Aquinnah tribes. In 2012 the WLRP received funding from the federal Administration for Native Americans to begin the charter school planning process and develop school curriculums. Many letters and legal documents written in the language are preserved in archives and private collections throughout the region, including the Dukes County archives. Three versions of the King James Bible were translated into Wopanaak by European missionaries in the 1600s, making up the largest body of native written records in the country. Mr. Vanderhoop, one of two certified teachers in Aquinnah, remembers looking through historic texts as a young man for traces of his ancestral language. He began taking classes through the WLRP around 2000 and now uses the language every day. “There is enough that’s been restored so that we can have conversations without uttering a non-Wampanoag word,” he said. “We are still in the infancy of this whole program,” he added. “We are just starting to have a generation that’s been raised hearing it every day, or on a much more regular basis from birth on up.” Ms. Weston agreed. “It’s reasonable to say that the language reclamation program is going to continue for many generations to come,” she said. “I think the Wampanoag language, like English, will always be changing and growing.” While the WLRP has yet to fully bridge the Island and Cape communities, Mr. Vanderhoop believes it has helped strengthen the tribe. “It’s something that’s uniquely ours,” he said of the language, which 20 years ago was nearly extinct. “It’s definitely brought us together on many levels.” “A lot of people have yet to take a class or be directly impacted,” he added. “I think there is a lot of good that’s been done and a lot of good that can be brought out of this.”

**University of Winnipeg makes indigenous course a requirement**

From the CBC News website (www.cbc.ca) 20 November 2015

The University of Winnipeg has officially given the green light to a new requirement that all students, starting in the next school year, take at least one indigenous studies course in order to graduate.

The university’s senate unanimously approved the requirement on Friday, making it mandatory for students to take a course focused on the rights, traditions, history, governance or other facets of indigenous culture.

The requirement will apply to new undergraduate students starting in the 2016-17 academic year. It will not affect the graduation requirements of existing students.
A motion calling for the requirement, brought forward by the University of Winnipeg Students’ Association and the Aboriginal Students’ Council, was approved in principle by the senate in March.

“This is a proud, joyous, and historic day for the University of Winnipeg community,” university president Annette Trimbee said in a news release.

“We recognize our responsibility to commit to the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission] recommendations and today’s decision by our faculty effectively implements a good number of them. We have taken an important step to integrate indigenous knowledge, perspectives and world view into our curricula and culture.”

The university says students can choose from a number of courses "in which the greater part of the content is local indigenous material — derived from or based on an analysis of the cultures, languages, history, ways of knowing or contemporary reality of the indigenous peoples of North America."

The number of credit hours that will be required to graduate won't change, officials added.

Academic departments will compile a full list of courses that will fulfil the indigenous course requirement in time for new students to register for the 2016-17 school year.

Ms Ellis has also helped connect kids in classrooms at Irrunytju, WA; earlier this year, she took a class out into the community, meeting elders and teaching them about country.

She says breaking down language barriers is crucial to fostering education in Indigenous communities.

"A lot of our families don't speak English."

"Because of the language barrier and the cultural barrier, people didn't know that they had the right to know what was going on in the classroom, and to know what children are achieving."

These days, Ms Ellis is an Australian Research Council Discovery Indigenous Fellow at the Australian National University, where she is working on a project documenting Western Desert speech styles and changing modes of communication across the generations.

"Living here in Canberra - I just love it. I love coming to work."

Canberra Close-up: Elizabeth Marrkilyi Ellis

By Farz Edraki, from the 666 ABC Canberra website (www.abc.net.au), 17 November 2015

A Ngaanyatjarra woman from the Tjukurla community in Western Australia, Elizabeth Marrkilyi Ellis is an educator, interpreter and linguist with a passion for documenting Indigenous languages.

Elizabeth Marrkily Ellis was born and raised in the Tjukurla community in Western Australia, four hours from Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park.

Driven by a passion for education and language, Ms Ellis joined Alex Sloan on Canberra Close Up to share her stories from remote Australia and her efforts to document Indigenous languages.

"I speak quite a few dialects of Western Desert languages," she told Alex Sloan.

"And I've been trying to learn French for a long time, because I've been over there and taught my own language."

Ms Ellis went to schools in Leonora, Karalundi and Wiluna, then later attended high school at Yirara College in Alice Springs.

In 2008, she worked in the WA Education Department as a curriculum coordinator.

The amazing survival of the Baltic Muslims

By Tharik Hussain, from the BBC News website (www.bbc.co.uk/news), 1 January 2016

It may not be the kind of place you would expect to stumble upon a mosque, but Muslims have lived among the forests and
lakes of Lithuania for more than 600 years - showing that toler-
ance reigned here in the Middle Ages, even when religious
strife was rampant in other parts of Europe.

At first glance, the square, wooden building looks like thou-
sands seen in villages all over the Baltic. Neat timber slats,
wood-legged windows, a tin roof.

But at the apex of the roof, instead of a point there is a small
glass turret, topped with an onion dome of the kind you might
see on a local church. Then, on top of the onion, stands a small
crescent.

This is the most European-looking mosque you will ever come
across.

If it looks completely at home in this northern European set-
ting, that's because a mosque has stood here, roughly 20
minutes' drive south-west of the Lithuanian capital, Vilnius,
since 1558.

There is a clue in the name of the village, Keturiasdesimt Totor-
riu. It means Forty Tatars, and legend has it that this is the
number of Tatar families that settled here more than 600 years
ago, at the invitation of the Lithuanian Grand Duke, Vytautas.

The Grand Duchy, with its deep pagan roots, faced a constant
threat from its aggressive Christian neighbours to the west, the
Teutonic Knights.

So in 1398, returning from a military campaign near the Black
Sea, Vytautas brought with him a large number of Muslim
Crimean Tatars and a small group of Karaite Jews to help de-
fend Lithuanian territory.

Sure enough, 12 years later the Teutonic Knights went to war
with Poland and Lithuania and the Tatars and Karaites fought
alongside Vytautas at the Battle of Grunwald (between Warsaw
and Gdansk) in which the crusaders were resoundingly defeat-
ed.

As a reward for their support, Vytautas gave the Muslims land
and complete religious freedom - and this was at a time when
both the Sephardic Jews, and Europe's oldest Muslim commu-
nity, the Moors, were being driven out of Spain.

"Vytautas is highly revered among us. He did not order us to
forget the Prophet... We swore an oath upon our swords to love
the Lithuanians when the fate and destiny of war brought us to
their homeland and they said... 'This land, these waters... will
be shared between us'".

Today about 120 people who live in Keturiasdesimt Totoriu are
Tatars, with many claiming to be direct descendants of the
founding Crimeans.

"It is because of Vytautas we are here, but we know we are
Crimean Tatars," says Fatima Stantrukova, a 75-year-old for-
mer teacher of Russian literature.

The oldest identifiable grave in the mosque's cemetery belongs
to a certain "Allahberdi" who was buried here in about 1621.
The Tatar population in Lithuania continued to grow and
spread to the south and west. Once there were dozens, possibly
hundreds of Tatar mosques in villages between Vilnius, the
Belarusian capital, Minsk, and the Polish city of Bialystok.

There were still 25 in Lithuania on the eve of World War One.
Now there are three - in Keturiasdesimt Totoriu and the nearby
villages of Raiziai and Nemezis. Four others are split between
the Polish settlements of Kruszyniany and Bohoniki and the
Belarusian towns of Navahrudak and Iwie. It was the Tatar lan-
guage that disappeared first, apparently in the early part of the
18th Century.

"It came to pass that the 'spiders of forgetfulness' spread their
webs over their customs and their tongues with the passing of
the ages," wrote the Russian Tatar Orientalist Muhammad Mu-
rad al-Ramzi, in the 19th Century.

"Yet, despite that, they have never lost their faith in Islam,
though they have no scholarly knowledge of the faith."

What little Islamic knowledge was left, took a further blow in
the 20th Century.

"The Soviet period was the worst. All the religious leaders and
people of any knowledge were either killed or sent into exile
into the farthest reaches of Siberia. Books and archives were
burnt. Mosques were closed and destroyed. Communities were
closed. Islam was forbidden," says another descendant of the
Crimeans who arrived with Vytautas, the Grand Mufti of Lith-
uania, Ramadan Yaqoob.

Yaqoob grew up knowing almost nothing about Islam, and was
only exposed to it properly after the fall of the Soviet Union,
when Muslim students began to arrive in the country. He felt an
immediate connection with them, and was able with their help
to study in Lebanon and Libya. The multicultural atmosphere
of Lebanon was the perfect place to train to lead a European
Muslim community, he says.

Despite a revival of interest in religion among some young Ta-
tars, none of the mosques opens for the five daily prayers. Even
in Keturiasdesimt Totoriu, where a third of the population is
Muslim, the mosque only opens for special religious occasions.

But in addition to these seven surviving Baltic Tatar mosques,
there is another many thousands of miles to the west - at 104
Powers Street in Brooklyn - which bears an uncanny resem-
bliance.

"I used to go to the mosque, mainly with my family, for festi-
ivals like Eid," says Alyssa Ratkewitch, the mosque's vice-
president, a third-generation Lipka Tatar - as Tatars from the
Baltic are sometimes called - who traces her roots to the Bela-
rusian town of Iwie.

"One of my earliest memories was the 'awful' wood panelling
that decorates the interior of the mosque. So when I became
vice-president, I planned to get rid of it, until an elder told me
that the panels were there to remind them of the mosques they had left behind in the Baltic.”

The Brooklyn mosque - which opened in 1927 and is believed to be the oldest in New York - also no longer opens for daily worship. But it is crucial to the identity of the tiny Tatar community, just like the seven Tatar mosques still standing in Lithuania, Belarus and Poland.

"We did not let our mosques fall! During the [Soviet] time, our mosque was used in secret," remembers Fatima in Keturiasdes-int Totoriu.

"The imam and the community of the 1940s kept the mosque alive for us children.

"The mosques are all we have left."

Northern village still communicates with amazing Turkish whistling language

From the Daily Sabah (Istanbul) web-site, 16 February 2016

The locals in the northern village of Kuşköy, in the province of Giresun, call it "kuş dili,” (bird language), a form of whistled language that help them communicate across the region’s deep valleys. With the initiatives of a public education center and the provincial governorate, whistling Turkish is now taught at schools. Karabörk Primary School launched the courses with 30 students, where the participants learn the techniques of the language, as well as the physical anatomy of the mouth and teeth. In later stages, the students are taught to understand the whistled language and how to communicate by using it. The students taking the course live in Kuşköy and neighboring areas.

Zafer Balcı, the head of the District National Education Directorate, said the history of whistled Turkish languages dates back 400 years and was a very common means of communication among locals living in the mountainous region. "We plan to offer this course to elementary, middle and high school students so they will be aware of their own culture and transfer it to future generations. For the first stage of the project, we chose primary school students," Balcı said. He added that children also learn how their parents and grandparents used to communicate without landline phones or cellphones. "We are working to keep this tradition alive," he stressed.

The whistled language is currently used by around 10,000 people in northeastern Turkey, and it can carry messages as far as 5 kilometers. It is an adaptation of the Turkish language into whistles, not a distinct language. A study conducted by Onur Güntürkün of Ruhr University in Germany revealed that "whistled Turkish uses the full lexical and syntactic information of vocal Turkish, and transforms them into whistles to transport complex conversations with constrained whistled articulations over long distances.” A total of 31 inhabitants of Kuşköy, who can speak whistling Turkish, participated in the study. In 2011, whistling Turkish, which is dying out, was announced as candidate to UNESCO’s intangible cultural heritage list. Other kinds of whistling languages are found in Mexico, France, the Canary Islands and Greece.

The race to digitise language records of the Pacific region before it is too late

By Nick Thieberger, University of Melbourne, from The Conversation web-site, 21 March 2016

A suitcase of reel-to-reel audio tapes arrived recently at the School of Languages and Linguistics at the University of Melbourne. They were from Madang, in Papua New Guinea (PNG), were made in the nineteen-sixties and some contain the only known records of some of the languages of PNG.

There are very few records of most of the 800 or so languages in PNG, so every new resource is important. Languages are complex systems that encode knowledge of the world developed over many years. Small groups or tribes evolve unique ways of being, which each in their own way tell us something of what it means to be human.

Several years of sleuthing and negotiating have led to this moment when the tapes will be digitised and archived in Australia. The digital versions will be returned to Madang.

The team that has worked on this are from the Pacific and Regional Archive for Digital Sources in Endangered Cultures (PARADISEC), a research project based at Sydney, Melbourne and ANU that has been running since 2003.

PARADISEC has found and digitised more than 5,600 hours of recordings in 900 languages, and has built the digital infrastructure for linguists and musicologists to safely house the priceless recordings they make in the course of their research.

While the research importance of these recordings is enormous (some are the only recording for a particular language), the archive also provides access for the people recorded and for their families and communities, thus helping Australia to be a good neighbour to the Pacific region.

The recordings contain narratives, songs, conversations – whatever was able to be recorded at the time. The tapes we look for are those made by researchers using audio recorders and occasionally making movies, technology that was available from the nineteen-fifties.

In the past, little emphasis was placed on the importance of these primary materials. Collections of tapes were not cared for and, when the researcher died, they were sometimes left in personal collections for an executor to deal with.

If the tapes were stored in humid conditions, they could get mouldy, and can then take some effort to clean and get ready to be played.

The recordings that do exist can be used to relearn traditions. For oral cultures, there are no libraries to go to when you want to find out what your ancestors knew, but recordings of those ancestors can help reconnect with this oral tradition.
When the 2004 tsunami wiped out whole communities in Aceh, some languages and musical traditions were the unnoticed victims. PARADISEC has recordings of language and musical performance made along the west coast of Aceh in the 1980s in communities that no longer exist after the tsunami.

But languages are not just lost through natural disasters. More often major languages impose themselves, typically in colonial contexts where little choice is available to speakers of minority languages.

The affection keenly felt for a language is replaced by chagrin at its loss and then by some joy at discovering recordings that have kept aspects of the language alive. Once digitised, they are on the web, often as the only available online source for the language.

In among the audio in PARADISEC are recordings that have no descriptions. If there’s nothing written on the tape box, and we know it is important from the context of other tapes, then these files can be put online in the hope that someone will let us know what they contain.

Putting digital files on the web (with whatever access conditions the depositors require) means that they can be found by those most interested in them, typically the speakers themselves or their families.

Mobile phones are now available in even the most remote parts of the region and are owned by at least 80% of people in Vanuatu and 94% in PNG. Accessing the internet in this way means that we make files available in formats that save on bandwidth. We also provide as much of a description of them as we can to make them findable.

PARADISEC is essentially a multi-institutional collaborative humanities experiment. Think of it as the humanities equivalent of a radio-telescope for astronomy, but focusing on the cultures of the Earth rather than on the stars.

In many ways, we know more about the range and number of objects in space than we do about the thousands of languages and cultures around us.

But, while the telescopes are run by a few specialists and their output is comprehensible to only another few, as with much humanities research the work of exploring human cultural diversity is more understandable to all.

PARADISEC is part of the new face of the humanities but is constantly looking to find funds to do this work. In a race against time, many more collections need to be identified and preserved while we can still play the tapes. This work gives the cultures of our region the respect they deserve.

**Vanishing languages, reincarnated as music**

*By Corinna da Fonseca-Wollheim, from the New York Times, 30 March 2016*

The UNESCO Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger is a melancholy document, charting the 3,000 or so languages that experts predict will vanish by the end of this century.

For the most part, ethnographers and linguists are helpless in the face of the gradual erasure of collective memory that goes along with this loss of linguistic diversity. Time to call in the composers?

A growing number of them are turning their attention to languages that are extinct, endangered or particular to tiny groups of speakers in far-flung places with the aim of weaving these enigmatic utterances into musical works that celebrate, memorize or mourn the languages and the cultures that gave birth to them. On Saturday, April 9, at the Cologne Opera in Germany, the Australian composer Liza Lim unveils her opera “Tree of Codes,” which includes snippets of a Turkish whistling language from a small mountain village. On her most recent album, “The Stone People”, the pianist Lisa Moore sings and plays Martin Bresnick’s hypnotic “Ishi’s Song” a setting of a chant by the last member of the Yahi, who died in 1916.

In February the New York Philharmonic performed Tan Dun’s multimedia symphony “Nu Shu,” the result of the composer’s research into a language and writing system that was passed down among the female inhabitants of a small village in Hunan Province in China for 700 years. Other composers who have done their own fieldwork include Vivian Fung, who investigated minority cultures in the Chinese province of Yunnan, and Kevin James, who sought out some of the last native speakers of minority languages in the Pacific Northwest, Australia and Japan.

The aesthetic uses to which the composers put these rare languages vary. Still, Mr. James, the founder of the Vanishing Languages Project, seemed to speak for most when, in a recent interview, he said that the goal was “not to set them to music, but set them as music.”

It’s an important distinction. Classical music has proved adept at preserving a language like Latin through liturgical settings that expose listeners to a language they no longer encounter in spoken form. But works like Mozart’s Requiem or Orff’s “Carmina Burana,” with its sections in Middle High German, sprang from the same cultural soil that gave birth to their texts. By contrast, when composers reach for words that are unintelligible to all but a handful of speakers on the planet, the very notion of music as a vessel for semantic content is upended. Removed from all context and understanding, speech — a constellation of rhythm and melody, resonant vowels and percussive consonants — begins to resemble music.

A whistling language like that quoted in “Tree of Codes,” she said, speaks to “how we humans adapt to and interact with our environment, not being separate, but really being in a merged relationship with everything around us.”

That positive attitude sets Ms. Lim apart from some of the other musical-linguistic ventures. Most are marked by a sense of loss and melancholy. A work like Mr. James’s “Counting in Quileute,” which blends his own field recordings of the last native speakers of an American Indian language from western Washington State is like a time capsule shot into space — except the meaning was already opaque at the time of its sealing.

At a performance of “Counting in Quileute” in 2013 at Roulette in Downtown Brooklyn, a set of speakers encircling the audience created an immersive and disorienting experience as torrents of foreign words washed over listeners and merged with breathy and brittle sounds created live by an instrumental ensemble.
The millennial gloom hovering over such a project is surely no accident. This fascination with the death throes of minority languages in remote regions seems linked to a wider contemporary anxiety over the degradation of the environment. The wane of linguistic diversity is the cultural equivalent of the loss of ecological diversity and, as such, a natural source of inspiration.

In a phone interview, Mr. Bresnick said it was a television documentary about Ishi, the last member of the Yahi tribe, that inspired his work for piano and voice. He said he related the story to his mother, a fluent Yiddish speaker, who was then 94 years old. “I told her, ‘You’re my Ishi, you’re the last to speak this language,’” he said. “She pointedly looked at me and said: ‘No, you are. Because you still care to know.’”

His setting begins with the pianist’s simultaneously singing and playing the song, which starts out sounding sunny, and naïve. As the voice drops away and the piano continues to reiterate the melody, it takes on an increasingly forlorn and alien feel, the husk of a tune that has long since lost its meaning.

When Mr. James flew to Washington to conduct field research on the Quileute language, he was immediately confronted with its extreme fragility. “The day I arrived, the best speaker was airlifted and taken to hospital,” he recalled. “And the population of native speakers went four to three. The next-best speaker had dementia. And the remaining two were old women who had grown up at a time when they were punished for speaking the language.”

Mr. Tan similarly found himself working against the clock when he set out to investigate Nu Shu culture at the prodding of his father who, as a native of Hunan had heard about this centuries-old women’s language. Some of the remaining speakers were over 100 but in no hurry to let a New York-based composer in on their secret.

When Ms. Fung, a Canadian, traveled through rural southwestern China in 2012 to study the music and language of several mountain tribes, she enlisted the help of a guide who helped her gain access to the homes of villagers where she might be regarded with drinking songs and other impromptu performances after dinner. “A lot of them were shy,” she recalled in a phone interview, “and you’d have to have a meal with them, and drink some moonshine.”

That sort of hands-on field work makes Mr. Tan, Ms. Fung and Mr. James the heirs to Béla Bartók, who travelled the countryside of his native Hungary with an unwieldy Edison phonograph to record and transcribe regional folk songs: the beginning of ethnomusicology. Ethnolinguistics can seem like a natural extension: The last vestiges of some minority languages are preserved as song, and a musical ear can be an advantage in studying the kind of tonal languages prevalent in parts of Asia.

But some professional linguists are watching with unease as artists, journalists and other amateur researchers enter their field. “A lot of people think they can do linguistics,” said Gregory D. S. Anderson, the director of the Living Tongues Institute for Endangered Languages in Salem, Ore. “A lot of good-intentioned people can wreak a lot of havoc when you work with these communities that are doubly marginalized and disenfranchised.”

Among his concerns are ethical questions of outsiders’ drawing financial benefit or prestige from such expeditions, or using the recorded voices of the dead in cultures where that is taboo. Mr. James said he explained his intentions in conversations with members of the Quileute tribal council, making sure to “convince them that this use was a meaningful use of the voices of their ancestors.”

Ms. Fung described the process by which the material she gathered on her travels was translated into music as one of filtering and sublimation. She said she was particularly interested in the wide melodic leaps and in a certain shrill and nasal vocal tone she encountered in the speech and songs she studied. Now she’s looking for ways to translate some of these qualities into instrumental chamber music.

“I don’t want to just state a song,” she said. “It’s about finding the parts of the research that speak to me — for example those wide leaps — and filtering it so it becomes mine.”

Mr. Tan, meanwhile, embedded his films of Nu Shu singing into a shimmering orchestral score that features an unusually muscular and assertive solo harp part. “I believe that if a tradition is vanishing something else has to take its place,” he said. “If something is dying there must be a way to incarnate it into something new.”

Children of Indonesian workers attend Community Learning Centres

From the Borneo Post, March 31, 2016

KUCHING: The state government adheres to guidelines for the establishment and registration of Community Learning Centres (CLC) for children of Indonesian plantation workers throughout the state.

Welfare, Women and Family Development Minister Datuk Fatimah Abdullah said this in response to allegations by the opposition that the CLC threatens national security.

“The opposition aroused the establishment of CLC.

I emphasise that safety is its utmost priority for the establishment and registration of the CLC.

“To register the CLC, we need to emphasise several matters including the rules and procedures of the agencies involved in the two countries (Indonesia and Malaysia) in terms of safety, health, curriculum and teaching staff.

“The children are still small but they have the right to be educated, hence the establishment of the CLC that caters to children below 12 years old of plantation workers.

“Apart from health, we take measures for the safety of children studying at CLC,” she told a press conference held in conjunction with a courtesy call made by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) representatives to her office on March 30.

To date, seven CLC were set up in farming areas in Miri followed by five in Bintulu and one in Serian.

Fatimah said the establishment of CLC was initiated by several plantation companies in the 20s and to date there are 13 CLCs in the state, seven in Miri, five in Bintulu, and one in Serian.

On health, Fatimah said the spread of ‘tuberculosis’ was unheard of yet, but the state government was alert and would ensure medical examinations were held in several places with CLC.
Fatimah discussed matters concerning Unicef and the state government among them marriages among children, teenage pregnancies, Indigenous People’s Conference, children profiling, child poverty, and education for children with special needs.

The Indigenous People’s Conference to be held on Sept 22 will witness more than 100 local and international experts talk on their experiences and language curriculum in their countries.

The conference will focus on native pre-school children in Sarawak being taught their native language.

Sarawak has two schools that have been implementing a curriculum that emphasises teaching in native languages.

“The native languages, namely Bidayuh and Kelabit, are being taught in nurseries and kindergartens in Kampung Bunuk here and Taska Tawaq Raut in Bario. The books in native languages were created by local communities.

“It is being implemented out of the fear their native language will become extinct if not spoken, mainly caused by intermarriage. In these schools, students are taught their traditions and cultures from a young age,” she added.

Meanwhile, Unicef representative to Malaysia, Marianne Clark Hattingh said they were keen to investigate domestic abuse against children with focus on those living in plantations and from Indonesia apart from indigenous children.

“Although living in distant places with no proper access to communication, these children are entitled to their basic right to education. We want to do research on this group to find out what they went through in their lives and the direction we are leading them,” she said.

Marianne added that sometimes due to poverty, the children become victims of human trafficking and child labour or are groomed to become criminals.

Malaysia has organised many programmes to fight for children’s rights including their rights to health, education, social lives and empowerment.

Unicef also looks at cases of teenage pregnancies for these children’s rights to be fought to achieve developed nation status by 2020.

The press conference was attended by state Women and Family Department director Noriah Ahmad.

### Educating Cambodia’s ethnic minorities

From Deutche Welle, 11th March, 2016

Cambodia’s marginalized indigenous populations are steadily gaining opportunities thanks to a new multilingual education program. Now, the government is taking the lead to expand the inclusive efforts.

Twelve-year-old Chhean Srey Meth dreams of being a teacher when she grows up. It’s a goal that now, thanks to a far-reaching and innovative education program, is within reach.

Srey Meth attends a simple, three-room school in Cambodia’s Kratie province where she, along with some 70 other students of Phnong ethnicity, benefits from multilingual education. The students begin learning in their mother tongue before the national language of Khmer is gradually phased into the curriculum.

This is a drastic departure from the past. In Cambodia, ethnic minorities have long been impeded from education. The long distance to travel to school was a deterrence, and those who did attend often faced discrimination or lagged behind due to a lack of understanding, as classes were only taught in Khmer by Khmer-speaking teachers.

"Children and adults there couldn’t speak Khmer at all,” says Kron Ka Sung, an ethnic Kreung from the northeast province of Ratanakiri, where 64 percent of the population is indigenous.

This meant attendance rates remained low, dropout rates were high, and very few indigenous children advanced to secondary school level, explains Jan Noorlander, a program director for ethnic minority women at non-profit organization Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE).

Education is just one of the ways that Cambodia's 24 ethnic minority groups face vulnerabilities. Among these communities, child mortality is high, health care is low, and food insecurity is heightened by deforestation. Indigenous people face discrimination in many aspects of public life, including employment. From a young age children are often required to help their parents with work in the fields and at home.

### Contextualized Communication

Over the past 13 years, non-profit organizations have been working to provide better learning opportunities to the country’s ethnic minorities by rolling out multilingual education to the most remote regions.

Since 2003, CARE - with support from UNICEF and the Cambodian government - has led a sweeping multilingual program, which has seen indigenous children taught in their own local language from preschool through to third grade, with bridge learning into Khmer, before transitioning to Khmer-only instruction in the fourth grade. "If we try to teach a child in a language they're not so familiar with, they're always going to be left behind,” said UNICEF Representative to Cambodia Debora Comini. "This is why we had lower retention rates, lower literacy rates, among indigenous communities, which are simply starting their education with a handicap."

The approach has involved setting up community-based schools, training indigenous teachers, who are often known by the students and their parents, and developing local language, contextualized textbooks with input from indigenous village and commune leaders.

As many of these languages are primarily oral, the process has had to first backtrack to codify, formalize and introduce these as written languages, which takes approximately two years,
"That's a very sound educational principle that if you learn in your context, you learn much better," said Noorlander. "Early childhood should be about developing emotional intelligence; it should be about socializing."

So far, the results have been promising. More than 4,000 children attended multilingual education schools in 2015. Enrollment doubled between 2009 and 2015, and teaching in two languages has led to higher literacy rates in ethnic minority communities, according to CARE.

"Children can read and write in [the] indigenous language—their language," said Ka Sung, who serves on the school board committee in her commune. "Now the community better understands the advantages of education," added 64-year-old Deng Song, an ethnic Tampuen also from Ratanakiri. "After they have knowledge, they can start a big or small business, for their future."

Mainstreaming Learning

But this month, the efforts were provided a significant boost, by the official launch of the government's Multilingual Education National Action Plan. The plan is a clear indicator the government is taking full ownership of the program, and channeling it into the country's education system.

"This isn't an initiative to create a different system. This is an initiative to make sure all children are integrated in the best possible system - that's a national system," said Comini.

The government has gradually become more involved over the past seven years - replicating community schools, integrating the program into state schools, providing teacher salaries and overseeing all multilingual schools. The plan promises significant expansion by 2018, with an increase in multilingual preschools by 88 percent and primary schools by 100 percent, as well as a doubling of students and trained teachers.

"[It] is part of the commitment from the ministry and all development partners to provide the underserved children access to full education," said Minister of Education, Youth and Sport Dr. Hang Chuong Naron at the March 1 launch.

Already, experts see Cambodia as a leader in the region for its institutionalized approach, involving both the highest level of government and the community, according to the minister. But government commitment and funding is perhaps more significant when considering the small numbers of ethnic minorities, who make up only 1.5 percent of the country's 15 million primarily Khmer population.

This approach, however, has its critics, particularly among nationalists concerned about secession. "Sometimes it's a sensitive issue," acknowledged Dr. Naron. "[But] teaching in their mother tongue doesn't create a [second] state; it just affords the opportunity to transition to Khmer. This is the best way of integration."

The minister added he is more concerned about alienating minority groups, particularly in the northeast, where in the past the brutal Khmer Rouge regime strategically created bases to appeal to those who benefited least from development. "Exclusion can create social problems," he said. "Education is the only equalizer. Maybe they're poor, or they are rich, but once you have education, it equalizes opportunity… It's good for the country."

Testing the System

Yet challenges remain in seeing the country's remaining indigenous groups reached with education. Comini warned during the launch that "Coverage does not yet match the scale of the need." According to CARE, quality needs to be closely monitored as the program expands nationally, and teachers' skills need to be improved.

Supplementary programs also need to better assist indigenous students to transition into state secondary schools, where they are often discriminated against.

Now in grade three, Srey Meth will face that change in three years' time and—despite the statistics stacked against her—says she wants to go on to complete twelfth grade.

While Southeast Asia currently boasts one of the globe's most diverse linguistic landscapes, UNESCO estimates that half of the world's 6,700 languages are at threat of extinction. Advocates hope that, at least in Cambodia's outlying regions, this program will help to stave off that loss.

"It's important," says Srey Meth, who stands armed with her colorful textbook. "To preserve the culture and tradition."

4. Letters to the Foundation

From Bernard Ogweno, Africa Foundation for Endangered Languages and Cultural Heritages (AFELCH), Box 66-40308, Sindo, Kenya

Established in 2015, the Africa Foundation for Endangered Languages and Cultural Heritages (AFELCH) is a private, charitable, community-based non-profit making and non-governmental organization whose registered office is situated at Sindo town in Suba Sub-county, Homa-Bay county. The primary purpose of AFELCH is to restore, maintain, bestow and promote use of the Africa endangered languages and cultural heritages for the present and future generations. AFELCH initially intends to revive endangered languages and cultural heritages in Kenya and thereafter stretch out to other African countries.

AFELCH was founded by a team of experienced indigenous language experts in Kenya who saw the urgent need for revitalization of endangered languages/dialects before they are faced out in the earth.

AFELCH was formed to achieve following principle objectives:
To restore, document and impart knowledge of the indigenous languages that are at risk of extinction.
To document, archive the physical artefacts and the intangible attributes that were once inherited from the past generations.
To apply the acquired languages/dialects to real indigenous language/dialectal environment.

In trying to achieve the above objectives the Organization will put in place the following strategic approaches:

(a) Mobilizing, promoting and partnering with the local community-based organizations and self-help groups towards democratic and good governance for sustainability of revitalization of endangered indigenous languages/dialects and cultural heritages.

(b) Training, capacity building and empowering the target groups to understand the nature of tasks involved in revitalization of endangered languages and cultural heritages and strategic policies for the achievement of the Organization’s objectives.

(c) Strengthening the indigenous language/dialects capacity gaps and foundation of the target communities through interactive engagements, for example in plays, songs, debates, radio and TV fora, and other festivals.

(d) Strengthening networks and linkages for collective power learning and actions, lobbying and advocacy for responsible services and development, new ideas, experience and information exchange.

(e) Facilitate and organize socio-economic fora, conferences and symposium towards sustainable revitalization of endangered languages and cultural heritages.

A number of African people continue to take strength from their sense of identity and community but a key feature of this identity, the language/dialects, have a doubtful future because they have been socially subordinated to stronger languages and cultures such as and also by national languages such as Kiswahili and English, French and etc. Use of some African languages/dialects has been suppressed by these stronger languages in all public contexts, and their vitality have been highly damaged. The dialects are not used for basic literacy and numeracy education in elementary schools. Such languages/dialects, culture and ways of teaching are never integrated into the public and private school curriculum or extra-curriculum. A good example of a community in Kenya where the dialects have been endangered is Suba Community where the majority of the population are bilingual in Kiswahili and English with Luo language spoken as the first language. Suba dialects are slowly getting extinct with the speech population less than 3,000 and 90% of fluent speakers are aged over 55. Although a handful of elders still use the Suba dialects, the younger generations have completely lost them. The Suba dialects occur in three forms: the Eksuva of Kakingiri and Gwasi, the Olusuba of Mfangano and Rusinga and Eksuba of Muhuru communities. Each dialect has low number of speakers and a high degree of endangerment. To address the problem of near extinction of such languages/dialects, AFELCH intends to create innovative activities that would help in their revitalization.

In order to sustain AFELCH activities, the organization intends to institute the following programmes:

a) Financial support from AFELCH directors, community stakeholders and donor communities.

b) Income generating activities from AFELCH

c) Sales of Language/dialect publications.

Sincerely,
BERNARD OGWENO
Chairman and Founder Director

5. Appeals

The K’ómoks First Nation are an indigenous people, located on the east coast of Vancouver Island in BC Canada. Our Traditional Territory reaches across the Salish Sea and over the middle of Vancouver Island. Members of the K’ómoks First Nation have lived on these lands and by these waters since time immemorial.

Our traditional language is ?aʔajúθəm which was our original language spoken by the K’ómoks People. Due to the implementation of Indian Residential Schools, ?aʔajúθəm has not been spoken by our people since the 40’s. Since then our people have taken to speaking Kwak’ala and Coast Salish, these languages were introduced via inter-marriage and war. Through our Comprehensive Community Plan, we recognized that ?aʔajúθəm has been inactive culturally and socially. During the development of our Comprehensive Community Plan, we conducted feedback sessions with our members. The feedback reflected that our people, yearn to revive ?aʔajúθəm.

The initiative to bring back ?aʔajúθəm started in 2014. It began within community meetings, there were 15 minute increments of Coast Salish and Kwak’ala language sessions. A few months later, we partnered with a neighboring first nation, Tla’amin. Through this relationship, we have obtained more resources and opportunity to work with fluent ?aʔajúθəm speaking elders. We have developed a connection with a university, in which their linguist Suzanne Urbanczyk. Suzanne volunteers her time and resources to us, she contributes by teaching ?aʔajúθəm here at the K’ómoks reserve. Starting this
year, Alanna, Suzanne Urbanczyk, and Betty Wilson (Elder & Teacher) have come together and held three ʔaʔaʔuʔom language lessons.

We’re in search of funding to make it possible to have ʔaʔaʔuʔom language sessions on a monthly basis, as our language is an important part of our culture this will be forever an ongoing initiative.

6. Publications, Book Reviews

Tatar first names from West Siberia


The price is $14.99 and comes with a CD featuring a native speaker who pronounces the names. This collection of native names, will contribute not only to Tatar names, but also to information related to the language, culture, and social life of the Tatar people.

7. Places to go on the Web

Sorosoro is back!

Dear all, friends of languages and cultural diversity,

You have been in contact in the past, one way or another, with the Sorosoro program, a program of documentation and promotion of endangered languages around the world.

The program was created in 2008, and left in abeyance in the beginning of 2012, because of a lack of funding. Thanks to the support of the ASLAN (Advance Studies on Language complexity, University of Lyon 2), and the WOLACO association, we were able to restart activities in early 2016, at least on the website. We are thus very happy to welcome you on the brand new version of the [www.sorosoro.org/en](http://www.sorosoro.org/en) website.

Our site is available in three languages (French, English and Spanish); it contains more than 3,000 pages of text, hundreds of videos, the localization of 5,500 Languages on interactive maps, a quiz, etc. It was completely rebuilt throughout 2015: its interface is now more suitable for the general public (entries by continents on the homepage, in particular), but you will also find there all the scientific data and articles collected over the years.

The site has always been very popular with people from all around the world, it continued to be so in the years when it was inactive, and we are counting on you to spread it around in your own networks. Thanks in advance!

We also ask you to be patient if you have tried to contact us in recent months: as the site was under reconstruction we were not able to handle all your messages, but we will in the coming weeks.

Also, if you want to contribute by sending us articles, or give information about the languages you know, do not hesitate to get in touch with us by mail or via the "contact" tab on the website.

Lastly, we are a small team of volunteers working to sustain this program; if you have in your circles people who would be ready to help out (to process all the requests we receive, to ensure the promotion of the site, etc.) ... all proposals are welcome!

Enjoy your visit on [www.sorosoro.org](http://www.sorosoro.org)

Rozenn Milin, Program director

8. Forthcoming events

Contested Languages of the Old World

Regrettably too late for inclusion in this issue, the second conference on Contested Languages of the Old World was held at the Università degli Studi di Torino on 5-6 May 2016.

More details can be found at [https://e20.unito.it/clow2/](https://e20.unito.it/clow2/)

Sixth Cambridge Conference on Language Endangerment

The Sixth Cambridge Conference on Language Endangerment will take place on Wednesday July 6th 2016 at the Alison Richard Building, Sidgwick Site, University of Cambridge, UK.

The theme will be: *Endangered Languages: Curriculum Design and Evaluation*

The school is often identified as an important context for the revitalization of endangered languages. Curriculum design and evaluation are therefore key factors in ensuring that such educa-
tional initiatives are successful. However, the precise sociocultural and political situation of endangered languages often preclude the simple replication of a curriculum developed for a language of wider communication for use within the endangered language classroom.

This conference invites papers that reflect on these issues:

- How should conventions designed for dominant languages be modified in the endangered language context?
- To what extent should curriculum design and evaluation be situated within the social and cultural practices of the endangered language speech community?
- How should the short- and long-term goals of curriculum design and evaluation be assessed in the context of endangered languages?
- Who is best placed to design and to evaluate the curriculum for endangered languages – the linguist or the community?
- Are the goals of an endangered language curriculum simply to obtain fluency or should they be broader in scope?
- How should the approaches used in the design and evaluation of an endangered language curriculum take account of contextual factors?
- What problems arise for curriculum design and evaluation in multidialectal and/or multination contexts?
- What pedagogical materials are necessary for the successful implementation and evaluation of an endangered language curriculum?

http://www.mml.cam.ac.uk/news/sixth-cambridge-conference-language-endangerment

This year, the conference will be preceded by a postgraduate workshop on July 5

http://groups.ds.cam.ac.uk/celc/graduate_workshop.html

Mari Jones and Damien Mooney

Linguistic Society of Papua New Guinea: annual conference

The LSPNG Annual Conference is to be held on 2-4 of August 2016 at SIL-PNG’s Training Centre, Ukarumpa, Eastern Highlands Province. 2016 is the 50th year of LSPNG!

It is also SIL’s 60th year in Papua New Guinea. The goal of this year’s conference is to provide a venue for research presentations in linguistics, sociolinguistics, literacy and education, aimed at increased collaboration between scholars and educators in the study of Tok Pisin and the amazingly diverse, confoundingly numerous vernacular languages of Melanesia. Abstracts and Programme Abstracts are due 1 June 2016 Applicants will be notified of abstract acceptance around 15 June 2016 All abstracts should be sent electronically to lr-tptrans@sil.org.pg

They can also be mailed by post to Language Resources, SIL-PNG, PO Box 1-418, Ukarumpa, EHP 444. The programme for this year’s Conference will be made available by 20 June on the Language and Linguistics in Melanesia website after the acceptance of the abstracts. For more information please visit www.langlxmelanesia.com Papers will be collected and published in the LLM online journal. Accommodation and Costs for the Conference Conference dinner: K120/night For alternate accommodations, please check with the organising committee. Students from PNG universities who present a paper will be eligible for discounted accommodation. There is no conference registration fee. Please plan to arrive on Monday 1 August, as presentations will begin on Tuesday morning. Please plan to leave on Friday 5 August as presentations will continue through Thursday afternoon. Please register your attendance at lr-tptrans@sil.org.pg by 1 July 2016.

Debrecen summer school, Hungary: Endangered languages of Europe and elsewhere

An international conference on the past, present and future of minority languages, Debrecen, Hungary: 1-3 August 2016

Language is an everyday commodity for all of us. Everyone uses at least one language for daily communication, and the number of people speaking two or more languages is steadily growing. Nevertheless, there are several languages whose long-term survival is in danger because of political, demographical, cultural or other reasons. There are different kinds of options, endeavours, political recommendations and even legal steps available but the overall situation is rather complicated. As a promoter of Hungarian, a state language in Hungary and a minority language in some other countries, Debrecen Summer School has been aware of the difficulties such languages have experienced ever since its foundation in 1927.

This is why we are happy to invite scholarly papers which discuss the problems and challenges faced by any non-state or minority language in the world. The conference is designed to bring together, primarily but not exclusively, young scholars whose main professional aim is to investigate and research the current state and future perspectives of the so-called endangered languages in Europe or in any other part of the world. Traditional lectures and presentations will be supplemented with workshops and round-table discussions. The language of the conference will be English, but if there are at least 3 papers related to the same language (Irish, Welsh, Occitan, Basque, Finnish, Hungarian etc.) we will be happy to organize a separate session in that language.

Participants of the conference will have the opportunity to experience and take part in some traditional Hungarian cultural events as well as to learn about the past and present of Debrecen, the ‘Calvinist Rome’ and two-time capital of Hungary.

If you wish to present a paper or act as a convenor for a workshop / round-table discussion, please send us an abstract of not more 200 words before 15 May 2016 to the following e-mail address: debrecen at nyariegyetem.hu

Application deadline: 1 June 2016. For further information, please contact Dr. Péter Szaffkó at peter.szaffko@yahoo.com
9. FEL Manifesto

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 find its 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.
The Comanche community in Oklahoma
(cf article on p. 4)

The 2015 Puhi Tekwap Class competes against 38 other tribes’ language classes in the Oklahoma Native American Language Youth Fair held at the Sam Noble Museum of Natural History Norman, OK.

Center row Left is Kenneth Geimausaddle.

Kenneth and his 2013 Puhi Tekwap class participate in the cultural portion of our class. Kenneth teaches them how to erect a 20’ tipi and they bring out the drum and learn songs in Comanche.