New book of Mixtec recipes from Jicayán, Mexico, produced with FEL/UNESCO assistance (see Reviews)

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# OGMIOS Newsletter 60
## 31 August 2016

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1. Editorial

Every time the Foundation holds an annual conference, it gains a little more experience in the factors that go into good organization, and gains an ever widening circle of friends. This year we will be holding our twentieth annual conference. But in this twentieth year we have also had the pleasure of a collaborative effort, a conference jointly organized with SOILLSE and held at the University of Glasgow from 6th to 8th June this year.

You read about it in the last issue of Ogmios; now we can look back on it with great satisfaction, and in this issue we present some reflections and some papers from the participants.

And meanwhile we look forward to returning to India in December for our twentieth full annual conference in Hyderabad – watch www.ogmios.org/conferences/2016

Christopher Moseley

2. Development of the Foundation

Meet a Community Member:
The Africa Foundation for Endangered Languages and Cultural Heritages

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

1. To restore, document and impart knowledge of the indigenous languages that are at risk of extinction.

2. To Document, Archive the Physical Artifacts and the Intangible Attributes that were once inherited from the past generations.

3. 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:

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.

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.

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.

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

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 Ekisuva of Kaksingiri and Gwasii, the Olusuba of Mfangango and Rusinga and Ekisuba 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

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

Income generating activities from AFELCH

Sales of Language/dialect publications.

BERNARD OGWENO
Chairman and Founder Director
3. Endangered Languages in the News

New Zealand: Maori pop song with serious message knocks Justin Timberlake off No. 1

From the Guardian (UK) web-site, 9 July 2016

A New Zealand pop tune sung entirely in the indigenous language of Te reo Maori has shot straight to the top of the iTunes chart, knocking Justin Timberlake from the No 1 position.

Maimoatia – which means Cherish It – features over a dozen little-known Maori singers belting out a gospel-esque tune, entreating Kiwis to adopt their native tongue and talk and sing in Te reo Maori to save it.

According to Statistics New Zealand, only 4% of New Zealanders speak fluent Te reo Maori (about 48,000), and the number of active speakers continues to decline year on year.

“A lot of young Maori don’t speak the language because they are shy and fearful of making mistakes with it,” said Nathaniel Howe, who performs in the song.

“We wanted to empower young New Zealanders to own the language, to feel that it’s our responsibility to keep it alive.”

Maimoatia was released on Wednesday and by Thursday it had bumped Justin Timberlake’s Can’t Stop the Feeling to second place on the New Zealand iTunes chart.

By Friday Maimoatia had returned to second place (it still beat Adele’s Send My Love (To Your New Lover)), but producer Marama Gardiner was confident it would reclaim the top spot over the weekend, which would mark the conclusion of Maori Language Week in New Zealand. “Our language is how we identify as a people and feel proud of who we are, it’s everything,” said Gardiner, who is a fluent Te reo speaker and whose two children are bilingual in English and Maori.

“I want this song to go global, for people to be singing a great Te reo song all over the world. That would be such a boost of confidence for speakers in New Zealand, that their indigenous language is not dying but adapting.”

Te Haumihiata Mason, a Te Reo language expert who worked with the singing group, said her family had been playing the song “night and day” since its release.

“Te reo is my first language and I will never give up on it, my grandchildren and great-grandchildren have every right to speak their native tongue,” she said.

“And when you have beautiful young faces singing Te reo so passionately, it’s impossible to feel that the language is anything but vibrant.”

UN calls for ‘culturally and linguistically appropriate’ education for indigenous people

By Laurel Raymond, from the ThinkProgress web-site. 9 August 2016

On the International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples, senior U.N. officials are calling to close the education gap between indigenous and non-indigenous populations. A key component of that, they emphasize, is providing “culturally and linguistically appropriate” education.

“Indigenous peoples regularly face stigmatization of their cultural identity and lack of respect and recognition for their heritage and values, including in textbooks and other educational materials,” said U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon in his remarks on Tuesday. “Their marginalization is often compounded by language barriers. Instruction is mainly in the national language, with little or no instruction in, or recognition of, indigenous languages.”

In order to close the education gap, the U.N. recommended that instruction in the mother tongue be provided, and if the indigenous mother language has been lost, that language revitalization programs be integrated.

According to the U.N., there are an estimated 370 million indigenous people in the world, living across 90 countries (though some sources put that number much higher). They account for 15 percent of the world’s poorest, despite being only 5 percent of the total population. In many parts of the world, disaggregated data breaking out benchmarks for indigenous populations isn’t even available, but where it is, it reveals a consistent story of disparities in education access, retention, and achievement.

In Nunavut, northern Canada, only 40 percent of school-age indigenous people are attending full time school, while in Australia, in 2013 only 60 percent of indigenous 15 to 19 year-olds were enrolled, according to the upcoming State of the World’s Indigenous Peoples, Volume 3. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the number of indigenous children attending school is higher (up to 85 percent), but only 40 percent actually graduate.

Language revitalization programs are essentially not only to close the education gap — but also to retain the world’s linguistic diversity.

Indigenous populations speak an “overwhelming majority” of the world’s 7,000 languages. But by 2100, more than half of these languages may disappear, according to the National Geographic’s Enduring Voices project. Around 93 percent of Australian indigenous languages are already extinct, and according to UNESCO, the vast majority of Canada’s indigenous languages are on the brink.

Languages spoken by small populations of people get pushed out as dominant languages spread. Many indigenous languages, however, have been purposefully crushed through racist educational policies requiring indigenous children to speak the dominant tongue.
In Canada, from 1876 until 1996, when the last school closed, indigenous youth were separated from their parents and sent to boarding schools administered by the church. In the schools, many indigenous youth were physically abused and all were forced to give up their culture and language. The United States had a similar policy throughout the late 18th and 19th centuries, requiring indigenous children to be separated from their families and placed in boarding schools. They were punished for speaking their native tongues.

Languages, with no way to pass from generation to generation, began dying. Today, many languages are spoken fluently only by the elderly.

“It is a truism but each time an Elder speaker passes we lose a dictionary of words and language resources as well as an encyclopedia of cultural knowledge,” wrote Andre Cramblit, chair of the Karuk Language Restoration Committee, in Indian Country Today. Cramblit noted that Karuk, the second largest tribe in California with around 4,000 members, has less than 10 fluent speakers.

“It is another cliché, but one rooted in truth, that there are some concepts and tenets of culture that cannot be translated into English,” Cramblit wrote. “Wellness, for Native people, is based upon the inter-connectedness of the physical, intellectual, spiritual and emotional health of the people, and language is the binding agent that connects all of those into a culture.”

Language is an essential part of culture, and carries wisdom, ideas, histories, and key insights into the functioning of communication and the human mind. In many cultures, histories and insights accumulated over centuries are passed down orally. When the language dies, an entire culture is lost with it.

Translation, if possible at all, imperfectly captures the ideas. Anton Treuer, an Ojibwe Indian and professor as Bemidji State University, gave an example to the Voice of America:

“For example, in Ojibwe, our word for elder, gichi-aya’aa, literally means ‘great being.’ And our word for an elderly woman, mindimooyen, means ‘one who holds things together’ and describes the role of a family matriarch,” he said. “We don’t have to remind youth to respect their elders because it’s built right into the language.”

Respect for indigenous languages is also bound up with respect and recognition for indigenous cultures. In Canada, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau noted that communities that retain and teach their own language and culture see “massive” decreases in youth suicide rates, currently an epidemic in Canada’s First Nations.

“This is something that we know is essential,” he said, as reported by The Toronto Star. “As an indicator of pride and identity, belonging and culture, indigenous languages are essential.”

There are some small projects aiming to preserve the embattled languages. One such program, the Lakota Language Consortium in Bloomington, Indiana, aims to teach increase the real number of speakers of Lakota by teaching it to school-age children.

Wilhelm Meya, the group’s leader and the executive producer of the film “Rising Voices,” which documents the project, told VOA that while programs like his can succeed, they can only help a small number of children, and are in constant need of funding.

“To truly be effective, we need to mainstream the whole notion of teaching all content in the target language, that is, total immersion in all the schools,” Meya told VOA. “And it’s not just in Lakota, but in dozens of languages across America that are taking their final last breaths. And unless the government applies more resources, I think we will lose them forever.”

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**SOILLSE 2016: Saving the Gaels?**

*By Argyro Kanaki, University of Dundee*

This article is about multilingualism and how promoting it as a social asset can provide new ways of understanding language learning. These insights help to promote Gaelic sustainability. The paper that this article derives from was presented at the SOILLSE Conference 2016 in Glasgow. The conference topic was “Small Language Planning, Communities in Crisis”, and the aim of the paper was to bring closer the new perspectives offered by multilingualism. I aim here to present for readers of Ogmios a ‘plurilingual’ perspective which could be used to favour effective Gaelic sustainability. The article first presents some facts about Gaelic language use in Scotland, and then points to some ways that plurilingualism can assist Gaelic sustainability.

Gaelic has become more prominent in Scotland in recent decades, especially since the Scottish Parliament passed the Gaelic Language Act in 2005. Broadcasting, Gaelic medium schools, and public affairs have all meant that language use is increasing. However, although Gaelic seems to be playing a more lively role in Scottish society, there is little research evidence about the attitudes of people in Scotland to Gaelic. During the last few years, and after the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey (SSA) had collected some data about public attitudes towards Gaelic in Scotland in 2012, some new research reports have appeared. In Phipps and Fassetta’s report, we see that people put strict geographical barriers about Gaelic language in their heads. “In Scotland, the language issue is seen in narrow geographical terms – it’s spoken up there – North West Highlands” (Phipps and Fassetta, 2015:18). According to Paterson and O’Hanlon (2015) Gaelic is seen more as a Scottish symbol rather than a communication tool, that is a language that can still be used. Gaelic is seen as cultural heritage, but, unfortunately, people seem not to link this heritage with language use, or language revitalisation. Culture and language are not intimately connected in the minds of respondents to Paterson and O’Hanlon (2015).

In another report, in 2014, Milligan Dombrowski et al. present the issue of teacher shortages for Gaelic Medium Education, and they remind us that teacher shortages result in restriction to language provision, and discontinuity in individual learning experience. At the same time, the Curriculum for Excellence (the new national curriculum for Scottish schools) and 1+2 Ap-
proach (a research informed European initiative that promotes the learning of two foreign languages for all children, in addition to their own mother tongue) are encouraged and supported by the Scottish government. Despite good efforts from some teachers to encourage language learning in general, and to promote Gaelic learning through the 1+2 Approach initiative, neither CfE nor 1+2 Approach policy initiatives allocate sufficient time and resources to satisfy language proficiency goals, or promote language progress towards fluency. The smaller-than-needed cohort of language teachers are measurably hampered by time restrictions on how much and when they can teach and curriculum overloading, which has them competing with other subjects for classroom time in any case.

The adoption of a multilingual theory of language teaching in education, the plurilingual approach, could be a solution to these issues. It is time to shift how we see language, and how we sensitize our society to language issues and cultural perspectives. Scotland is a monoglot habitus, and having only English at home, it prevents Scottish people, first, from a full appreciation of language. Logically, as well as practically, it is not possible to have a rounded perception of ‘language’ if you are only at home in one. Focusing on all existing language skills in a community rather than on a particular language, helps people abandon monolingual assumptions and practices, and predispose themselves to favour language learning and use in the community. According to the 2011 UK census, the most common place of birth for adult residents of Scotland born outside the UK was Poland, around 55,000 people, and more than twice as many folk as were born in Ireland. The General Teaching Council for Scotland has just started efforts to license the teaching of Polish in Scottish schools, despite the large number of unofficial Polish schools in various parts of the country (Martowicz and Roach, 2016). This is another set of observations about monoglot theorisations of language and their use in Scotland that should make us think more seriously about Gaelic revitalisation and sustainability. Education systems which demonstrate the complex and technical resistance which Scotland has presented to Polish, effectively and powerfully acting against languages in their own communities, cannot be expected to institute relevant and effective continuation and support measures for smaller languages, especially those without a reservoir culture for their immediate support. Scottish Gaelic does have an active and fairly powerful reservoir culture, but unfortunately for this variant of the language, it is based in the Republic of Ireland. As Grin points out (Grin, 2006) economic advantages which accrue from teaching, learning and using language diversity are much less frequently observed in monoglot countries. Their focus on the private and personal cultural factors in sustaining languages, rather than the equally real commercial, market and social advantages of plurilingual cultures, demonstrably reduces returns to investment and entrepreneurial opportunity over a whole polity.

Schools are the first places for adopting plurilingual approaches. All that we learn at school amounts to new words, and new ways to use them. Teachers could raise student awareness in classroom learning and be more explicit with language teaching by analysing, comparing and contrasting mother tongue with the second language that students learn. Students should also be encouraged to reflect on their own language development, and competence, cognition and metacognition in their mother tongue, in their second language, and for all their school subjects. This is about understanding the subtle differences between concepts in science as much as in history, learning experiences which are only readily available to students who understand how concepts work in their own and other languages. Students beginning to cope with levels of abstraction in the wider curriculum can most directly be encouraged in this closer and deeper analysis of language by identifying links with previous learning experiences in other languages. Language, in a plurilingual sense, should become the centre of learning and teaching, enabling, as it does, simultaneous focus on cultural aspects, historical and social development, on grammar competence, on vocabulary learning, on text analysis, and on communication. Studying any language cannot, on the plurilingual view, be considered as an old-fashioned, boring or out-of-date task for the schoolroom. On the contrary, it should be considered as a mediating tool that links with the culture and the wider community. Learning Gaelic does not allow you to talk to one additional person, but on the plurilingual view it radically alters how you can talk to them and it must change all of what you can talk about. It will also give you new insight as to how your own mother tongue actually works, and what you can and cannot say with it.

Apart from schools, we need to shift teachers’ language training. All teachers should be aware of a multilingual educational context where they can use a local mother tongue as well as a second language (any language they know) as tools for the development of learning competences and positive school experiences. Teacher language training should also be focusing on contemporary and innovative language approaches such as Content and Language Integrated Learning (teaching school subjects such as science, history etc. through the medium of other languages); vocabulary work as part of literacy development; story-telling and drama through another language and its cultural possibilities. This shift in teacher training would allow the introduction of a true multilingual and multicultural educational context, particularly in schools where teachers and students accept language diversity as a real phenomenon in their community, not a marker of fatal difference. They will see themselves as active parts of a plurilingual and multicultural community, and fail to understand practices and mentalities that preponderantly monoglot communities establish.

A plurilingual approach requires that we abandon the monolingual organisation of school environments and educational institutions. It promotes the integration of all community languages into the canon of officially accepted and taught, legitimate school languages. In this way, people will be sensitive to linguistic matters and will not only accept but promote all languages in the community. Gaelic language speakers will then have guaranteed ownership of their own language capital. Plurilingualism can work as an economic and social tool for the revitalisation and sustainability of Gaelic in the Scottish communities.
References:


SOILLSE 2016: Linking the Ryukyus and Finland

By Madoka Hammine, Ph.D. candidate, Faculty of Education, University of Lapland (Finland)

I participated in the conference organized by SOILLSE and FEL at the University of Glasgow held on 6th and 7th May, 2016. As a young researcher in the field of minority language education, this conference has provided me with great opportunities to meet many people who are specially working on language revitalization in different places in the world. This conference aimed at providing a forum for minority language researchers, policy makers, practitioners and activists to exchange research findings and experiences in order to stimulate new perspectives on minority language revitalization and to identify new areas for collaboration.

At the conference were three invited speakers, François Grin from the University of Geneva, Leena Huss from the Uppsala University and Brian Ó Curnáin from Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies. What was noteworthy about this conference was that participants were not only researchers from the universities but also practitioners from small language communities. Many research studies presented at the conference focused on Celtic Language Communities, especially in Scotland and Ireland, which is not surprising considering the fact that it was held in Scotland. However, the conference also had quite a number of papers from other parts of the world, including language communities in Africa and in Asia.

I also gave a presentation at the conference. My presentation focused on one of my papers for my own Ph.D. research project on two such communities; Sami languages in the Nordic countries and Ryukyuan languages in the Ryukyu archipelago in Japan. Sami languages are the group of about 10 languages spoken in Sami areas in Finland, Sweden, Norway and Kola peninsula of Russia. Although my whole Ph.D. focuses on Finland and Japan, in this presentation I presented a paper on which I have been working with the ECMI (European Center for Minority Issues), titled “Sami languages in Education: Comparative Case Study in Finland and Sweden.” I chose Finland and Sweden because they both have Sami languages as their national minority language, but the two countries have different systems of education. As a result, Sami language speakers have been facing different challenges in Sweden and Finland.

If we consider small language communities in Europe, such as Finland or Sweden, the European Union plays an important role since they conduct monitoring in each nation, examining how minority languages are included in different aspects of society. Specifically speaking, the EU has one instrument which member nations in the EU have signed and ratified: the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages (EC- RML). Finland and Sweden also have signed and ratified the Charter (Finland signed in 1992 and ratified in 1994, Sweden signed and ratified in 2000). In this Charter, it is stated that in order to maintain and to develop the Europe’s cultural traditions and heritage, and on the other, to respect an inalienable and commonly recognized right to use a regional or minority language in private and public life. Through investigating the Charter, the monitoring reports from Council of Europe, and the government reports of Finland and Sweden, it is obvious that although Sami languages are spoken both in Sweden and Finland, each country has different approaches in the field of education, in terms of how they treat Sami languages.

The case of Finland and Sweden is one of the examples where endangered language communities have different challenges depending on the educational systems of each country. For instance, it is easier and more accessible for children to continue their education in Sami at the university level in Finland than in Sweden, since the Finnish system has college entrance examinations available also in Sami. In Sweden, students need to switch to Swedish in order to take the college entrance examination, which could be one of the obstacles that prevent Sami speaking children from continuing their education in Sami languages. This is one example whereby institutional differences in the two countries could create differences in accessibility to education among learners of the same minority language.

In addition, different varieties of Sami languages are treated differently both in Sweden and Finland. In Finland, for instance, smaller Sami languages such as Inari Sami and Skolt Sami have less learning materials and the number of qualified teachers is scarce. Similarly in Sweden, smaller Sami languages...
including Lule Sami, Pite Sami and Ume Sami have a smaller number of teachers and institutions available for children.

Small language communities all over the world have different environments and needs in revitalizing small languages. Although different communities have different issues concerning language revitalization, language revitalization needs both institutional support and motivation of the people. In order to develop better institutional support and ways of maintaining small languages, it is important to collaborate among researchers and activists from different communities. The SOILL SE conference and the future conferences could and should contribute to making further collaboration, not only in Europe but also with other parts of the world.

SOILLSE 2016: Ryukyu language: An orphan to be ignored?

By Tomoko Arakaki and Jun Shimabukuro; paper presented at the SOILLSE/FEL conference, June 20916, Glasgow

1. Background of Okinawa

Ryukyuan languages are spoken in the Ryukyu Islands (Okinawa and Kagoshima Prefecture), which are the southernmost islands of Japan. In 2009, the UNESCO Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger included six Ryukyuan languages (Moseley 2009): from north, Amami, which is a part of Kagoshima prefecture, then, Kunigami, is spoken both in Kagoshima and Okinawa Prefecture. The next map illustrates where Okinawan language—known also as Uchinaaguichi—is spoken in the central and southern part of the main island of Okinawa, and Miyako, Yaeyama, and Yonaguni are spoken on each island on the map. For this presentation, Uchinaaguichi and Okinawan language are used interchangeably. These six languages are mutually unintelligible, and all of them are either definitely or severely endangered. Ryukyuan languages are considered to have separated from Japanese no later than the eighth century or even earlier than that (Dictionary of Okinawan Language: 1963). The linguistic features of each of these languages are significantly different from Japanese. Yet the Ryukyuan group is genetically related to Japanese and analyzed to constitute one of two branches of the Japonic language family (Serafim, 2003).

Historically, Ryukyu was at one time an independent nation, known as the Ryukyu Kingdom, for more than 400 years, from 1429 to 1879, until Meiji Japan annexed the islands, militarily. Despite having limited natural resources, the Ryukyu Kingdom had flourished through a rich culture of overseas trade with many neighboring Asian countries. However, Ryukyu’s circumstance changed quite dramatically due to the Japanese takeover of the island in 1879, the subsequent destructive effects World War II, and U.S. military occupation that followed after the end of the war. Although Okinawa comprises only 0.6% of Japan’s landmass, 74% of the U.S. military bases in the nation are located in Okinawa. Many problems such as noise pollution, rapes, homicides, injuries, and aircraft crashes, environmental contamination and degradation have been caused by the U.S. military. These lingering problems, it has been observed by many social critics, have caused depression, low self-esteem, and poverty among the local population and these outward issues, which are very easy to point to, have tended to overshadow the importance and necessity of language revitalization. The following chart provides details of the scale of the problem we face.

2. Assessing the Extent of Ryukyuan Languages Revitalization

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<td>1. Intergenerational language transmission</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>2. Absolute number of speakers for all Ryukyuan languages</td>
<td>350,000</td>
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<td>3. Proportion of speakers within the total population</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>9. Amount and quality of documentation</td>
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(Ishihara 2014:162)

Next, I’m going to show you how serious or imperiled Ryukyuan languages really are. To analyze the problem, Ishihara (2014) employs the nine factors outlined by UNESCO (2003), the “Language Vitality and Endangerment” to assess vitality of Ryukyuan languages. His assessments are based upon academic surveys and public opinion polls collected by the local newspaper. As you can see, factors 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6 feature rather low scores. Pretty miserable, huh? Nevertheless, as you can see, clearly factors 7, 8 and 9 feature some possible bright news.

Let me turn now to the important points only. 93% of the respondents in their teens or twenties reveal some difficulties in speaking the community language, and only 8% of the respondents speak the community language to their children. Ishihara (2014) appreciates both the community members and the Okinawan prefectoral government’s positive attitude towards Okinawan language; however, the actual situation isn’t so optimistic. Native speakers are dying every day, and very few of their children are actually learning their native language. At present, no single school exists for children to receive an education in their tongue. Let me now turn over the talk to Jun.

3. City and Local Government Efforts: What’s Been Done?

3.1 I’d like to talk briefly about local government efforts to deal with this issue. First, before getting into the details, it is worth noting that the national government has done virtually nothing to address language issues in Okinawa, a point that will be addressed during this talk. So, let’s look at local efforts.

The Prefectural Education Agency, part of the prefectural government, has
Since reversion in 1972, Okinawa had no political power or right to chart its own plan for its welfare and culture. This is why, only since 2012, Okinawa has been largely defenseless in maintaining its language and culture and history. Finally, in 2012, after 40 years (or 4 cycles of central governmental planning), Okinawa was at last given the power to create and enact its vision for the future. Significantly, Okinawan people in 2012—over a span of 133 years—were finally able to request support officially for the preservation, diffusion and inheritance of their own languages. The details of that request follow:

Okinawa 21 century vision basic plan (2012-2017, p30)

Ryukyuan Languages are the basic component of Okinawan Culture and a cultural heritage which has a historical importance. For the preservation, diffusion and inheritance of the language, Okinawa Prefectural Government will found research system by networking local university research organizations and education bodies. For primary and secondary and high schools, education program for pupils and students will be developed and promoted.

The Basic plan was made by reflecting people’s opinions through many public meetings and involvements. However, in the basic plan, there are no concrete projects and concrete future achievements, though ideas and concepts are on it.

The Okinawan Prefectural government has created a tactical plan based upon the basic strategic plan above. At a glance, we can see the precarious state that Ryukyuan languages appear to be in. The plan itself illustrates how well this local agency understand the situation.

Okinawa 21st Century Vision tactical plan (2012-2022, p.44)

Recognition of the Basic plan:

Ryukyuan languages are inherited over many generations throughout Ryukyu Islands and their communities, as well as the basic components of Okinawa/Ryukyuan Culture. Therefore, continued propagation of the languages for the next generation is most important, but now, these are endangered languages and are facing extinction because of the rapidly decreasing number of speakers.

A. Language Projects for High Schools: Sending Ryukyuan language speakers to High School Project,

Okinawa Prefecture Education Agency plans to send speakers of Ryukyuan language to schools 30 times from 2013 to 2017.

B. The Project for Primary and Secondary Schools: Primary and Secondary School Assisted by Local Language Speakers

Okinawa Prefecture Education Agency plans to create classes and meetings concerning Ryukyuan languages in 90 schools, which equates to 15 schools in each 6 major education branch areas.

There are 77 high schools throughout Okinawa Prefecture, so let us suppose that even if a Ryukyuan language speaker is sent to one high school, 30 times over 4 years, this means 44 schools receive zero speakers over the 4-year duration of the program. There are 280 primary schools and 157 secondary schools, but the entire project covers only 90 schools. If it seems as though there is a gap between what is needed and what can be done, we can say clearly the gap is very wide.

Even if the planned projects were completely realized, it seems that not nearly enough resources will be devoted to language revitalization efforts. Despite the apparent weaknesses in the plan itself, the actual effort that has so far been put forward has been absurdly ineffective.

Next, I would like to turn to the Self-Assessment Project.

2016 Self-Assessment for projects in “Okinawa Prefecture PDCA check sheets”.

A. Project for High School:

The plan was to send a speaker 30 times, but the achievement was 0.

The agency had failed to properly budget resources to send speakers in support of the project. To fix their shortsightedness and mismanagement, the agency, instead, created an educational small pamphlet (about 20 pages) titled “Local Language for High School Students” and provided all prefectural high schools with some brief written instruction in Okinawan language.

B. Project for Primary and Secondary School:

The plan was to send speakers to 90 schools, but the achievement again was 0.

This time (if you can believe it) the agency failed to request funding for the project, because the main responsibility for the language preservation, diffusion and inheritance rests with the Prefectural Government’s Culture Promotion Division, as well as other divisions and municipalities that maintain similar projects. The Educational Agency supports having Ryukyuan language classes as a part of Japanese national educational curriculum.

It is no exaggeration to say that Okinawa Prefectural Education Agency has done nothing to support the projects that they themselves had created during 2012 for the tactical plan. The projects within this so-called tactical plan were devised only by a bureaucracy that failed to reflect on actual needs within the community and for Okinawan people. One might argue that such ineptitude is really just window dressing, an outward show performed by the government to create the illusion of something. In other words, a public administration plan that shows nothing of substance. Added to this, the Prefectural Assembly has no power to enact such a concrete project and to enforce the projects of the local bureaucracy.

The Okinawan Prefectural Education Agency—under the direction and influence of the Japanese Ministry of Education (MEXT) has decided not to create an original education curriculum for Ryukyuan languages but has decided, instead, to adopt the Japanese national education curriculum, which recognizes Ryukyu languages as mere dialects of Japanese language, not an independent language itself. Furthermore, the Agency believes that primary responsibility to the Okinawan language should rest with other divisions, such as lifelong learning divisions, but not with the Education Agency. For all of its purported interest in knowledge and education,
Okinawa Prefectural Education Agency is now a serious obstacle for the revitalization of Okinawan language through—ironically enough—the school system.

3.2 Okinawa Prefectural Government, Culture Promotion Division

Culture Promotion Division (Department of Culture, Tourism and Sports) has a responsibility for administering life-long learning and cultural programs for mainly those people who had finished secondary and higher education. The following slide illustrates the key details.

B. Middle Period (2016-2018): Promote Uses of the Community Language – Promotion efforts are aimed at the diffusion of the language throughout the speech community
C. Last Period (2019-2022): Establishment of Daily Language Use – Promotion efforts are aimed at consistently active use of the language throughout the speech community

As you can see in these major periods, the government has envisioned some noble plans for language revitalization. At present, the first period has concluded. The assessments of each project on the Prefectural government homepage show that the projects are basically going well. Nevertheless, most of the projects are actually one-off venture that feature no follow-up or continuity to maintain consistency. Another example of their efforts appears in a handbook and in a calendar written in community languages, both of which were published in 2014. These are innovative attempts for Ryukyuan languages but hardly consistent. Next, I’d like to move on to what the capital city, Naha, is doing.

3.3. Naha, prefectural capital

The Naha City Board of Education in 2013 published two non-required supplemental readings for elementary and junior high school students. The Board provided these materials to all students but failed or ignored details on how these educational materials might be most effectively used by teachers. Discretion on whether or not to even use the materials was left to individuals teachers. It’s not even possible to know whether some teachers used the materials or ignored them completely.

Naha City also created an Uchinaaguichi Promotion Working Team in 2011. The team undertakes continuous efforts to build awareness and promote the language locally. This represents a modest improvement since the team appears to be aiming toward consistency. Next, I’d like to move on to what is being done at the unofficial level.

4. NGO/NPO Involvement

4.1 Association for Ryukyu Languages (Shimakutuba Renraku Kyogikai):

In 2013, the Association of Ryukyu Languages Promotion Group was founded. This diverse group is a coalition of many non-governmental organizations that have overlapping interests in saving and promoting community languages.

Besides official members of this group, there are also other unique NPOs working in the same vein, such as Okinawa Hands-on, which fosters in younger generations an awareness of the importance of community languages as well as an ability to use them. Beyond this are efforts put forward in new media and SNS, with Facebook or 24-hour per day radio programs broadcast online in Okinawan languages. Though I have to skip the details today, what I can say is that civil-level attempts are actually increasing. This means that the people themselves are seeing the vital importance, which is a very good grassroots kind of thing. Moving on from public efforts is a kind of bridge that serves as a link between citizens and scholarship.

4.2 Ryukyuan Heritage Language Society:

Likely many of you already know, in 2014, the 18th Conference of Foundation of Endangered Language (FEL) was held in Okinawa. The Ryukyuan Heritage Language Society, which I’m involved, was a co-organizer of that conference. At that conference, we discussed these issues and managed to publish a declaration—the two main points of which are “the appointment of Ryukyuan languages as second official languages” and “their introduction into the school system in Okinawa Prefecture and Kagoshima Prefecture.

Our Society communicated this declaration to the Prefecture Governor, the Prefectural Assembly Chairperson, and the Agency for Cultural Affairs Director. As a result of our efforts, can you imagine the effects they produced? Predictably, the government agreed that the issue is important, but in keeping with bureaucratic intrigue, this kind of importance has led to no substantive action toward revitalization. At the same time, in February 2016, one assembly member asked a question at the regular prefectural assembly whether or not Ryukyuan languages should be taught in schools, and both the Chair of the Prefectural Board of Education (who is also the head of the Prefectural Education Agency) and the Chair of the Department of Culture, Tourism and Sports answered, bizarrely, that there is no need. A contradiction if there ever was one!!

5. The Human Rights Committee of United Nations

In 2008, the United Nations expressed the necessity of accepting Ryukyuan people as indigenous people and discussed the issue that Ryukyuan people have a right to learn their languages and history. After six years from the publication of this report in 2014, the Human Rights Committee of United Nations has reiterated its concern regarding the lack of recognition of the Ryukyu and Okinawa, as well as of the rights of those groups to their traditional land and resources and the right of their children to be educated in their language.

The Government of Japan continues to ignore the warning of the United Nations. Beyond simply ignoring, the government Vice-Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan stated that the government is going to try to persuade the UN to recall or revise those statements and their position in responding to questions in the National Diet in April 2016. Clearly, in light of the long suppression of language and culture since Okinawa’s annexation, these national government efforts to simply ignore history qualify as a rank example of bullshit, as argued by Harry.
Frankfurt. He notes that, “The bullshitter ignores the demands of [of truth] altogether. He does not reject the authority of the truth, as the liar does, and oppose himself to it ... he pays no attention to [the truth] at all” (2005 p. 61).

5. Solutions?

To sum up, no one wants to live in a society where the powerful get to bullshit citizens. After all, we pay them to create a free and just society. Our community efforts are rooted in the real world where facts matter and where culture matters. So, we ask you all what might possibly be done to save this invaluable resource we call language and culture? What can be done at the community level to realistically save what appears to be fading away?

References


SOILLSE 2016 – To revitalize or not – that is the question!

By Nurdan Karakili, Hacettepe University, Turkey

The SOILLSE Conference themed as ‘Small Language Planning: Communities in Crisis’ was held in Glasgow between the dates of 6-8 June, 2016. It was such an inspiring event for me for a myriad of reasons. To begin with, this was my very first visit to Glasgow. I guess this is why I had some hard time finding the venue on the first day of the conference! However, I came across some colleagues along the way, which paved the way towards a great friendship bounded internationally: Lost but not a loser, yay!

As the only Turk at the conference, it was my pleasure and honour to introduce Laz, which is spoken primarily on the southeastern coast of the Black Sea region in Turkey. It did attract the participants’ attention as no-one ever heard of Laz before. Even in Turkey, Laz is most generally assumed to be either a dialect in the Black Sea region or a variation of Turkish, albeit not a distinct language itself. Briefly, Laz is a member of the South Caucasian language family. The language has speakers mostly in Turkey and a small number in Georgia (merely 2,000). The UNESCO Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger has reported Laz as a definitely endangered language, frequently applied in intra-familial conversations by its users at home. Therefore, transmission of the language to the younger generation is somehow limited. As the young people’s language is Turkish (official language in the country), Laz language competency has been falling each passing year. Even the people over 40 are now passive users of the language, though reported as more proficient speakers of Laz.

Starting from these points, I have framed the controversial issue between young and old generations in language use and language choice, and mentioned the new governmental acts taken to revitalize the Laz language in Turkey. Among them, Laz has been taken to rank as a distinct language in the media and at schools as an elective course under the cover of ‘Living Languages and Dialects’. As a course at primary schools, Laz also has a textbook composed of 11 units and 213 pages for A1 proficiency level and prepared by experts and linguists in the field, which was published online by the Turkish Ministry of National Education in 2015. With its publication by the Ministry, it has reached a governmental significance through an official channel. Besides, the endeavours of some non-governmental organizations, especially those of the Laz Institute, founded in 2013, and those of the Laz Cultural Association have mushroomed as a part of Laz culture transmission and language revitalization. The workshops organized, and free-of-charge Laz language courses designed within them, are examples. In favour of preservation and transmission of both language and culture, the translation of literary works and placing Laz cultural elements (e.g. songs, food, villages etc.) in the media are other positive changes to touch upon.

Talking about the conference, it did provide opportunities for me to meet and work in cooperation with the experts in the field of language revitalization around the world. I learnt more about the studies conducted for small language planning even for the languages I heard for the first time. The methodologies implemented on strengthening the ties between the communities and languages did open new horizons on my mind for my next studies. Besides these, I have some other things to say about the conference and organization committee, as well. Cassie Smith-Christmas, with her always-smiling face did a great job from A to Z. The director of SOILLSE, Conchúr Ó Giollagáin, impressed me with his never-ending perseverance and kind-hearted attitude. Peter Murray, as the only guy who knows a little Turkish, made me feel home although it was the last day I learnt that he knew Turkish! Dear Marsail MacLeod, thank you for teaching me the Scottish dances, I enjoyed every minute of it, and now I am a good ceilidh dancer, hurrah! And, what about the conference dinner? Aside from how it looked, I must confess that haggis was really delicious. Robert Robertson, thank you for your beautiful voice and infinite patience while we, as the foreign guests, were trying to learn the steps for a better ceilidh but left as unscathed at the end! And a big thanks goes to the best conference friends ever: Edina, Karen, Marina, Trudy, Ragnhild and Prof. Olenka Bilash, my second mother from another country, who cared for us from beginning till the end.
Last but not least, Glasgow enchanted me a lot with the best friendships ever made, the never rainy weather for 5 days, the hospitality so alike to that of Turkey, and the Scottish accent, which made me fall in love with it. I am sorry for those whom I cannot remember by name but thank you so much, all was awesome and hope to see you again at the next organized event!

The race to save a dying language

By Ross Perlin, excerpted from the Guardian (UK), 9 August 2016

In 2013, at a conference on endangered languages, a retired teacher named Linda Lambrecht announced the extraordinary discovery of a previously unknown language. Lambrecht—who is Chinese-Hawaiian, 71 years old, warm but no-nonsense—called it Hawaii Sign Language, or HSL. In front of a room full of linguists, she demonstrated that its core vocabulary—words such as “mother”, “pig” and “small”—was distinct from that of other sign languages.

The linguists were immediately convinced. William O’Grady, the chair of the linguistics department at the University of Hawaii, called it “the first time in 80 years that a new language has been discovered in the United States—and maybe the last time.” But the new language found 80 years ago was in remote Alaska, whereas HSL was hiding in plain sight in Honolulu, a metropolitan area of nearly a million people. It was the kind of discovery that made the world seem larger.

The last-minute arrival of recognition and support for HSL was a powerful, almost surreal vindication for Lambrecht, whose first language is HSL. For decades, it was stigmatised or ignored; now the language has acquired an agreed-upon name, an official “language code” from the International Organization for Standardization, the attention of linguists around the world, and a three-year grant from the Endangered Languages Documentation Programme at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London.

But just as linguists were substantiating its existence, HSL stood on the brink of extinction, remembered by just a handful of signers. Unless the language made a miraculous recovery, Lambrecht feared that her announcement might turn out to be HSL’s obituary.

Three years after announcing its existence, Lambrecht is still unearthing her language sign by sign. She may be the only person in the world who still uses HSL on a regular basis, signing into a camera while a linguist named James “Woody” Woodward and a handful of graduate students from the University of Hawaii document her every move.

Led by Lambrecht, Woodward, and researcher Barbara Earth, the project aims to document what may be the last-ever conversations of native HSL signers. The goal is to record at least 20 hours of high-quality video footage of natural HSL and then transcribe, translate, and archive it. The researchers hope that this work—along with a series of illustrated handbooks depicting over 1,000 signs, and a regular class at the University of Hawaii set to begin next year—will jump-start the revitalisation of HSL.

The project faces numerous obstacles. The first is the scepticism of many of the remaining signers themselves. Hawaii’s tiny Deaf community is deeply divided. Some say HSL is not a real language, others see it as backward; still others are sceptical of Lambrecht.

But the gravest threat to HSL is American Sign Language (ASL), which is advancing across the globe—from Hawaii to Thailand to Togo—just as fast as English. The Deaf world, intensely local until recently, is consolidating and globalising in unprecedented ways. And the forward march of ASL, which in certain ways brings people together, also poses a significant danger to many of the estimated 400 sign languages used all over the world—most of which we know nothing about.

Hawaii is a bellwether, but Deaf culture all around the world—for many on the inside it is a “capital-D” culture, not a “lower-case-d” disability—faces threats from every direction. The “mainstreaming” of deaf students means that they are placed in hearing schools, where they are encouraged to be just like everyone else but with “special needs”, in a process that some call deliberate assimilation. Cochlear implants (and the potential of gene therapy) even more fundamentally endanger sign languages—some Deaf activists condemn such “cures” as being akin to genocide.

If the loss of a particular language such as HSL means the end of a whole expressive system, the disappearance of sign language in general—the only fully fledged form of language completely independent of speech—would permanently impoverish human communication.

Like every natural language, HSL is the evolved product of a specific history, the unconscious creation of a community. For it to survive, local signers will have to make a deliberate choice to use it. The same may be increasingly true of Deafness itself. The story of HSL raises crucial questions in an age of globalisation: Do cultures on the margins have a future? Will enough people choose to be that different, and will they do it together?

Australia’s Frank Yamma paints pictures in song

By Alexander Varty, from the Georgia Straight website (www.straight.com) (Canada), 10 August 2016

You can hear the outback in Frank Yamma’s music, and that’s not just a figure of speech. The Pitjantjatjara singer-songwriter, who hails from the drylands of Central Australia, sings about the bush, its creatures, and its people, but he also works field recordings of the wild into his sound. In songs such as “Sunday Morning” and “Beginning of Today”, both from his 2014 release Uncle, unfamiliar birdsong, rustling shrubs, and human footfalls contribute to a vivid portrait of a timeless way of life—and on the hard-hitting, half-rapped “Todd Mall”, crowd noise and overheard conversations add similar depths to Yamma’s description of a young Aboriginal boy adrift in the city.

Even when he’s singing in his native tongue, as endangered as any West Coast First Nations language, his message is clear: we Pitjantjaljara are here, we endure, and we will be heard.
Still, it’s not entirely easy to hear Yamma himself when the Georgia Straight reaches him with an early-morning call to wet, wintry Adelaide. He’s asleep when we ring; a friend rather nervously goes to wake him up, and when he makes it to the phone he’s audibly blinking and groggy. Worse yet, a fierce cold has deepened Yamma’s dark-chocolate baritone to a subsonic croak that our recording device, further frustrated by a noisy line, only imperfectly captures.

“It’s early here,” he says, yawning. “But it’s okay.”

More than okay, really: our conversation is punctuated by a lot of laughter and graced by an easy, intuitive understanding—even if much of what he says is lost in static.

Yamma agrees that his songwriting has much in common with the colourful, maplike, and semi-abstract paintings that typify Australian Aboriginal art. “In both, we’re mapping our minds,” he says. “So I’m not a painter, but when I sing a song I put different objects inside, so you can hear the words and listen to a picture at the same time.”

His use of field recordings, he adds, is another way to bring the landscape into his music. Using sounds from the natural world is a way of letting listeners, even in remotest Canada, experience the world he knew when he was growing up, far away from the nearest urban centre.

“I put those things together to picture the people in the past, singing,” he explains. “That’s why I create my songs.”

And there’s an equally well-defined purpose to his use of Pitjantjatjara as well as English. Like many First Nations artists here on the West Coast, he feels an obligation to his ancestors that encompasses using ancient words to describe modern conditions. Languages are also something of a passion for this singer, guitarist, and wordsmith.

“I speak about five different (Aboriginal) languages,” he says. “Our Pitjantjatjara language is really similar to other languages from this region, so if you’re motivated you can learn. And I include it in songs because it’s interesting. I like to keep myself occupied, and the way I do it is with language.”

But there’s another reason why Yamma’s songs are so compelling, and it goes beyond his sturdy folk and classic-rock melodies, which will appeal to anyone who enjoys Neil Young, Pink Floyd, or the Tragically Hip. For this Pitjantjatjara man, words and music are his gift to the world. “The thing about language that’s very interesting is that it’s like a little passport to your heart,” Yamma says. “And sharing that is what it’s all about.”

First Tibetan-language search engine launched in China

By PTI (Press Trust of India), from the News Nation web-suite, India (www.newsnation.in) 22 August 2016

China launched its first Tibetan-language search engine which will serve as a unified portal for all the Tibetan-language websites.

The search engine will serve as a unified portal for all major Tibetan-language websites in China, Iselo, director of the Tibetan Language Work Committee of the Hainan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Qinghai said.

Yongzin means “master” or “teacher” in the Tibetan language. It will also be a major global source for information in Tibetan online, he said.

The search engine has eight sections for news, websites, images, videos, music, encyclopedia, literature and forums, state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

“The search engine will meet the growing needs of the Tibetan-speaking population and facilitate the building of Tibetan digital archives and the expansion of databases in the Tibetan language,” he said.

The project, which costs 57 million yuan (about USD 8.7 million), is supported by the government. The work began on the project in April 2013.

More than 150 people were hired for the project, said Dora, technical director of the search engine and a professor with the Digitisation Institute of Tibetan Literature of Northwest University for Nationalities.

People of Tibetan ethnicity make up 80 per cent of the team, Dora said.

“Popular search engines such as Yahoo and Google enable searches in Tibetan, but they mainly support searching with single characters,” he said.

Yongzin.com enables searches using words and phrases to yield more accurate results, he said. Yongzin also leads to more web resources than its competitors, said Dora.

“For example, the news function leads to more than 200 domestic Tibetan-language websites in China,” he said. It is expected to gain around 1.2 million users in its initial stage, Dora said.

Contents are also categorised according to different local dialects such as Amdo, Kamba and U-Tsang, he said.

Australia: Waking our sleeping Indigenous languages: ‘we’re in the midst of a resurgence’

By Helen Davidson, from the Guardian web-site (www.guardian.com), 30 August 2016

It’s never been a more exciting time to be a linguist working with Australian Indigenous languages – at least according to linguist Murray Garde.

When the languages of Australia’s first peoples are spoken in prominent public settings, it often makes national headlines. In February the prime minister, Malcolm Turnbull, spoke Ngunawal to deliver the Closing the Gap report (which showed little progress in reaching targets).

Turnbull’s speech came within days of the Northern Territory MLA Bess Price objecting to not being allowed to speak her
first language of Warlpiri in parliament— even if it was just a throwaway retort to the opposition.

For many non-Indigenous Australians these were unique and interesting moments. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people they were too rare instances of hearing Indigenous languages used in mainstream Australia.

Less than half of the estimated 250 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages which have existed on this continent are still in some form of use. The vast majority are considered endangered.

“There are probably only 20, 30, 40 which are looking like they’ve got a good chance of survival across next generations,” Garde tells Guardian Australia.

“But we’re trying to address that,” he adds. Indeed in the past couple of decades non-Indigenous Australia have cottoned on to the importance of preserving and rescuing the languages of first nations people, and we are in the midst of a resurgence in appreciation, he says.

“There’s a whole range of reasons why we think it’s important Australia’s Indigenous languages are supported, maintained and revived,” says Garde.

Aside from historical or academic reasons, aside from the basic right of Indigenous peoples – enshrined in international agreements – to have their traditional language preserved, there are socially pragmatic reasons to keep these languages alive.

“The mental health of people in small remote communities is tied to the ability of those people to express themselves in first language,” says Garde.

“If their language is acknowledged or even used with interpreters [during their daily lives, employment or interactions with government services], those of us who have been working in this space for decades know that those communities function a lot better.”

Today across the country concerted efforts are under way to preserve and pass languages down to the next generation to ensure their survival.

Indigenous languages were introduced to the New South Wales curriculum as a higher school certificate subject this year, while schools in other states have begun offering some classes. Australian universities are increasingly offering tertiary courses.

Language centres offer grassroots classes and educational resources. City councils are embracing Indigenous place names.

The world of mobile apps and online research tools are making languages, their history and their context more accessible to non-Indigenous Australians who wish to better understand and interact with the oldest continuing culture in the world.

Last year Charles Darwin University launched a searchable online dictionary of Yolngu Matha – the languages spoken across much of Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory. Its success has prompted Garde to begin work on a similar project for Bininj Kunwok. A key concern, he says, is to make sure the language is controlled by the community to ensure they retain ownership over a significant part of their culture. The same concerns are held about language programs in mainstream education, outside the control of community groups and caretakers of traditional knowledge.

In March Canberra’s Australian National University launched the Austkin database of Indigenous kinship terms and skin names, which seeks to preserve those still heard every day in communities, as well as create a database of terms in languages which are essentially extinct except for mentions in historical archives.

There is a need among Indigenous groups to maintain the culture and heritage of a traditional language. The battle is fought on two fronts, says the lead investigator for the database, Dr Patrick McConvell: by those seeking to maintain their endangered languages, and by those trying to revive ones no longer used.

“When people try to recreate languages, they often will focus in on kinship terms as being an important thing to revive because it’s such a fundamental bedrock for their community,” McConvell tells Guardian Australia.

“People feel very much that language is the thing that can help them to bring back, not just their identity, but their ways of dealing with each other.

“We’re working with some people who have still got their language and kinship system but they fear that their children are losing it so they’re very much trying to save it.”

Many of the programs operating around the country focus on passing the knowledge down to the next generation. “Obviously it’s going to die out if the kids don’t learn it,” Dallas Walker says. “We’ll have done all this for nothing.”

Walker is a research consultant with the Muurrbay Aboriginal Language & Culture Co-operative on the New South Wales mid-north coast, which supports the revitalisation of languages from seven regional Aboriginal communities.

Teaching schoolchildren the local Indigenous languages is one of the key activities offered by the Nambucca centre, which was started by Gumbaynggirr elders in 1986. In 1997 they began teaching Gumbaynggirr and in 2004 expanded to cover six other regional languages.

“It used to be just Indigenous kids and now we’re open to all,” Walker says. “If one kid’s going to learn it, why not all? It’s good for everyone.”

Some of the children who learn Gumbaynggirr through the centre are “right into it” but others are more focused on learning swearwords, he says, laughing. “Our aim is to get them to start speaking it, they’re our next teachers.

“That’s our identity and culture, it keeps you on your toes and keeps you happy. Kids have got to know where they come from and have a sense of identity. If they don’t have that where do they end up?”

In 2008 the Northern Territory government effectively ended the practice of “two-way” education in Aboriginal community schools, decreeing that the first four hours of classes must be taught in English. Critics, with research to support them, said
the move made it harder for children to learn and bilingual education was more effective for Indigenous students.

For people who are striving to revitalise language and support disadvantaged communities, that decision is among a number they consider to be backwards steps.

The 2014 second national Indigenous languages survey (2Nils) found successful delivery of language programs required involved and committed community members, access to language resources and adequate funding.

The first, ongoing national funding to preserve languages began in 1992, but the money has been inconsistent. In just the past three years federal funding has been increased, then cut by almost $10m, then boosted again. In December an extra $3m was earmarked for 59 language and arts activities.

The minister for communications, Mitch Fifield, defended the government’s record, telling Guardian Australia it had funded Indigenous language support since the 1970s and now provided about $20m a year.

“Today, the Australian government continues to support activities that record, revive and maintain Indigenous languages so that they can be safeguarded and passed on to future generations, preserving this important part of Australia’s cultural heritage,” he says.

The 2Nils, which examined the state of Indigenous language in Australia, found strong concern at the rate of loss, and said activities around the country were not just about restoring languages for the sake of it but also went to improve the well-being of Indigenous people.

Participants expressed a desire to see not just an increase in the proficiencies of speakers, but also “for the language to have a stronger presence in their own and wider communities, noting that this in turn strengthens identity and connection with country and heritage”.

In the NT, where about a third of the community ks Indigenous, a local ABC radio station has sought to do just that.

Late on a weekday afternoon in the Top End, listeners of ABC Darwin might catch an unusual news broadcast. For the past two years journalists and producers have worked with interpreters to put together daily bulletins in three Indigenous languages.

“This idea came up as one where we can reach the community, hear more Indigenous voices on the radio, and try and do this within our existing capacity,” says Rob Cross, the news director for ABC Northern Territory. Most Indigenous Territorians speak English as a second – or further – language.

“We prepare the bulletin, so our morning radio subs have had it added to their duties to pick some stories that may be of interest to the Indigenous community. We then send it to the Indigenous Interpreter Service. They decide if a story’s suitable or if there are any other stories they’ve heard they might like. They sort of rewrite it to how it might sound best in an Indigenous language.”

Bulletins in Warlpiri, Yolngu and Kriol are uploaded to a website where they can be heard and downloaded by listeners and remote Indigenous broadcast services for further transmission. A shortened version is broadcast each afternoon.

“People who want to listen to it and understand the language obviously go to the webpage,” says Cross. “But the little snippets or stories we play on local radio are a chance for people to go, oh that’s Warlpiri or that’s Yolngu and it just keeps the languages alive.”

Elsewhere in the NT, a program has taken the connection between language and knowledge and applied it to a world-leading environmental program.

Ten years ago the West Arnhem Land fire abatement project turned to traditional fire management practices to protect the Arnhem Land plateau environment.

Over the decades many of the local people had moved away from the plateau – known as rock or stone country – and were no longer using traditional methods to manage fire. Large and uncontrollable bushfires were tearing through Arnhem Land and neighbouring Kakadu, causing devastation.

Traditional knowledge of fire management which related specifically to that corner of the earth was contained in the Bininj Kunwok language, says Garde.

“They had extensive knowledge about the environment, about plants and animals – how to refer to the landscape, the way the landscape is broken up – a kind of taxonomy of the land forms.”

Terms for the plateau’s landscapes, the different parts of a fire, even the patterns flames left in the land, all formed part of the detailed land management knowledge of the group.

The cultural knowledge was something which wasn’t appreciated until recent decades, says Garde. Now it’s incorporated into the fire management program by Warddeken rangers from Kabulwarnyo, Mimal rangers from Bulman, Jawoyn rangers from Katherine and Adjumarrarl rangers.

“The last old professors as we called them, they’d explain to the younger rangers how to burn the country at a particular time of year in a particular ecological zone,” says Garde.

“These remnant rainforests on the plateau, Aboriginal people value them greatly as places of shade to camp in, so they had a particular way of burning it so as not to damage.

“We realised this was incredibly important for land management today, and it’s also providing employment with the ranger program ... All the ranger programs are very keen on having a language component in their work.”

The growing range of individual programs is a positive step towards saving languages but a long-term strategy is needed, says Garde.

Across Indigenous communities languages are spoken in everyday life and are inextricably linked to traditional knowledge and culture.
Technology creates new opportunities for language revitalization

By Alison Herrera, from the Kosu web-site, (www.kosu.org), 22 July 2016

Many native languages are considered endangered, with few first speakers left to pass down the language to a new generation. But, a new generation of young people fueled by technology is making an impact.

The famed song by Chubby Checker encouraging dancers all over to get down and do “The Twist” plays in the background as dancers from the Cherokee Pride school in NE Oklahoma move and groove around. Today, the song isn’t being sung by the 1950’s icon, it’s being sung by students in their native language of Cherokee.

Native American students travel from all over to compete in the annual Oklahoma Native American Youth Language Fair held on the University of Oklahoma campus. Contestants create animated videos, sing songs, tell stories and some even design skateboards imprinted with their Native language. Today, students face off to see who can tell a better story without forgetting words or stumbling over phrases like Jay Fife from the Creek Nation. He won first place in the storytelling contest for a story about stickball.

“I will give credit to other tribes...they have apps. They have audio dictionaries,” said Fife. But, he went on to explain that learning language can’t just be about devices and tech.

“We’re making progress to modernize the teaching of the language. It’s really within your family. You have to have a desire to learn.”

The language fair and the enthusiasm displayed by parents, students and teachers is a far cry from a generation of Native people who went to boarding schools and were discouraged or even punished when speaking in their native tongue. That led to a loss of culture and identity among many Native Americans.

“I always say that all of humanity is diminished with the loss of a language, ” says Dan Swan. He’s the curator of Ethnology and interim curator of languages at the Sam Noble Museum.

“Every language is a window into a different way of seeing the world. It’s a route to the accumulated knowledge of those cultures and communities.”

And for the young people at the Oklahoma Native American Youth Language Fair, access to that accumulated knowledge is inextricably tied to technology. For example, language - learning apps for smart phones and the ability to text in native languages. And while some people in Swan’s generation may bemoan young people’s incessant texting habits he’s not one of them. In fact, he says it’s helped many tribes with their language revitalization efforts.

“...This is just one more tool for communities to access. But if we can put language and language learning in the pocket of every student via their cell phone that’s a wonderful opportunity that cannot be ignored.”

One of the most important tools to get that language learning into students’ pockets is called Unicode, a digital language system compatible with any internet connected device like an iphone, computer or kindle. Both the Cherokee Nation and the Osage nation have collaborated with techies to create characters in Osage and Cherokee so people can text using these native languages. One of the people behind the development of the Unicode for Osage is Herman Mongrain Lookout. He’s studied and taught the language for more than 40 years and is the master language teacher for the Osage Nation.

For someone in his 70’s this tech doesn’t totally come naturally, but he’s realized the need to embrace it in order to pass along what he knows. So he, like Dan Swan, realized that in order to teach language to young people he has use something he knows young people use to communicate every day..

After years of working to create the orthography Osages use to write their language, he started to explore new ways to teach the language . He’s introduced online and streaming language courses in Pawhuska, Oklahomathe seat of the Osage nation to teach folks who can’t be there in person. And he encourages using online dictionaries and translation apps.

“I used to have boxes full of papers and I’d have to go in there and dig. But computers, it’s great. I can just say, ‘give me a word for tse,’ and all these words come up. We got online learning now. We know that just streaming something out ‘aint gonna help ‘em learn. You gotta have synchronious...so one on one. And they can come back and they can say something and they can get hands on,” explained Lookout.

Back at the Oklahoma Native American Youth Language Fair, students demonstrate their singing skills for the judges. A trio of young men belt out a soulful Kiowa hymn... it’s one that is sometimes sung at funerals or for someone who might need a few extra prayers. It’s a song that’s been passed down through generations of Kiowa in the traditional way... orally. But for the kids singing it now, and for their kids, the future of their language will be a mix of custom, and customized tech.

Canada: New Brunswick needs immersion-style education for First Nations students

By Oscar Baker III, from the CBC news web-site (www.cbc.ca), 21 July 2016

Eleven First Nations language immersion teachers spent Thursday at St. Mary’s First Nation learning about Indigenous immersion classes.

Conor Quinn, a documentary maker and linguist who teaches the course, knows both the Maliseet
and Mi'kmaq languages, and has a working knowledge of 30 others.

He says he knows first hand how it feels to want to understand one's ancestral language, which is how he felt about Irish Gaelic before he finally learned it.

"It's hard to learn and there are reasons why people stop speaking it, or felt pressured to stop speaking it, because people say 'What's the point of learning it?' Basically all of the colonial mind set," said Quinn.

Quinn is an advocate of an immersion-style of learning because it's worked in other parts of the world.

He cited the Maori of New Zealand, as well as places such as Norway and Hawaii, as examples of people and places that have successfully saved their Indigenous languages.

Quinn said in Hawaii, students can now go from grade school up to a PhD in their ancestral mother tongue.

"You plunk people into a language and do what you did to learn the first language ... It's sort of just spending a lot of time learning the language, to speak it," said Quinn.

He said the best way to learn is to be surrounded with the language, but when there aren't that many speakers, it's easier to just speak English.

Quinn said he felt the hardest part for Indigenous speakers is that they naturally speak English to those who don't understand the language, rather than just sticking to their mother tongue.

That's something Andrea Bear Nicholas has also pointed to as a problem.

"We get it coming both ways. Our elders were once punished for speaking their language in residential schools and community reserve schools," said Nicholas, an emeritus professor at St. Thomas University.

"And our young people are ridiculed, in a sense, because they don't know their own language."

She feels the best way to save these languages is through total immersion programs, much like in the francophone school system.

"We're dealing with some old thinking," she said.

"We're still in the old frame of, 'It's just a little extra for our children to learn, its not something they really need to speak.' I think that's the attitude in general," said Nicholas.

Nicholas said she has advocated for Indigenous immersion languages for years, and says the province could benefit from revitalizing the languages. In other places in the world, she said, when people know their mother tongue they tend to do better in school and end up in prison less often.

"These languages are the heart and soul for our land and people and these languages are being systematically killed off," said Nicholas.

While there are core programs, she said they don't work because students only spend 40 minutes a day in their language and the rest of the school day is in English.

She says she hopes the Maliseet, Mi'kmaq and Passamaquoddy languages are saved one day, but the speakers of the languages are getting older.

It is estimated there are 3,000 Maliseet living in New Brunswick. Nicholas says only 300–400 still speak their language, but she hopes more First Nations youth learn the language and are provided with a safe space to speak it.

Quinn agreed that new speakers to a language are often shy and uncomfortable. They tend to feel like they are under the spotlight and he hopes that immersion programs can instill a feeling of community.

"But if you have these techniques that worked for Maori, that worked for Hawaii and that have worked for the Mohawks, and put them in writing, that can maintain immersion. They just work."

4. Letters to the Foundation

Correction

Serge Sagna begs to point out: In the article in Ogmios 59, "Research impact' and how it can help endangered languages" 'foster a negative attitude towards a language' should have been 'foster a POSITIVE attitude towards a language'.

5. Publications, Book Reviews

K'uv'a chachi nuu chuka'a, iyoyatin nduta ŋu’un, ŋuuv nduva: Recipes from Mixteca de la Costa, Mexico

Since 1993, CELIAC (Centro Editorial de Literatura Indígena, Asociación Civil) has developed an original way of recording oral languages. H. Russell Bernard (University of Florida) has been collaborating with Jesús Salinas Pedraza since 1962, providing an academic background to an efficient method for devising writing systems for oral languages. CELIAC has organised sessions for speakers of endangered languages in its facilities in Oaxaca. Over a hundred people—mostly bilingual school teachers, from across Latin America—have learned to write their languages in a short period of time. Assisted by Salinas, new authors find a way of writing their languages with an ordinary keyboard, choose a subject, and start freely writing on it. They go back to their communities for feedback on the readability of the texts, integrate comments and suggestions and end up with a file that is ready for publication as a book. All is left then is to find the funds to print the work.

Josefa Leonarda Gonzáles Ventura, a Mixteca de la Costa, published an earlier book with CELIAC about her community of Jicayán. She began working some years ago on a book of Mixtec recipes, which she envisioned as a vehicle for describing the role of food in her culture. Thanks to FEL, her masterwork has just been published. It all started in Ottawa at FEL XVII (2013) when Joan Argenter from the UNESCO Chair in Endan-
gered Languages in Barcelona and Prof. Salinas from CELIAC, met and discussed a possible collaboration. A grant from UNESCO helped González complete her work, format it for publication, and provide color photographs of the foods described. It took three years of work, and the book is now a reality. Prof. Salinas is proud of this new title in the CELIAC series, which now number six. Many books are ready for printing and distribution to the communities and the speakers of these languages.

Reviewed by Serena d’Agostino

6. Places to go on the Web

The Mian and Kilivila Collection

The Mian & Kilivila Collection ([http://www.mian-kilivila.surrey.ac.uk/](http://www.mian-kilivila.surrey.ac.uk/)) is a new website, created by the Surrey Morphology Group under the auspices of the AHRC-funded research project “Combining gender and classifiers in natural language” (AH/K003194/1), which allows users to find out about the nominal classification systems of two indigenous languages of Papua New Guinea – Mian and Kilivila. This website is aimed at a non-linguist audience, and forms part of our strategy to engage with the general public in making the results of our research more widely available.

While Kilivila has a single, yet extensive, system of classificatory particles, Mian has a dual system, which combines four genders and six classifiers. Users are able to explore the Mian and Kilivila systems in more detail using the Digital Collection on the website, which consists of a wide range of different images of Mian and Kilivila objects and people. Once they have a good idea of how the classification systems work in each language, users are able to test their knowledge through the online quiz. The website also offers users the opportunity to watch two short videos which explain difficult concepts about gender and classifiers in a non-technical manner.

Aside from the general public, this website will serve as a useful resource for others, such as language teachers. If there is a query or discussion about the surprising/troublesome nature of gender in French or German, for instance, pupils can be directed to this site, to show that things can be different. And more generally, for the pupil who asks interesting questions about language, this site will further their interest.

French newspaper Libération on endangered languages


On 19 August the Paris newspaper Libération featured an article by Anne Pastor and David Rochier on the Penan people of Sarawak and their language, including an interview with the Canadian linguist Ian MacKenzie: *Voyage en terre indigène: pour les penans le mot ‘temps’ n’existe pas* (Voyage into indigenous lands: For the Penan, the word ‘time’ does not exist).

7. Forthcoming events

**First International Conference on Revitalization of indigenous and Minoritized Languages**

The First International Conference on Revitalization of Indigenous and Minoritized Languages will take place April 19-21, 2017 in Barcelona and Vic, Spain.

All the information can be found here, including the call for papers:

[https://icriml.indiana.edu/call-for-papers/call-for-papers-eng/index.html](https://icriml.indiana.edu/call-for-papers/call-for-papers-eng/index.html)

In addition, we would like to encourage you to participate in the conference as well. We cannot pay for travel expenses but as a member of the scientific committee registration for the conference is free.

Organizing committee:

Mònica Barriéras (GELA-UB)
Llorenç Comajoan (UVic, CUSC-UB)
Pere Comellas (GELA-UB)
Serafín M. Coronel-Molina (IU)
Montserrat Cortès-Colomé (GELA-UB)
Alicia Fuentes-Calle (GELA-UB)
M. Carme Junyent (GELA-UB)
John H. McDowell (IU)
At this point in human history, most human languages are spoken by exceedingly few people. And that majority, the majority of languages, is about to vanish.

The most authoritative source on the languages of the world (Ethnologue, Gordon 2005) lists just over 6,900 living languages. Population figures are available for just over 6,600 of them (or 94.5%). Of these 6,600, it may be noted that:

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

More important than this snapshot of proportions and populations is the outlook for survival of the languages we have. Hard comparable data here are scarce or absent, often because of the sheer variety of the human condition: a small community, isolated or bilingual, may continue for centuries to speak a unique language, while in another place a populous language may for social or political reasons die out in little more than a generation. Another reason is that the period in which records have been kept is too short to document a trend: e.g. the Ethnologue has been issued only since 1951. However, it is difficult to imagine many communities sustaining serious daily use of a language for even a generation with fewer than 100 speakers; yet at least 10% of the world’s living languages are now in this position.

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

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

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.

The Need for an Organization

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

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

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

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

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

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.
Some pictures from the new display, showing just a few of the projects supported by FEL, now set up on our website:

http://www.ogmios.org/grants/reports/

Here are (above)

Documentation of endangered genres of the Kĩsèdjê oral literature
(led by Rafael Bezerra Nonato)

and (below)

Documentation of Manchu language at Sanjiazi village
(led by Gang Li)