Marriage Arbëresh style

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1. Editorial

I apologise to you for the long time it’s taken for this issue of Ogmi os to reach you. Since I relinquished the reins to our previous editor, Hayley Ferguson, she has had a great number of health issues as well as commitments to attend to, and little time to devote to the Foundation. Late last year Hayley had to reluctantly face the fact that she was unable to continue as Editor and provide the service that you expect as members.

So I have resumed the reins, but we have a net gain from Hayley’s fresh outlook on the production of our journal: we’ll retain the new look her journalistic skills brought to Ogmios, and we’ll try to pursue, as vigorously as she intended, the issues in the world of endangered languages with interviews and fresh discoveries. FEL aims to continue to provide you with an original and dynamic approach to the always urgent issue of language loss, three times a year as before.
And it is an urgent issue, all the more so because politicians and senior decision-makers are so obviously intervening in the fate of languages. In the past year FEL has developed its campaigning side, but some people might say rather gently; we’re not exactly manning the barricades. You can read in the media just how cavalierly some indigenous peoples are treated by their governments. Something that stuck in my head for days afterwards was a remark of Brazil’s president Jair Bolsonaro that I heard last year; in English he was reported to have said that his government didn’t deal with indigenous people because “they don’t speak our language.” What a massive symbol of the dereliction of duty that is. So we will continue to campaign and nag, nag, nag. But what does ‘campaign’ mean in FEL terms? Does it just mean to spout protests from our academic armchairs? After all, if you’re reading this, you’re probably already converted to the cause and don’t need preaching.

Campaigns that we run, then, are counteractions against deliberate campaigns to demean indigenous people. There is no reason to give up protesting against the Burmese government’s intimidation of the Rohingya people, either. In this issue you will find some background information on their language, which is largely synonymous with them, but never referred to in the mainstream media. This is a linguistic issue, as well as an ethnic one.

Chris Moseley

2. Development of the Foundation

FEL XXIII, 14th – 16th December 2019 Conference, University of Sydney, Australia

Our new Executive Committee member Joseph Babasola Osoba from Nigeria attended his first FEL conference, our twenty-third, on the Causes of Language Endangerment, at the University of Sydney, Australia, from 14th to 16th December 2019. The conference, hosted by Prof. Jaky Troy and Mujahid Torwali, attracted over 60 participants, one of our best ever attendances. Here is his report on the conference:

Report on the Presentations on the Causes of and Solutions to Language Endangerment Worldwide

Some of the presentations revealed the manipulations of language and identity through the use of powerful multinational agencies and institutions to bring a popular language to the status of the language of the future as the language of power. Others examined the actual causes of and possible solutions to language endangerment, including sign language, globally. Some others reviewed the effort at revitalizing endangered indigenous languages in places like the US, Australia, China, Canada, Chile, India, Pakistan, the Philippines and Nigeria.

The basic question was, What is the basis of power or power-base or struggle between a language and another or between a group of languages or dialects that could lead to endangerment or loss of one or the other? For instance, we might want to ask, What is the difference between Cantonese and Mandarin that makes one more appealing than the other? Are there several other indigenous languages and dialects that are being suppressed or that are already suppressed through deliberate language policies and planning or by a subtle gag of the indigenous speakers? Are parents deliberately discouraged from transmitting their mother tongues to successive generations? Is it a deliberate policy through or of colonial pedagogy to stifle, denigrate and exterminate indigenous knowledges and civilisations in all of their former or present territories? Further conference collaboration seems to be required to be able to provide meaningful answers to some of the questions above.

In the effort to revitalize or rejuvenate endangered languages, some archived materials could be seen as having yielded invaluable sources of information and insights through which the canons of lost, forgotten and endangered languages have been published as their grammars. This is a step further into preserving and standardising such endangered languages as records or evidence of their existence. However, it is advisable to be circumspect in our reliance entirely on archived materials.

The reason might be quite clear. First, it is almost impossible to archive the context, the general or the specific setting, the para-linguistic, non-linguistic and the socio-semiotic features of any naturally spoken language. Second, artefacts, graphics and cryptograms are almost impossible to encapsulate as archived materials in terms of ethics, traditions, interpretations, nuances and speech acts. Third, prejudices and biases on the part of the colonial archiver(s) would most likely becloud an objective and neutral presentation or record of the indigenous materials either as language or as culture. Fourth, the colonial pedagogy cannot be relied upon to offer a just, equitable or fair account of the despised vernacular languages because of its inherent ideology of being better and more beneficial for everyone than those indigenous ones. Fifth and finally, in most former colonial territories, indigenous people now tend to prefer the colonial languages than their own by displaying negative attitudes to their own languages, traditions and cultures as a result of decades and centuries of colonial pedagogy, ideology and values. Thus archived materials appear to serve as a poor reminder of a checkered history of brutality and oppression of the indigenous knowledges and peoples of the world.

A number of questions rightly and truly present themselves in an attempt to deconstruct or de-create colonial legacy and pedagogy. Indigenous multilingual research methodology as a parallel or alternative paradigm cannot and should not be dismissed. Otherwise, centuries of indigenous knowledges and civilisations, without which the world would not experience peace, progress and advancement in all its ramifications, could be made to disappear.

To begin with, can we, as teachers, linguists, anthropologists, gatekeepers, conservationists, Eco-linguists, naturalists and humanists expand, accelerate and fast-forward the process of de-creating, deconstructing and decolonizing colonial pedagogy for the benefit of indigenous communities of the world? Further apt questions could be, How many indigenous people or native speakers are involved in pedagogy curriculum design and methodology? Should the indigenous speakers alone, with little or no colonial education, be allowed to teach their mother tongues, either as languages or as dialects? Should a parallel teaching, research and methodological paradigm be devised or
designed for the teaching of indigenous languages and cultures? How possible would it be to fashion out some kind of decolonised multilingual research methodological paradigm or paradigms that account for the relevance, appropriateness and adequacy of the different indigenous approaches as valid or plausible intellectual contributions to scholarship in all its ramifications?

Who will be bell the cat in terms of funding? Since money makes the world go round, will it be morally right to accept or solicit funds from colonial governments and their institutions and agencies? Or will their funding be justified in terms of reparations for their exploitation and brutalisation of indigenous peoples, their knowledges and civilisations. As we know that people put their money where their mouth is, asking the colonialists and their institutions or agencies for funding might meet a dead. Except in the case of restitution and fair play, no one puts their money on something that is not of direct benefit to them. Nonetheless, nothing ventured nothing gained, the saying goes.

From the insights provided by mixed methodological research approach, perhaps a combination of available traditional or indigenous methods, tools, instruments embedded in their historicity, oral traditions, pictographs, semiotics and methodologies could provide a better management theory of peace, advancement for humanity through the objective reality of justice and equity for all.

It could also provide a necessary insight into the urgency and the need for decolonising, de-creating and deconstructing the current colonial multilingual research methodological paradigm by exposing its inherent unfairness, inequity and injustice. This step if taken could be the most significant contribution to scholarship through the indigenous mixed methodological approaches or paradigms.

My perception of the goal of the conference is summarized as follows. Every language has something which no other language has. They are NOT substitutes but are in a complementary relationship. We need all the languages, as well as the native intelligence of their speakers, more in the world today. We are one, since our different languages and dialects make us one, made of many beautiful varieties.

Further collaboration is the key as the end may justify the means.

_Joseph Babasola Osoba_

**FEL XXIV, London, September 2020:** _Teaching and Learning Resources for Endangered Languages – call for papers_

*University College London (UCL), UK*

The theme of this year’s FEL conference is teaching and learning materials (including primers, grammars, dictionaries, textbooks, websites, language documentation and other audiovisual material, apps, etc.) for, in, and about endangered languages. We would like to invite presentations that focus on the types of pedagogical resources that are appropriate for endangered language situations (including the teaching and learning of speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills, as relevant), and the roles they can play in the support for and revitalization of endangered languages. Presentations could also explore how such resources can contribute to the status and profile of a language, and what practical and pedagogical solutions and resources work best for first, heritage, and second language speakers and learners.

Submit your abstract by 11 May 2020. For information about preparing and submitting abstracts, please see the EasyChair website (https://easychair.org/cfp/FEL24).

For further information please contact fel.london2020@gmail.com.

**FEL blog**

Our new Executive Committee member Peter Austin has taken on the responsibility of running the FEL blog on our website. You can find it at [www.ogmios.org/blog](http://www.ogmios.org/blog) - and if course, if you’d like to contribute to it, Peter would be glad to hear from you: pa2@soas.ac.uk. At present the blog introduces the FEL committee; in future it will be covering all kinds of endangered language related issues, written by both the committee and members.

**FEL grants issued for 2020**

In March 2020 the FEL Grants sub-committee announced eight successful applicants for its annual round of grants in the general stream, plus two in the ‘Navlipi’ stream (which can only be financed after a successful negotiation), making a total of ten grants. The successful applicants were:

**General stream:**

- Iara Mantenuto (USA) San Sebastian del Monte Mixtec and Yucuquimi de Ocampo Mixtec (Mexico): Signs and games: Strategies for involving the youth in the revitalization of two varieties of Mixtec ($990)
- Yujie Ji / Bendi Tso (Canada) Chone Tibetan language (China): Collaborative documentation, development and publication of Chone Tibetan story book ($1000)
- Musombwa Igunzi Michel (Congo) Kinyindu (Congo): Kinyindu endangered language song book project ($960)
- Radu Voica (UK) Blablanga (Solomon Islands): Orthography and literacy materials development workshop ($980)
- Edwin Ko (USA) Northern Pomo (USA): Development of language revitalization camps ($900)
- Emuobonuvie Maria Ajiboye (Nigeria) Urhobo (Nigeria): Development of reading material for higher basic education ($990)
• Ignacio Montoya (USA) Northern Paiute / Numu (USA): Uding Northern Paiute stories as on-line teaching tools ($750)
• Jey Lingam Burkhardt (Malaysia) Lun Bawang (Malaysia): Documenting mumuh traditional sung story-telling ($1000)

Navlipi stream:
• Muhammad Afzaal (Pakistan) Seraki (Pakistan): A study of Seraki speakers in Pakistan ($1500)
• Suwam Vajracharya (Japan) Nepal Bhasa (Nepal): Compilation and publication of a guide ($1167)

Congratulations to all the successful applicants. In view of the Coronavirus crisis prevailing at the time of the announcement, it’s possible that some recipients might have to defer taking up their grants.

3. Interview

Jacinta of the Darug songs

Interview and text by Eda Derhemi

When people ask me ‘how can I be indigenous and so fair’ [i.e. in complexity – ed.] or ‘what part of me is Aboriginal’, I say: “It’s that part that never left; it’s the part of me that has a deep connection and responsibility to this country”

I first met Jacinta during the 23rd annual conference of the Foundation for Endangered Languages (FEL) which took place in Sydney, Australia, last December. As Australian fires grew everyday around Sydney, the ocean reflected red and smoky skies. The conference dealt with causes of linguistic endangerment and language loss today, and as we met during conference sessions, we thought about consequences as much as causes—and the ecological disaster that was related to that loss. The conference organizers could not have found a better activist to open the conference: she began with a story told in song about how tragic and complex the consequences of language loss are. Her words and songs moved us and framed this international conference in a way that brought the Aboriginal voice in to view during the whole conference. Her Aboriginal spirit of the past, which for her lives also as vibration in the air, has the face of all women, and of community, Earth, and resistance.

Some of my songs like “Blacktown Joe” have been given to me by Aunty Glady Smith, one of my elders. The “Kookaburra song” was given to me in Language by Aunty Joan Cooper and Aunty Betty Locke. Most of the songs I have written myself, influenced by spirit. “Weerawee” was written with Cindy Laws and Michelle Laws. Cindy also gave me the words for “Ancestors Plea” which was given to her by spirit. I’ve also done music with aboriginal women from other tribes, such as Nardi Simpson and Shelly Morris. Recently, my son and I wrote music for his school Katoomba High which was given an award. Very proud! I don’t do clubs or pubs; I do community events, and my public is everyone from government departments to non-government to family and friends’ gatherings, and other communities and councils. I also sing for women, Earth Day, and for schools and universities.

The research of a colleague at the University of Illinois U-C focuses on the triple rebellious nature of female writers from linguistic and cultural minorities in Spain. There is something about growing up a woman in a minority whose rights are not guaranteed that brings them to the front of social activism as feminists, minority leaders in fight for language and cultural rights, and artists. I saw all these features rooted that first day in Jacinta’s words, songs, and language.

Maria first married Bennunalong’s son Dickie. Dickie died so she had a second choice and married a convict called Robert Locke. He was a convict, but he stayed with Maria and raised 9 children. He had blond hair and blue eyes. He was a carpenter - very good with his hands.

Maria was daughter of a karraj (doctor), leader and clever men of the Richmond clan. The son of Maria and Robert married a woman called Sarah Castle who became Granny Locke, who was of the Ganamegal clan Prospect of the Sydney language group.

At this point in her story I am concentrating hard, trying to keep up with all the information given in brief sentences that appear like formulas of a recited ritual with more background knowledge than I can handle. It all seems fascinating. The elaboration and cultural depth of the sentence with the convict and the non-judgmental (as a matter of fact, embracing) attitude Jacinta transmits, fascinate me. Granny Locke, I think, must be Jacinta’s grandma.

Granny Locke was known to have walked from Eastern Creek to Parramatta to see the first steam train. She was also a language informant for Matthews. Their daughter called Theresa, married a Moran born on a boat from England. Their daughter Katrine or Flo married a Burke which is my Grandmother and Grandfather. Their daughter Valerie married my dad Kevin Tobin, then there’s me. I have two children one is Jasper Daruga, my Falling Star, and Killimai, my Bright Eyes… and they follow culture because their mother does… but they have a choice… if they choose to or not when they get old enough.

Boy, was I wrong about Granny Locke (Sarah) of the first half of 1800s, being Jacinta’s grandma! Granny Katrine (called also Flo) was instead her grandmother. Jacinta’s description of Maria and the Blue-eyed Robert Locke, as much as that of Granny Locke who walked for days to see the first train, then of Teresa and Katrine and Valerie, were told with the same historic certainty and expressive detail, as stories about the schools and activities where Jacinta preferred to sing today. I made three different family trees to understand the lineage of members until I got it right. In my defense, I must say that the whole interview was not only a very strongly knit narrative, but the countless characters described in it interacted with each other in a supratemporal dimension, all brought to the interlocutor with the same ease and expressivity as those who, according to me, “really” lived in the present. And the answer to why her perception is not that which I am used to, and is shaped with particular strength and timelessness, is this (in her own words): I’m a descendant of two clans of the Sydney Language groups. The Ganamegal from the Prospect Boorooberongal and from the Richmond Greater Sydney area… I come from an unbroken women’s line to Ganamegal Prospect. This is a vibration and frequency that lives in my DNA. I live in the country where my ancestors in my Mother’s side have always
been born; that’s how I know I’m indigenous; I have a blood line responsibility. We have something to offer 21st century and maybe, being a fair skinned person, you might listen to us.

Jacinta’s language has features mine does not. It is coded. It has a depth that mine is missing. As I listen and read and reread her answers, I find myself wondering about the meaning more than usual and questioning my logic and worldview, which have become obstacles. As I do, I decide to send her questions about our first interview and then more questions about the answers to my previous questions. The more I read and reread her answers, the better I understand that what I considered some sort of mysticism or Magical Realism in her world view is in fact her sense of duty to the world and her ancestors, a conceptual structure that sees all of us in all continents and all times, humans as part of nature, of past and future, as related in an uninterrupted line. It is an ecology that we have forgotten and which we as humans are having a hard time to re-establish. I understand that I am not part of the “I” and “we” Jacinta mentioned above. I lack her natural and effortless sense of ecology that includes climate, language, culture, forests, behavior, change, philosophy, physics, and her children as well as her remote ancestors. Jacinta lives, speaks and sings it. I try to reach it as knowledge outside of me, and make it part of my life. But there are so many social and cultural filters (most of which are beyond my awareness) that weaken this connection for me. Jacinta lives her life with a clear mission, which I should join for my own good. For Jacinta, language, song, and culture are indivisible, and are also a way to save the future of our planet. Her voice in the planet comes through her Song, which is also her Language and the Aboriginal knowledge.

I wrote my music to tell a story. Our story is our Song. I sing to let people know we are still here and also to hopefully touch base with ancestors, landscape, animal, and family in our Aboriginal way. Through the vibration and frequency of country in Darug and English... Music has always been a way to map our country, it is our title deed you could say. Our music, our song reflects our realities maybe through quantum physics and other theories that are coming to light. Hopefully in the future we would be able to see music as a science and not just an art or just a song. The connection of Language and Song is our strength; it is the way of saying prayer and showing gratitude to being able to be part of this existence. The messages in the Language and Song in our Country also help the natural environments that are our home vibrate and become healthier. This is not about song for song’s sake... if we could understand a little bit more—in my country, music is seen as a school subject, and not a way of life as it was in times past. My understanding is that more music in one’s life means a more compassionate society. My Song and Language are for a sustainable living, understanding that we’re not the only living creatures on this earth and that there is a way to work in harmony with all that is. We need to stop being arrogant as humans and realize we are part of nature and we have a responsibility to it.

I interviewed her right after months of fires all around Australia. But I did not ask any questions about the fires. Nonetheless, in her ecological view Jacinta sees her Country and the world as her personal responsibility—the same way she sees language, music, and ancestors’ culture as closely related agents for a better future. Her ideas are clear and her opinions strong. The absence of Language and Song is so present in my country. I believe this is why we are burning. It’s time for us to actually learn and relearn old lessons, and to join with other Aboriginal nations who know the connection to their country through song. I am an optimist. I believe that we can bring 21st century into a new way of living together. I pray that FEL will help people understand vibration and frequency which have been the Aboriginal science of this country for a millennium. That’s why language is important in this country. Some of us are relearning and we thank the universe that some of the Aborigines still preserve that knowing. FEL, through its network, should work more to lift up those people in aboriginal communities who have this knowledge. They may speak five languages, but when you hear their broken English, they are judged as people with simple minds. Please lift them up! FEL should continue to stress that language is part of environmental knowledge, language is part of health issues, language is part of education, language is part of music and song—and that we are all connected in this world. Thousands of generations have sung for me in Language, and now I need to sing for thousands to come.

As I am finishing this text that tells Jacinta’s story, I realize how useful and how correct her insight is in these grim days of coronavirus fear. I also realize that after the long communication with her words, I never got her last name. She has mentioned in her spiritual narration about 100 people (98% of which were women), but never her last name. I thought to write to her again and ask. But then... why? A last name would make Jacinta one person like anybody. Commoners like us have last names, and I know she is not one. I really believe she is Jacinta of the Darug songs. And that is more important.

4. Endangered Languages in the News

What language do the Rohingya speak?

Though it is the language associated with the Muslim inhabitants of Rakhine state in Burma known as the Rohingya, their language is hardly ever referred to in media reports. One might be forgiven for thinking that they are speakers of Arakanese, a name that is in fact related to the name Rakhine, and moreover, not alien to Burma, but closely related to the Burmese language, even called a dialect of it by some. The Arakanese kingdom of Rakhine has a long and proud history in parallel with the Burmese nation. Both languages, Burmese and Arakanese, are Tibeto-Burman languages.

The Rohingya people, however, are ethnically different, and speak an Indo-Aryan language, or dialect, called after them, Rohingya, or Akyab. It is regarded by linguists as a dialect of Chittagonian, the language of the Chittagong Hills in Bangladesh. It is not mutually intelligible with its close relative Bengali. Currently it has about 1.8 million speakers. The Rohingya migrated to Burma several generations ago from what is now Bangladesh. Part of the Burmese objection to their presence in what is now ‘Myanmar’ stems from their ethnic difference from the Burmese and from their relatively recent immigration to the
area. More than once in the past quarter of a century there have been mass repatriations and paterations between Bangladesh and Burma. At the moment the majority of the enforced exiles are living in refugee camps in and around Cox’s Bazar, in Bangladesh, and there have been no convincing guarantees of their safety from the Burmese authorities if they did return to Burma, and there is still plenty of evidence to the contrary. They would be in danger of further persecution.

So it is their Muslim religion that differentiates these people from the majority Burmese as well as their language. They are considered to be incomers to Burma, and this is partly due to the original speakers of Arakanese being Buddhist, and a nation-state of great antiquity.

Until the independence of India in 1947 and of Burma in 1948, both of these territories were administered by the British. In that time the Rohingya language was not used in writing. Arabic and English were the main written languages. Therefore it is not surprising that when the language was committed to writing in 1975, an Arabic-based orthography was chosen. This was a further emblematic distinction from the Burmese. It was refined a further decade later by Molana Hanif and colleagues into the ‘Hanif’ script. A Roman-based script for Rohingya has also been devised by E.M.Siddique. You can see samples of these scripts on the Omniglot web-site (www.omniglot.com/writing/rohingya/htm).

That, then, is the basic linguistic background to the present dreadful plight of the Rohingya, in a simple nutshell. And it does nothing to excite it.

Chris Moseley

Russia urged to protect linguistic diversity after self-immolation

From Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty 13 September 2019

Following the self-immolation of an ethnic Udmurt scholar and activist in protest against Russia’s language policies, Human Rights Watch (HRW) is urging the government to address the “deep-rooted problems” facing ethnic and linguistic minorities in the country.

Russia "should reassess its language policies, with a view to eliminating direct or indirect discrimination and reverse policies that are sweeping away linguistic diversity," HRW said in a statement on September 12.

"The Russian government has spared no efforts to express concern about the language rights of Russian speakers in the Baltic countries and Ukraine. At home, the Russian government seems to play by different rules," the New York-based human rights watchdog added.

Two days earlier, Albert Razin died in hospital after he set himself on fire outside the regional parliament in the capital of the Volga region of Udmurtia, Izhevsk.

He was holding a placard reading: “If my language dies tomorrow, then I’m ready to die today.”

Razin, 79, was among a group of local experts who signed an open letter in June 2018 calling on the Udmurt parliament not to support a bill on the teaching of “native languages” in schools that Russia’s so-called ethnic regions considered as an existential threat to their cultures.

Despite the opposition, Russia last year adopted the law that canceled the mandatory teaching of indigenous languages in regions and republics where non-Russian ethnic groups are well-represented.

Officials insisted that the change was not aimed at destroying linguistic diversity, but allowed people to study their native languages.

However, HRW said the law "adds to a worrying picture of gradually diminishing linguistic diversity in Russia" by creating "disincentives to study minority languages, even in regions where the titular language is supposed to be used on a par with Russian."

“This arrangement is enshrined in these republics’ constitutions, and the study of both state languages is mandated by local laws,” it added.

With his death, Razin “called on Russia and the whole world to pay attention to the catastrophic situation of the Udmurt language and to implement measures to save it, to create all conditions to protect and preserve it,” an Udmurtlyk group that promotes Udmurt culture and language wrote on the VKonakte social network.

"Now, we cannot continue to ignore the Udmurt language’s problems and remain indifferent to its death,” the activists added.

Andrei Babushkin, who sits on President Vladimir Putin’s human rights council, said in a report that “human rights activists believed that the situation [in Udmurtia] is better than in other regions,” according to Interfax.

But Razin’s self-immolation showed that "not everything is actually O.K." in the region, Babushkin added.

The Udmurt language is of the Uralic stem that also includes Finno-Ugric languages. The number of people who speak the language has decreased from 463,000 in 2002 to 324,000 in 2010, according to data from Russia’s national census carried out in those two years.

There are some 560,000 ethnic Udmurts living in Russia’s Volga region, Kazakhstan, and Estonia.

In 2018, before the controversial language law was introduced, the Council of Europe Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities pointed out that “over the past years a strong emphasis has been put on the Russian language and culture while minority languages and cultures appear to be marginalized.”

The committee expressed concerns over a "lack of effective support for minority languages," with their role "diminishing even in the republics, including in those where the titular ethnic group is in the majority.”
I met Antonella and Vincenzo the day of their wedding--Antonella with huge eyes that seemed to grasp all the light and life around her, Vincenzo with eyes only for her. These two young Italo-Albanians from Vaccarizzo Albanese, a small town in Calabria, have both worked at a Law Firm in Milan for a couple of years now. But they have come back to Vaccarizzo to be married.

Calabria and its languages
It is an old and painful tradition for southern Italians to leave their homes in search of work in the Italian north, with Milan being one of the most attractive centers. For about 200 years now, the exodus of the young adults of the south has slowly and incessantly depopulated Calabria, leaving empty villages or “paesini fantasma”. This exodus has not slowed in the 21st century. In the last 15 years two and a half million Italians have left their homes in the south for opportunities in northern Italian cities: 50% comprising of youth and 30% with university diplomas. The southern region of Calabria, with its beautiful Ionian and Tyrrenian coasts, is the region with the lowest GDP and the highest unemployment in Italy. Antonella and Vincenzo belong to this most recent wave of educated, idealistic youth who cannot find work in the region where they grew up.

I had come to Calabria for field work. Calabria is poor economically, but it is still linguistically rich, and not only with languages: various Italian subdialects are still used by most Calabria inhabitants and there are over 30 small communities that speak Arbëresh as well as a few villages in the “toe” of the peninsula that speak Griko. Arbëresh is a dialect of Albanian, brought to Calabria in the late 1400’s by refugees from Albania and Greece fleeing the Ottoman invasion. Griko is a dialect of Greek brought to Calabria for the same reason. Both these languages are recognized as minority languages by the Italian law no. 482, while the Italian dialectal varieties of the region are notii. Arbëresh is considered a “definitely endangered” language in the UNESCO Atlas of Endangered Languages. Griko is in a more advanced state of endangerment than Arbëresh and is very rarely now used in Calabria. The map below by the University of Calabria shows the 50 Arbëresh centers of Italy today. Vaccarizzo is number 22 in the enlarged square of Calabrian area.

Vaccarizzo Albanese
According to academic research and Unesco and Ethnologue scales that measure linguistic vitality, the number of speakers is an important factor for linguistic maintenance, a factor that is lacking in the small community of Vaccarizzo Albanese and seriously threatens the use of Arbëresh there. The number of inhabitants has dwindled to somewhere between one and two thousand. The main Byzantine priest of the village complains that there are no children; recently only one or two new-borns in the whole year – “how can one maintain the language when there are no young people to learn and use it?” Fortunately, Vaccarizzo is close to some other Arbëresh centers of a similar or even smaller size, like San Cosmo Albanese, San Giorgio Albanese, San Demetrio, and Macchia Albanese. The good fortune consists not in exemplifying the belief that “misery loves company”, but in the possibility of creating a viable net of communication, a continuous coming and going that reduces the linguistic and cultural isolation of the Arbëresh people, a sense of larger community, and a chance to share and celebrate Arbëresh-ness throughout different locations, the capacity to use the available financial resources in a more efficient way, and to create local and long-lasting synergies. Another problem faced by the Arbëresh of Vaccarizzo today is the decreasing number of speakers inside the village that use Arbëresh in at least one domain. Newcomers, especially those young in age, are the best thing that happens to small centers, but in Vaccarizzo the newcomers usually do not speak Arbëresh.
It is not surprising that Antonella and Vincenzo are having their wedding in Vaccarizzo and not in Milan. For them, Vaccarizzo is still a magnetically attractive place, it is the warm fireplace to which they always return for at least a while. And this is not simply because in the last decades it has become a town with a picturesque piazza and charming narrow streets paved in stone. Both Antonella and Vincenzo consider themselves to be from Vaccarizzo while living and working in Milan. The truth however is much more complicated than this. They identify as children of Vaccarizzo and they speak Arbëresh (although with different levels of competence), but they were not born there. Antonella was born in Saronno of Lombardy in the North, the town of the famous amaretti di Saronno, and Vincenzo was born even further North, in Switzerland. The reason for their Northern birthplaces is the usual ‘condizione calabrese’: the parents of both the bride and the groom had to migrate to Northern Italy for work, worked there for many years and brought their children back to Vaccarizzo when they could—in the summers, to stay with their grandparents and spend their holidays in the sun of the South, and even for some school years. The fact is that Antonella, although having spent most of her life away from Vaccarizzo, still speaks Arbëresh well enough for her communicative needs at home, and Vincenzo has a passive understanding of the language. The connection to their family roots and the paesino Arbëresh is also how Vaccarizzo "kept" Antonella and Vincenzo together, whether physically present in the village or far away from it.

After a long period in the North, Antonella decided to leave Milan and come back to Calabria to study at the University of Calabria, where she made Arbëresh a central part of her dissertation. Vincenzo, on the other hand, after having stayed for some years in Vaccarizzo, decided to go and attend university in Milan. With whom? With Antonella’s brother, Francesco, who at that point had been his best friend for a while. Francesco’s life itself is a roller-coaster between the Italian North and South and then the United States, but let’s focus on our two main characters. Because of Francesco, Antonella’s and Vincenzo’s paths crossed again. Once they finished the university, they found themselves again in Calabria where they really wanted to live and work. They both were very active in the Arbëresh movement in Vaccarizzo and the small towns around, participated in organized groups that performed Arbëresh songs and dances, took courses in Arbëresh offered by the Town Hall, and traveled to participate in competitions centered around Arbëresh. Antonella proudly showed me the beautiful Arbëresh traditional dresses in the Museum of the Arbëresh Costumes in Vaccarizzo, and explained that it was due to the insistence and the protests of her and a group of young people from Vaccarizzo that the Museum became permanent. I saw pictures of her and Vincenzo in the amazing costumes. One of them is a postcard now.

Their love grew and the way they understood each other matured as they worked to revive their little town and their shrinking language and traditions. But, alas! Calabria was unable to sustain these two young people’s ambitions, like so many before them, and like the parents of Antonella and Vincenzo who spent most of their lives working in other places—but always thinking of Vaccarizzo as home. The two lovers gave Vaccarizzo more than one try, but at last decided to move to the North, taking with them their mementos and memories of their home and the language of their mothers and grandmothers. Two years passed in Milan, a city that gave them good jobs, economic dignity, and freedom. At age 31 and 37 respectively, Antonella and Vincenzo decided to get married. They could think of only one place for their wedding: Vaccarizzo.

The Wedding, Peppa Marriti and Kuljaçi i Nuses

The wedding of Antonella and Vincenzo, on July 18th of this year was spectacular, warm, different. I will not forget it, first because of the pure immense love of two beautiful young people and of many devoted family members and friends that made every moment bliss and...
passion. But I will also remember it because of the beautiful location and special food served in the wedding, the beautifully simple ceremony in the small church of Vaccarizzo among the golden colors of the Orthodox Saints, the strong smell of incense, and the Byzantine monotonous chanting of Papa Lia holding the white crowns made of orange flowers for the newlyweds. Then the stray dog full of pulci, fleas, that lives in the main piazza of the Katund, who uses every church ceremony to centrally pose next to the Alpha person of the day. And the fuming Papa Lia running after him to throw him out of the church while the young would complain: But why? Why?

The most important factor that made this wedding special is what it gave to its guests. It was carefully built to bring joy from the music, talks, food, dances, and especially the Arbëresh language and tradition. A nice bottle of grappa, the distilled drink from grapes that is the typical drink in the Albanian tradition (raki in Albanian), is the gift given to all the wedding guests to take home. An extraordinary local band was the musical soul of the wedding although there were many very good musical bands invited. I had heard of Peppa Marriti and their work of bringing together the Arbëresh music and rhythm with rock and blues in a “contamination” mode. The surprising thing for me was the clarity of the Arbëresh and Albanian lyrics, and the creative mixtures of language varieties and geographies. Angelo, also called Bobbo, the main singer and the director of the band, was able to bring together not only Arbëresh, but also the Albanian varieties of North and South and even Kosovar songs and melodies, in a way that made the 200 guests at the wedding sing and dance with him. Bobbo keeps the Albanian flag with him in his concerts, but what in Bobbo is Albanian? It is only the memory of the “blood” which more realistically is mainly language. He keeps it alive in events like this wedding. The band danced and sang in Arbëresh together with all of us for hours. You would hear the language revitalized right then and there among people who probably didn’t even use it any more at their homes. It was like living a linguistic revival moment in a lab, after an experiment that involved love, music and energy. But I knew that it was not a lab, although the sound of Arbëresh, the raki and the music had brought me to a state of pure joy. I could be anywhere at that point, even in a lab, and, as long as IT was in Arbëresh, IT would be the place to be for me.

And then came a special event in the Arbëresh wedding, that of “kuljaçi i nuses”. The Arbëresh tradition of Vaccarizzo demands that at some point during the wedding, nesja and dhandrri – bride and groom - pull from opposite sides of a very large dessert made of flour and honey, shaped like a giant pretzel. I would say it demonstrates a feminist tendency of these villages given that the result is that whoever is left with the larger piece of the kuljaç commands at home, and the tradition is that the bride always wins! In Vaccarizzo all men are taught to always pull sharply to get a small piece, while all nuses, the brides, are taught not pull at all, but simply pretend to pull. That means that the larger piece of the dessert will always be left to the women. It was sweet to see Antonella and Vincenzo that night perfectly playing this ritual like two great actors, her asking her mother and aunts, all worried and in panic, what to exactly do at that moment, all of course in Arbëresh, while her nephews would cheer for her in Italian: “Dai zia! Vai zia!”. And the story ended up as expected, with the nuse being the one that commands at home.

I interviewed Lucia, Antonella’s mother, a middle school teacher all her life who is now retired, but is remembered in all the communities where she taught for her love of their language and traditions and her energy in supporting and mobilizing youth, working with the children to teach them how to recite, sing and dance Arbëresh. She tells me that her parents, mëma and tata, spoke an Arbëresh much richer and more fluent than Italian. She and her sisters had a hard time with Italian in the elementary school, where they were not allowed to use the Arbëresh. But Lucia today, with some embarrassment, resorts to Italian when Arbëresh does not allow her to fully express herself. Warm, cordial and smart, Lucia explained to me that traditionally the wedding dessert was not even called “kuljaç”, and she does not even remember when this sweet started to be called “kuljaç”. It was part of the Arbëresh tradition of Vaccarizzo, she says, but we used to call it “mustacioli i nuses”, evidently an Italian word which is thought to have Latin origins. But Lucia explains that calling it kuljaç now with an Arbëresh word with a similar meaning, has become a tradition, as has become performing this beautiful ritual of “kuljaçi i nuses” in the weddings in many Arbëresh villages of Calabria.

Commodification of tradition and culture are often criticized from within the communities and from purist positions in academia. But who can tell us today that tradition does not always start as a new invention, an invention which we get used to just because we happen to live long enough with it as with the language in which the invention is embedded? How are the beautiful dresses of Arbëresh women created all around the Arbëresh villages of Italy? How are the special foods “different from the surrounding areas” born? Certainly they were not brought from Albania 500 years ago or more! Why and when does the invention of difference (which I think is what has kept a distinct identity and sense of belonging of these communities alive for so long) stop being the crib of tradition and turn into the coffin of commodified touristic culture? What I am expressing is not optimism: it is a need to cope with endangerment; it is hope based mainly on the linguistic attitudes of speakers like those of Vaccarizzo. Language revival is extremely hard, but not impossible. But the demographics and other cultural and economic traits of Vaccarizzo rather support skeptics who fear that the functions left from endangered linguistic varieties in their last “good days” after decades of stigma and repression, are more museum ornaments than real linguistic functions: “Once it has lost its social stigma, the dialect – what little of the dialect that is still known – becomes a supplementary communication resource, in ordinary communication, available for use in particular contexts and functions – a little bit like English, that here and there comes in handy for inserts, quotations, advertisement, irony, showing off, ‘we code’, etc.”v

Epilogue of a wedding

The beautiful wedding ended. The two new weds got ready to go back to the Italian North. The work at their new home was waiting. Will they ever return to Calabria for good? Will their children ever speak
Arbëresh? Will Vaccarizzo be empty one day, and northern Italian communities become large pockets of minorities within minorities within minorities containing somewhere also the pale figure of whatever is left from Vaccarizzo? I do not have the answers, but I do not want Vaccarizzo of the future to be a place that could exemplify Foucauldian heterotopia. I look with great respect at these people who fight for their language as for themselves in the best and worst of their days. I cannot wait to see them in another summer. In another wedding perhaps. In a return to Vaccarizzo of the Arbëresh.


http://www.today.it/economia/sud-italia-emigrati-nord.html

6. Controversies

Minority languages are endangered but no-one cares in Nepal

By Dev Kumar Sunuwar

As indigenous peoples from across the world formally bid farewell to the International Year of Indigenous Languages (IYIL2019) and eagerly await and gear up to prepare for the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022-2032), Nepal had bad news to share with those who love, care about and are fighting for linguistic diversity.

On 25 January, 2020, Nepal lost 85-year-old Gyani Maya Kusunda, one of the last two surviving Kusunda-speaking people. Gyani Maya was the ultimate authority on the Kusunda indigenous language of Nepal. Gyani Maya and her younger sister Kamala Kusunda used to talk to each other in their own language. The question now is, after the death of Gyani Maya, who will Kamala, who is in her fifties, talk to in her mother tongue?

Gyani Maya had made her efforts to transfer her knowledge about the Kusunda language to the new generation. She taught her children and grandchildren so that they are able to learn their mother tongue and she also collaborated with Udaya Raj Ale, a researcher, to develop a dictionary of Kusunda words. Her death is the loss of a living dictionary of the Kusunda language.

Just like other Kusunda people of her generation, Gyani Maya was born in a jungle somewhere in western Nepal. She grew up constantly wandering through the woods, eating wild roots and bulbs and collecting alms from nearby villages.

Kusunda Indigenous people still consider themselves as the Kings of forest. They don’t like to settle down in one place and do not want to mingle with other communities. But some decades ago, the government of Nepal forced them to be confined to one particular forested area of western Nepal.

While in the jungle, Kusunda men would hunt down wild animals and birds. But after the start of the Maoist war (1996-2006) in Nepal, it became harder for them to remain in the jungle and they slowly began to assimilate with people from other tribes.

Gyani Maya also got married to a man belonging to the Magar indigenous community. After marriage, she settled down in a village in Dang district, western Nepal. She lived a quiet life for years without realizing how valuable her ability to speak the Kusunda language was. After being identified as one of the last remaining Kusunda-speaking people, Gyani Maya had devoted her life to saving her mother tongue. Her death has been mourned by many as the loss of a battle to preserve Nepal’s linguistic plurality.

Nepal is proud of its linguistic diversity. It claims that 123 languages exist in Nepal, as per the Census of 2011. The Language Commission has lately identified 6 distinct living languages to be included in 2021 Census of Nepal, which altogether will make up 129 existing languages of Nepal, but one of them, Kusunda, is now certainly on its death bed. The population of Kusunda is 273 according to the 2011 Census, but Udaya Raj Ale (who comes from a different indigenous group called Magar) a researcher and author about the Kusunda language, says there are merely 150 Kusunda across Nepal.

It is not merely a story of a dying Kusunda indigenous language alone; already over one dozen languages have gone extinct in Nepal, but the surprising thing is, none of the people are worried for the extinction of these languages, because these belong to Indigenous Peoples who have been marginalized and discriminated in terms of language, culture, political as well as economic opportunities throughout history.1 If not, for Nepal, now a country of linguistic diversity, having as many as 129 languages, the International Year of Indigenous Languages, 2019, should have been a reason to celebrate. Nepal should have used it as a chance to facilitate a debate on the use of mother tongues, but the year came and went, and no one cared about it.

Of the total of 129, as many as 117 languages are spoken by various indigenous communities and many are becoming extinct, as these languages do not boast their own scripts. People speaking these dying mother tongues do not have a tradition of writing literature, though some communities have developed their scripts, dictionaries and begun to publish their literary works.

1 See who are indigenous peoples of Nepal at http://www.indigenouspeoples/national.html
works, but not all. Most communities just have a spoken language. There is a hardly any scientific study has yet been conducted on the status of indigenous languages, how they have been used in practice. Except Nepali (the national language), indigenous languages have hardly been used as a medium of education, justice delivery, information and the official business of government. The sad part still is that some 37 languages are on the verge of extinction and some 29 languages have only less than one thousand speakers in Nepal and almost one dozen languages have gone extinct. The government has no policy to protect endangered languages from becoming extinct in Nepal.

Endangered languages

Nepal is a multilingual country with more than 123 living languages. According to the 2011 Census, Nepali, the official language, is not the mother tongue of 56.4 percent of the total population. Notwithstanding, Nepali language is thriving, while many of Nepal's languages belonging to indigenous peoples, also defined as minority languages, lie at various stages continuously towards eventual extinction. It is because of the state's neglect towards ethno-linguistic communities and the effectiveness of the Nepali language in employment, in justice delivery, media, and including the business of government. It is therefore the children of the majority of indigenous language speakers who are not learning their mother tongue; this is why indigenous languages are becoming endangered and the number of speakers of each indigenous language is declining in Nepal. The best measure of the viability of a language is not the number of people who speak it, but to what extent their children are learning the language as their mother tongue.

In Nepal, indigenous peoples are bi-lingual, trilingual and some are quadrilingual. They use their mother tongue/indigenous language at home, a Nepali or different regional language in the local market, conversing in Nepali at school or in dealings with government administration or accessing media outlets and often use English (also Hindi to some extent) in dealings with foreigners or to chat with friends online. Indigenous languages no doubt are not merely an expression of socio-ethnic or cultural identity, but the repository of the history, beliefs of a people.

Language is far more than grammar and words in which the state, development workers and scholars have to be dealt with. Respective indigenous peoples have been documenting and promoting their mother tongues, undertaking initiatives to use them in their everyday life and where possible, more importantly in preserving and promoting their language within their capacity.

There is no dearth of national and international provisions which guarantee indigenous peoples' linguistic rights. Indigenous peoples have little confidence in their ability to gain access to and then effectively use the legal system to defend these rights. The legal system is controlled by dominant-high caste groups (non-indigenous groups) and is against their interests which have little chance of success. The system needs fluency in spoken Nepali language.

The latest Constitution of Nepal, 2015, Part I, Article 6, says 'all languages spoken as the mother tongues in Nepal are the languages of the nation'. However, Sub-Article 1 of Article 7 maintains that Nepali language written in the Devanagari script shall be the official language of Nepal. Similarly, Sub-Article 2 of the same Article mentions that a state may, by state law, determine one or more than one language of the nation used by majority of people within the state as its official language (s) in addition to Nepali. With the restructuring of Nepal, it is not clear that Nepali written in the Devanagari script shall be the official language in all provinces, but how many languages are meant by 'more than one language' and what is meant by 'majority of the people' are not clear.

The self-Governance Act, 1999 provides that local bodies have the right to use, preserve and promote local languages. Based on this provision, in the same year a group of language rights activists in Kathmandu demanded to use Newari as the official media of communication in Kathmandu Metropolitan City, in Kathmandu and use Maithali language as official business in Dhanusa District Development Committee, Rajbiraj and Jajarkot municipality filed cases at the Supreme Court, but the court issued an interim order, prohibiting the use of local and regional languages in administration. This order brought sadness among the indigenous language speaking communities.

Indigenous languages in broadcasting and print

The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDPR), 2007, recognizes the importance of the right to media and free expression in indigenous languages for safeguarding culture, identity and equally to protect knowledge and information concerning Indigenous Peoples. The media can ensure Indigenous Peoples the right of access to information, participation and voice. But in Nepal there are few media outlets which provide programming in Indigenous languages. Nepal's media have been and are still overwhelmingly controlled by the members of the dominant social groups, not only in terms of ownership but also in terms of content production. The major language of media has been Nepali. At present there are as many as 116 Television and 793 FM radios which have obtained licenses to operate across the country. Similarly, there are a total 7743 newspapers and magazines registered including 735 daily newspapers. Of all newspapers, 93.07 percent of the newspapers published in Nepal are in non-Indigenous languages. Of them, 68.42 percent are published in Nepali and 24.65 percent in English, Hindi, and English-Nepali. The media in Indigenous languages (those media, newspapers, broadcasting radio and TV programs by Indigenous journalists) account for only 6.58 percent of the total, while Indigenous Peoples make up 36 percent of the national population. The Public Government broadcasting Nepal Television and Gorkhapatra (newspaper) provide merely translated Nepali news into some Indigenous languages, relatively those which have a higher

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2 Nepal has been restructured into 7 provinces and 744 local units with 4 Metropolitan cities, 13-Sub-Metropolitan cities, 246 Municipalities, 481 Rural village councils and 6680 wards. In all 123 different languages are spoken as mother tongue by 126 different caste and ethnic groups in Nepal, as per 2011 Census.
number of Indigenous language speakers and the news hardly concern Indigenous Peoples.3

Of the total 793 FM radio stations that obtained a license, some 400 are regarded to be so-called community radio stations mainly run by NGOs and cooperatives, which are said to be the lifeblood for many remote communities where many residents are speakers of Indigenous languages, but communities are stationed in the district headquarters, physically not accessible to Indigenous Peoples who are living in remote villages; most are controlled by dominant groups in terms of ownership, decision making and content production. There are a few FM stations, including TV and newspapers, which are owned and operated by individuals or groups from Indigenous communities, but there is hardly any support from government. The lack of media in Indigenous languages has hindered Indigenous Peoples’ right of access to, participation and voice in the media and more importantly they have been deprived of their right to information, freedom of expression reflecting their cultural and linguistic diversity and the right to communication in their Indigenous language.

In order to fill this gap, a group of indigenous journalists founded the Indigenous Media Foundation in 2011, then established indigenous community radio—called Radio Kairan 96.4 Mhz and Radio Likhu 91.3 Mhz in the remote village of Ramechhap district, eastern Nepal, and started producing radio programs in different indigenous languages. Similarly there was formed a network of Indigenous radio run by Indigenous Peoples in their language called Indigenous Community Radio Network (ICRN); the network has 21 member radios which together produce radio programs in 35 different indigenous languages reaching across Nepal. Similarly, the Indigenous Media Foundation, intended to influence the policy makers, founded Indigenous Television. The Indigenous Television channel, launched on August 9, 2016 on the occasion of the International day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples, today produces TV programs in 15 different indigenous languages. In 2019, the Indigenous Television and Indigenous Community Radio Network, both were official media partners of the International Year of Indigenous Languages 2019. By creating these media platforms, we have been able to instil a sense of community pride in their mother tongue and also have helped indigenous communities to have access to, participate and voice in the language they speak and understand in Nepal.

Access to multilingual education

Before 1990, education was possible only for those who were close to the then ruling family and the Khas-Bahun priestly lines. The only medium was Sanskrit.

In 1995, for the first time, the government formed the Nepal National Education Council, which recommended Nepali as the medium of instruction, and banned using other languages even in the informal sector and playgrounds. Until 1990 the ‘One language, one culture, one religion’ policy was adopted and other languages were completely suppressed. The result is that nearly a dozen indigenous languages have been extinct.

Particularly since the restoration of democracy in 1990, linguistic issues have been gradually gained attention. Although some of the previous legacy relating to the suppression of the indigenous languages continues, the Constitution of Nepal, 1990, affirmed Nepal as ‘a multilingual and multicultural nation state.’

The Constitution further stated that all languages spoken as mother tongues are the national languages, and further affirmed that every community residing within the country shall have the right to protect and develop its language, script, and culture, and equally the right to establish schools for providing education to children up to the primary level in their mother tongues.

Internationally, the government has expressed its commitment to ensuring education for all children, including IPs, by signing conventions such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), World Conference on Education for All (EFA), the Dakar Framework of Action (2000), Millennium Development Goals (2000), UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDIRIP) 2007, and ILO Convention No. 169 on Indigenous and Tribal peoples.

The Interim Constitution adopted in 2007 further guaranteed education up to the secondary level in mother tongues. The three-year Interim Plan (2007-2010) laid emphasis on the expansion and consolidation of early childhood education development program across the country, with priority for the excluded groups including indigenous peoples through the provision of scholarships.

Accordingly, the government has introduced two-tier policies of teaching mother tongues as optional subjects up to the higher secondary level and mother tongue as a medium of instruction, aiming to bring all children – especially from indigenous communities – to school. It has also launched an international initiative, the Education for All program, and has been devising a vulnerable community development framework since 2009. The government also scaled up multilingual education and community-level drive and so forth, to ensure the participation of vulnerable groups, including Indigenous Peoples and other linguistic minorities, especially in the entire process of preparation of textbooks and other teaching materials.

Specifically targeting linguistic minorities and Indigenous Peoples, the Department of Education (DoE) introduced Mother-tongue-based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) as a pilot program in 2004, primarily for eight mother tongues in seven schools in different districts – Tamang in Rasuwa, Aathpahria (Rai) in Dhankuta, Rana-Tharu language in Kanchanjung, Santhal and Rajbansi in Jhapa, Maithali and Urau in Sunsari, and Magar in Dhankuta. As the MLE yielded good results, in 2007, the government scaled it up to 21 schools. The school sector reform plan (2009-2015), another important education policy devised by the MoE, aims to implement mother-tongue-based multilingual education in 7,500 schools. Similarly, besides having a step-wise plan to scale up multilingual, bilingual education across Nepal, the Curriculum Development Centre (DDC), the sole government body entrusted to prepare school curriculum, has developed textbooks in 24 mother tongues, and materi-

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3 See Meera Amatya
A new app will help younger members of Cree First Nations bands in northern Alberta maintain their language. They will be able to listen to more than 150 tribal elders from across five First Nations in the region.

The app, called KTCEA Elders Speak, documents Cree as it is spoken in the region northwest of Grand Prairie.

Students will hear 900 Cree words and phrases identifying local plants, wildlife and daily activities.

Each word was recorded by a local elder.

The team that developed the app focused on cultural traditions and activities by asking the elders what they would like their children to know about their way of life and what they would like the world to know about their nation.

It was developed by the Kee Tas Kee Now Tribal Council Education Authority, which oversees six schools within five northern Alberta First Nations: Peerless Trout First Nation, Whitefish Lake First Nation, Loon River First Nation, Lubicon Lake Band and Woodland Cree First Nation.

“The students will hear the voices of their mushums—their grandparents—that will instil pride in them,” Audrey Anderson, the education authority’s land-based curriculum co-ordinator, told the Edmonton Journal’s Moira Wyton.

Anderson says dialect differences between Nations were taken into account with each nation addressing certain subjects, including, for example, how to prepare fish and moose and other land-based cultural activities.

“And they will be proud of their language.”

The app, which features more than 900 words in 50 categories, as well as access to games and activities, took three years to develop.

It was completed last year, the United Nations’ International Year of Indigenous Language.

“We chose an app to preserve the language so we could hear our elders speak for many years to come,” Anderson told the CBC’s Madeleine Cummings.

Global storybooks: From Arabic to Zulu, freely available digital tales in 50+ languages

By Bonny Norton and Espen Strang Johannessen, from The Conversation web-site, 19 January 2020

Globally, 750 million youth and adults do not know how to read and write and 250 million children are failing to acquire basic literacy skills. Literacy is central to education and plays an important role in development and peace.

In response to this global educational challenge, our team based at the University of British Columbia developed the open multilingual literacy portal Global Storybooks.

This portal hosts custom sites with multilingual open-licensed books for over 40 countries and regions on five continents. Our vision is to help democratize global flows of information and resources, to facilitate language learning—including, for example, how to prepare fish and moose and other land-based cultural activities.

One of the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals is to achieve quality education globally by the year 2030. High illiteracy rates among children are partly due to a lack of appropriate reading materials in languages familiar to children. Research has shown that children learn to read best in their family’s home language, which also establishes a strong foundation for learning any additional languages.

We believe the Global Storybooks project has the potential to promote quality education, literacy and multilingualism worldwide. Open educational resources (OER) have much potential to address the lack of reading materials in poorly resourced communities, facilitate language learning and reduce inequities between communities and nations.
The origins of this Global Storybooks digital project are found in the African Storybook initiative, which digitizes and makes freely available under an open license over 1,000 original stories in over 150 African languages, as well as English, French and Portuguese.

The South African organization Saide began developing this site in 2013, with funding from the UK charity Comic Relief and research support from UBC scholars.

Grounded in a shared vision of global literacy and open technology, our UBC team collaborated on the development of Storybooks Canada, with seed funding from UBC Language Sciences. Launched in 2018, Storybooks Canada was the first of our Global Storybooks sites. It has a growing team, with a range of funders, including Education without Borders, the Peter Wall Institute and Mitacs. It is built on a curated selection of 40 openly licensed stories from the African Storybook that have been repurposed for a Canadian and global audience.

The stories have been translated into 19 of the most widely spoken languages in Canada, with studio-quality audio versions. An additional 10 languages are still in the process of being translated or recorded. Many of the translations and recordings, which are ongoing, are done by international graduate student volunteers with an interest in literacy and language learning.

Through the Global Storybooks portal, users can also access Indigenous Storybooks, developed in collaboration with Haida scholar Sara Davidson of the University of the Fraser Valley. This collection is based on the open licensed stories created by the Little Cree Books project at the University of Alberta.

The Indigenous Storybooks site now offers translations of these stories in Swampy Cree, Plains Cree, Haida (Old Masset) and Haida (Skideigate), as well as in English, French and Spanish. Recently, volunteers have also translated these stories into Huichol and Huastec, Indigenous languages of Mexico.

As news of Storybooks Canada has spread internationally, many scholars, educators and community agencies have invited us to collaborate on the development of localized sites for their communities, based on the Global Storybooks platform.

This platform has been specifically designed to support the development of mother tongue literacy, bilingualism, and multilingualism with the following features:

1. Single-click access: The stories can be reached in a single click.
2. User-friendly layout: Easy to navigate and can support self-directed learning.
3. Audio and print: Promotes reading by linking sounds and symbols.
4. Mobile-first design: Websites can be easily viewed on any device, including cell phones, tablets and desktop computers.
5. Parallel texts: Users can toggle between different translations of the same story. The more familiar language helps to scaffold understanding of the less-familiar language.
6. Downloading: Stories can be downloaded in different PDF layouts, including monolingual or bilingual and regular or wordless/imageless versions. Users can also download in a landscape format (for reading on screens) or a booklet format (for printing).

New sites can draw on the existing database of stories and multimedia in multiple languages, and new translations are developed as needed. At present, translations have been made in more than 50 new languages. For example, the Storybooks Jamaica site features translations of the 40 stories into Jamaican Creole, and the stories on Storybooks Haiti are available in Haitian Creole.

The Global Storybooks project generates many questions for educational research: How well do stories travel from one region of the world to another? To what extent can sites like Storybooks Canada promote home and school connections for immigrant and refugee students? Does the use of dual language storybooks promote language awareness in linguistically diverse classrooms?

Team member and UBC PhD candidate Michelle Gilman is investigating connections between Storybooks Canada and the B.C. curriculum. PhD student Asma Afreen is addressing cultural identity in the translation of English language stories from the African Storybook into Bengali for Storybooks Canada and Storybooks Bangladesh. Her knowledge of Bangladeshi cultural practices and social relationships helps inform the translation process.

International Year of Indigenous Languages

By the editor

As readers will know, 2019 was declared by the United Nations to be the International Year of Indigenous Languages. While Ogmios has been in abeyance, the Foundation has been taking an active part in it. In June 2019, the Foundation organized a one-day celebration of the year at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, together with other like-minded organisations: the United Nations Association of Westminster, Survival International and Wikitongues, each of which was represented by speakers and displays.
7. Forthcoming & recent events

Indigenous languages at the Perth Festival (Australia) 2020

Perth Festival this February has had one of the 66-year-old event’s most ambitious programs yet. Incoming Perth-born artistic director Iain Grandage centred his maiden program on the theme Karla, a Noongar word meaning “fire”, with a renewed focus on First Nations productions.

The festival opened on February 7, with eight of its 24 days dedicated to Indigenous-only programming, including a landmark Noongar language adaptation of Shakespeare’s Macbeth, a mixed-genre celebration of the music of Gurrumul Yunupinu and a nationally-acclaimed performance from the globally-renowned Bangarra Dance Theatre company.

The rest of the program spanned a diverse mix of independent theatre, dance and film, local and international music and literature, and took audiences into some of Perth’s premier entertainment venues. A new festival hub, the City of Lights, saw the Perth Concert Hall and surrounds transformed to host a multicultural music and theatre program, including the open-air Chevron Lighthouse music venue.

Hecate

Hecate takes place in a world where Noongar language is spoken by all. In this world-premiering Perth Festival commission, leading Aboriginal performing arts company Yirra Yaakin presented Kylie Bracknell’s adaptation of Shakespeare’s Macbeth, performed entirely in Noongar. In Shakespeare’s original work, Hecate is the queen of the witches who deliver Macbeth’s prophecy. But in most adaptations, she is not a leading character. Bracknell’s Hecate brings her show’s namesake to the centre of the plot, as a wise observer of Macbeth’s tragic demise and a reminder that nature – or, in this case, Country – will always trump human greed. With a timely and poignant message brought to life through the poetic qualities of a reclaimed Noongar language, this show is the bedrock of the festival’s 2020 program.

Bennelong

From the globally-acclaimed Bangarra Dance Theatre company, Bennelong is a dance production exploring the life of one of history’s most iconic Aboriginal figures: Woollarawarre Bennelong, a Senior Eora man who left a legacy of power and defiance. Already picking up seven Helpmann Awards during a celebrated national tour, the show celebrates the continuation of that legacy in contemporary Australian life.

Bungul

Gurrumul Yunupinu’s final album, Djarimirri: Child of the Rainbow, was celebrated around the world as a transcendent musical achievement, amalgamating ancient songs and chants from the late artist’s Yolŋu culture with contemporary orchestral compositions. Another Perth Festival commission, Bungul saw the album interpreted on stage for the first time. In a show directed by Senior Yolŋu Don Wininba Ganambarr and Nigel Jamieson, Yolŋu dancers and songmen were joined by the West Australian Symphony Orchestra to share the traditional songs, dances and paintings that inspired Gurrumul’s pivotal work. Created on Country in North East Arnhem Land with the Yunupinu family, Bungul represents a coming together of two contrasting worlds and illustrates the potential of a contemporary Australian identity grounded in First Nations knowledge and legacy.