Semali Panai, of Long Semadok Rayeh, Sarawak, playing the bamboo flute. See his obituary in this issue.
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Editorial

As announced in the previous issue of Ogmios, our Committee is being cautious this year, and arranging our 2021 conference for as late in the year as possible – it will be held in Tirana, Albania, in December 2021 – please see the announcement below. We have been determined that it should be a face-to-face meeting once again, though we will not risk endangering the lives of supporters of endangered languages – but since the world’s situation regarding the pandemic is still very unbalanced as we go to press, it is to be a hybrid conference, which means that although it will be held at the physical venue, we are making provision for participation remotely on-line for those who, for whatever reason, are unable to get to Tirana at that time. 

And in conjunction with this, we also plan to hold a Jubilee event in December, probably in London and a week before the Tirana conference, to celebrate 25 years of FEL’s existence. We hope that as many as possible of our members can take part.

And as I mentioned in the last issue, for those attending in person, the two events in Europe within a week of each other could be a double attraction for our intercontinental members. Personal contact with fellow linguists is invaluable, so we want to encourage as many of you as possible to take part.

Chris Moseley

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1. Development of the Foundation

FEL XXV conference, Tirana, Albania, 16-19 December 2021

We continue to work hard on the preparation of all aspects of the 29th annual conference of the Foundation for Endangered Languages (FEL XXV) “Endangered Languages and Diaspora” to take place Dec. 16-19 in Tirana, Albania.

We wanted to let you know some important news and updates.

1. The abstract submission deadline was extended to June 13. Other important dates have changed accordingly.

2. Given that many interested presenters think that their countries will not be fully open by December, FEL XXV will be a hybrid conference allowing some of the presenters to give their talks online. As the date comes closer we will reconsider the modes of interaction according to the state of the pandemic.

3. The conference social program and information on registration fees has been added to the mainpage of the conference.

4. Conference website with all the updates:

Best wishes,

FEL XXV organizers

And here is the official announcement of our conference:

FEL XXV (2021)

Endangered Languages and Diaspora
State and Study of Arbëresh as an Endangered Diaspora Language

Tirana, Albania, 16-19 December 2021,

held at

QSPA
Qendra e Studimeve dhe Publikimeve për Arbëreshët -
(The Center for Research and Publication on Arbëresh);

in collaboration with

the University of Tirana

Modes of interaction:
Face-to-face with some online participation.

Conference language:
The main language of the conference is English; in a few grouped sessions Italian and Albanian will be used. English interpreting provided for keynote talks that are not in English.

Conference website:
Can be consulted at: https://europe.illinois.edu/news-events/2020-21-initiatives/conference-foundation-endangered-languages

Important dates:
Find them all at
https://europe.illinois.edu/news-events/2020-21-initiatives/conference-foundation-endangered-languages/important-dates

Call for abstracts:
Closed, submission deadline was on June 13 2021
https://europe.illinois.edu/news-events/2020-21-initiatives/conference-foundation-endangered-languages/call-abstracts
Registration: Opened 2 August 2021

For more information:

Please visit the official conference website at the University of Illinois.
The Foundation for Endangered Languages thanks the European Union Center at the University of Illinois and in particular PhD candidate Irati Hurtado Ruiz for the maintenance of the conference page.

For further enquiries contact: edmond.cane@qspa.gov.al

FEL Subcommittees on Regulations and FEL Jubilee

Regular meetings of these two subcommittees are still taking place in 2021. The Regulations subcommittee aims to review our constitution and revise the duties of Committee members and try to enhance participation by the officer bearers on it. The Jubilee subcommittee is aiming to organise an event in December 2021 in London to celebrate 25 years since our foundation as a charity. At the moment we are seeking a suitable venue. More news as it comes to hand; it will be announced to our members on the web-site and on these pages.

2. Campaigns: South America

Global Week of Action for Amazon

The Amazon is in a state of emergency and at a tipping point due to attacks on the rights, lives, and territories of Indigenous and forest peoples. In response, we’re inviting you to join us and take action during the Global Week of Action for the Amazon. Join Indigenous organizations in Amazonia and allies around the world offering opportunities to get involved and collaborate with one another – all for the protection of the Amazon rainforest.

To create a stronger voice and presence, this year we’re inviting you all to meet us on NooWorld, a site and app made for activists by activists that will allow us to unite worldwide. It’s pretty simple to join, just follow these steps:

1. Download the NooWorld app on Apple or Android devices, or create an account on their website. It’s a trusted site created by partners in the resistance with you in mind. All the activist tools you could need, in one place.
2. Follow the Global Week of Action for the Amazon community page. Meet us on the community page to get connected with all the right events, action opportunities and information.

Join Indigenous Earth defenders calling for immediate and urgent action to permanently protect the Amazon and our global climate. We need your solidarity to spread the message during this week! Sign up on any or all of the days during the Global Week of Action for the Amazon on the NooWorld app or website. Do your part in this movement – we need you!

Sunday, September 5: Amazon Day

What: COICA (Coordinating Body of Indigenous Peoples of the Amazon) and allies will launch Initiative to Protect 80% of the Amazon by 2025 to avert the tipping point.

More info: Global Week of Action for the Amazon community page on NooWorld

Monday, September 6: Online Day of Action for the Amazon

What: Learn more about the 80 x 2025 declaration and other actions to defend the Amazon online!

Where: Meet us on the Global Week of Action for the Amazon community page on NooWorld to learn more and engage

When: Throughout the day

Tuesday, September 7: Defend the Defenders

What: Brazil’s Independence Day is a Day of Resistance in solidarity with Indigenous and earth defenders who are under attack for defending their rights, lives and territories across the Amazon. We’ll take this day to show solidarity with Women Defenders of the Amazon at the 2nd Indigenous Women’s March in Brazil (led by ANMIGA) and the Cry of the Excluded in Brazil.

For San Francisco Bay Area-based people, meet us for an evening action focusing on photo projections and songs of
Indigenous women defenders. We’ll hear about historical and present day struggles and the power of Indigenous women leadership. Online, we’ll offer learning opportunities, digital actions and a direct connection to on-the-ground activities in Brazil.

Where:
Online: Meet us on the Global Week of Action for the Amazon community page on NooWorld to learn more and engage
In-person: In front of the Brazilian Consulate at 300 Montgomery Street in San Francisco (register here to attend).

When:
Online: Throughout the day
In-person Action: 7 pm PDT

Wednesday, September 8: Amazon Health in Crisis
What: A webinar organized by Asamblea Mundial de la Amazonia (Global Amazon Assembly) and Amazon Emergency Fund to discuss the COVID-19 impacts, solutions, and actions.

Where: Meet us on the Global Week of Action for the Amazon community page on NooWorld to catch the live streaming of this event.

When: 10 am EDT

Thursday, September 9: Climate Justice for the Amazon: Stop False Solutions
What: A webinar organized by Amazon Watch to discuss "Net Zero" commitments and whether they are enough to protect the Amazon and stop climate chaos.

Where: Meet us on the Global Week of Action for the Amazon community page on NooWorld to catch the live streaming of this event. Register here to attend via Zoom.

When: 9:00 am PDT

Friday, September 10: Forests, Fires, Finance and Our Future
What: Join this Global Day of Action to call for an Amazon Ceasefire in solidarity and coordination with COICA youth, Youth vs. Apocalypse and more. It’ll be an opportunity to take action on corporations complicit in Amazon destruction as we visit their physical locations in downtown San Francisco.

Where:
Online: Meet us on the Global Week of Action for the Amazon community page on NooWorld to catch the live streaming of this event
In-person: BlackRock Headquarters, 400 Howard Street in San Francisco (more info here).

When: 1:00 pm PDT

Saturday, September 11: Honoring and Celebrating Life and Cultures of the Amazon
What: On this closing day of the 2021 Global Week of Action for the Amazon, we’re calling people to join us in celebration of the unique beauty and cultures from the Amazon. Tune in for livestream videos and messages from our Indigenous partners from the Amazon.

Brazil: the decimation continues
Survival International: “Stop Brazil’s Genocide”

Meanwhile our great ally Survival International launched a campaign in May, which we are happy to publicise here. The fund-raising campaign is called Stop Brazil’s Genocide and is introduced by this statement:

It is not a new story, the one we share of genocide against tribal peoples. For centuries their lands have been invaded and they have been killed, whether directly or indirectly by being exposed to diseases to which they have little or no immunity. The plight of Aruká Juma’s tribe epitomises the devastating impact of the Brazilian government’s failure to protect indigenous lands. Land rights have always been vital to the survival of tribal peoples, and the demarcation and protection of their land is even more urgent with the presence of a deadly virus which has crippled large parts of the world.

Although tribal rights continue to be violated, the time when entire peoples could be wiped out without people noticing is drawing to a close. Our supporters are committed to working alongside indigenous peoples in the fight to defend their lives and lands. You have donated to our campaigns, sent emails, posted on social media and used our activist kits to put pressure on President Bolsonaro from all angles. Public opinion is the most powerful force to create meaningful change, and your work has exhibited to the Brazilian government that the world will not turn a blind eye to their genocide.

Thank you for taking a stand against Brazil’s genocide. The fight is far from over, and we appreciate your continued support at this critical time for tribal peoples in Brazil and, indeed, around the world.

3. Endangered Languages in the News

Moeso-Romanian - a Balkan-Romance (collateral) language

Marcel Courthiade & Philippe Boula de Marciuil
1. Contact and field work with speakers of Moeso-Romanian

Contempt and rejection may result in ethnic confusion between populations basically different but amalgamated erroneously by outsiders, especially those with scarce direct contact with them. This was the case of several marginalized minor populations in Europe who were mistaken for Rroms (under the obsolete and inappropriate name of “gypsies”), although they share with Rroms only some fake clichés forged from outside. It was in the early nineties, while attempting to scientifically identify the ethno-historical profile of the Rroms that we first came in contact with speakers of a Romance idiom, close to Daco-Romanian, yet differing as if it were a diasporatic form of it. Later on we had more and more contacts with this population and its atypical Romanian-like idiom, mainly in Hungary and Northern Croatia. As a speaker of Romanian in both literary and rural Vojvodinian varieties, I was more and more strengthened in the view that the dialects of this population are closer to the local Romanian of Southern Serbia, as I had heard it in the seventies, than to “regular” Romanian. I had already been then amazed by the fact that the sub-Danubian Romance population was omitted in practically all studies devoted to Yugoslav Romanians, who lived supposedly only to the North of the Danube – and enjoyed real minority rights there. In addition, sub-Danubian Romanians used to self-identify in conversation as Serbs, although their mother tongue was not Serbian. They justified this surprising ethnicity saying “we go to the Serbian church, so we are Serbs and our home language has nothing to do with this”. It is appropriate at this point to recall that the Ottoman conception of nation (millet) relied on people’s denomination, not on their language.

Later on I extended my contacts with other persons of this population in various areas, namely Attica (Greece, village of Zefýri), where I was taken by the Greek Helsinki Watch Association. The inhabitants of this isolated settlement were convinced that they speak a language totally unknown elsewhere in the world and were stunned when I began to speak rural Banatian Romanian with them. In fact they had been in contact with Romanian tourists, but they had not identified their language as common to theirs because in communist times only the highest social classes could spend their holidays in Greece, classes whose language was closer to Italian than to rural Romanian and anyway used to speak English in Greece. These people were orthodox and referred to themselves as Gurbetzi (from Tk. grūbet “emigrant”). My further research brought me to Beás families of Somogy and Pécs counties (Southern Hungary), where I could hear again this Romance idiom close to Romanian. I even had the opportunity to teach in Nagyatád in a two week summer school a group of these young people, who rejoiced emotionally to hear such “serious subjects” as history taught in their idiom. In the meantime (1994) I had witnessed the astonishment of a political leader from Čakovec in Medunurje (Croatia), who had been sent as a “Rrom” to a conference in Budapest and discovered, when he began uttering his speech in his native Romance tongue, that nobody among the Rroms understood him. In fact his community had had no contact with genuine Rroms (all had been exterminated during WWII in the area) and he had no idea how Rromani looked. On the other side, the label “Cigani (gypsies)” given to them by old Croatian generations on the ground of their alleged laziness, filthiness, poverty, backwardness etc. had been replaced administratively (undifferentially) by “Rom” under Tito’s rule. The correct naming should have been Bajaš (a word cognate to Beás), as they are called locally.

During a trip and conference in Portorož (Slovenia) with three young Croatian Bajaš, there was a long discussion about an adaptation of the Romanian alphabet to their tongue, to break up with the Croatian script and a proposal was issued at the end of the travel. Upon their request, I adapted to this “new” alphabet the Beás translation of iános vítěz (by Petőfi) and this comparatively long text (more than 1400 verses) was circulated as grey literature. It was a period when I began to collect publications in their language, practically all from Hungary, and in Magyar script. In this country they are still mistaken by politicians as Rroms (for political reasons beyond the scope of this paper), whereas rural populations are very well aware of the difference between these two minorities. It is a pity that the BULAC (Paris) where I deposited the 32 volumes about them lost the whole collection. I collected also early publications devoted to them, among others a study by Gustav Weigang (1860-1930) about this population in Bosnia.

Unfortunately I did not collect linguistic material from these people due to several reasons:

- lack of time;
- lack of specific methodology, which could have been elaborated only on the basis of a substantial preliminary research;
- and most of all the conviction that a real study of this language (and culture) deserves full time research and that it belongs to the members of this community to care about their own heritage.

I tried for years to convince the authorities outside the former Yugoslavia, Hungary and Romania to help, thanks to scholarships, for a few young people of this community to study Romance philology and general linguistics, but this was in vain, despite the real interest of some talented youngsters among them. I was reluctant to address the authorities of the three aforementioned countries because of the heavy nationalistic ideology which could have biased the training of these young (and probably naive) people. In order to satisfy their interest, I accepted to explore the verbal morphology of two varieties of their language (Lonča and Darda, both in Croatia), as an example of field work in view of drafting a grammatical description.

In the past decade, I entered in contact with members of this community from Serbia living in Vienna, where in the context of emigration they had understood “that they are not Serbs like all others” and had set up their association called Oameni nostri “Our people” (there are thousands of them, living in Vienna – note that they say nostri and not nostri as in Romanian). They also organized a seminar on 04.05.2015 in Vienna “Roots – Auf den Spuren der Banjasch Minderheit” and are conducting now a linguistic and ethnological research among elders with Austrian funds – Austria, or more exactly the City of Vienna, is the only country which is considering to recognize them as a
specific minority – hence this project aimed at giving a scientific
ground to such a decision.

2. Linguistic specificity of Moeso-Romanian versus
other Balkan Romance languages

More than twenty-five years of sporadic practice of this
language, referred to by native speakers as svetadal’imbá de
băieşi, as well as more concrete descriptions of it, inclines me to
consider that these people are a diaspora of sub-Danubian
Romanian – incidentally called “Romanians of Timok” by
Romanian authorities, who “discovered” them after the
collapse of socialism and lapsing of overt and secret agreements
between Romania and Yugoslavia. However it is necessary
now to confirm this link by scientific methods – still wanting to be
elaborated. For the time being, one may consider that
Moeso-Romanian (called after the name of the Roman
antiquated province of Moesia, where it is spoken) is closer to
Daco-Romanian than to Arumanian or Meglenoromanian but
there are many differences from the former. The mutation of the
two alveolar affricates to soft fricatives is common with
Banatian dialect, but differs in quality from the Moldavian
similar evolution. There are also differences in vowels,
especially centralized sounds. The verbal system is noticeably
reduced as compared with Daco-Romanian and even
Aromanian. There are also specificities in the nominal system,
although these are not consistent for all varieties of Moeso-
Romanian. The syntax is globally the same as in other Balkan
languages and the Latin element of the lexicon is closer to
prototypical Balkan Romance than Romanian itself, not due to a
lack of evolution in Moeso-Romanian but on the contrary as a
result of the massive re-Latinisation of standard (literary)
Romanian, especially in the 19th century. On the other side,
there are numerous Serbisms in Moeso-Romanian as spoken in situ and it would be of high interest to track potential Serbisms in the varieties of the diaspora. The strong Hungarian influence on the Magyar soil is no wonder.

Just to give some examples, let us quote the following: lotru “thief” (old Slavic) instead of hot, ostên “tired” instead of oboiät, mis “I am” instead of sent, ro “very” instead of foarte, mă cîlc “I sleep” instead of dorm (this root is totally absent) etc. The language is very rich in idiomatic structures of all kinds, apparently even more in Hungary and Croatia, but this could be due to a lack of familiarity on my behalf with other varieties. One could take in parallel texts in Moeso-Romanian and their Daco-Romanian translations in order to establish a typology of differences. This method would be more reliable than mere intuition.

A lot could be said about Moeso-Romanian of Romania, now extinct but preserved in some books, mainly in Calota’s collection of ethno-texts.

Be it as it may, the over-simple explanation that Moeso-
Romanians are allegedly Roms who were “forbidden” to
speak their Romani mother tongue does not withstand
scrutiny and close examination. It cannot be substantiated
linguistically (Banatean features are found in all varieties of
Moeso-Romanian) and it is anachronistic in historical terms,
because there was never anything like banning the use in
Rromani: Rromani slaves were treated as cattle and nobody
cared how they spoke. If these were Rromani slaves locally
acculturated to Romanian, there is no way to explain how their speech contains Banatean elements, even far from Banat. In fact, various elements point to the hypothesis that not only Rroms were enslaved in Romania, but also, albeit to a lesser extent, Romance populations from South Serbia, who migrated to the
Danubian principalities and preferred slavery in a
comparatively opulent country to the even worse conditions
of life in Moesia. Mentions of this population appear sporadically, in very short phrases or allusions, in Romanian books,
including historical studies and it would be of the utmost
interest to gather and analyze them to reach a more objective image of the past of this population. We know from Latin
sources that Moesia was one of the earliest Latinized areas in
the Balkans (around 70 before our era) and this population
could be initially the heir of autochthonous Latinized Moesians. In other terms they could be one of the oldest ethnicities in the Balkans.

The observation of Moeso-Romanian in South Serbia prompts one to consider whether it arose from a South-Western (sub-
Danubian) dialect of Daco-Romanian, which remained outside the frontiers not only of the Romanian State but also out of reach of the Renaissance movement which led to the constitution of modern Romanian. In this respect it is a typical example of collateral language, a notion developed by Dawson (Lille university). The Beás and Bajaš idioms (also called Rudar, Ludar, Lingurar, Koritar, Gurbetz, Metskariões, Teknôscigányok, and Kopanar) can be considered simply as diasporic forms of this collateral language. They all call Roms “Lăcătari”.

3. Current spread of Moeso-Romanian in the Balkans and in the world today

If all the forms mentioned so far belong, as is probable, to a
Moeso-Romanian entity and its diaspora, one may say that it is
still very vivid in Serbia (with dozens of compact villages) and in the recent diaspora (mainly Austria and Germany). Scattered Moesian hamlets might still exist in Bosnia-Herzegovina but the language is most likely extinct there. Only a few settlements on the Bulgarian Riviera (near Varna and Burgas) have preserved the ancestral language, and the last one in Greece, Zefýri, has been ruined a few years ago as a result of violence after a non-eclucidated murder. Beás and Bajaš are well preserved in Hungary and Croatia respectively, despite efforts of both governments to eliminate them and teach their children Romani instead. The language disappeared after WWII in Romania and today’s Băieşi, deprived of their own mother
language, are erroneously labeled “Roms”, mainly because
Romanians refuse any kinship with a population who has been enslaved by their ancestors in the past and prefer continuing
to consider them as “gypsies” (a term meaning “slave” in medieval Romanian). Băieşi are afflicted by this situation. Their
number could amount some 100,000 to 200,000 in all the
country but all speak only (rural) Romanian, in the wake of an
assimilation made easier by the similarity of both languages.
Not only in Romania but also all over former Austro-Hungary
(including Bosnia), they are renowned for their skills in carving wooden instruments for the household (spoons, distaffs, bowls,
tubs, laundry vats [hence the name of Teknőscigány Hung. and Kopanar Sl.] and the like.

Outside Europe there are some 4000 Moesians in Colombia, where an ethnological survey in the eighties collected some 40 proverbs in their language. Communities have also been observed in Mexico, Chile and Argentina; the language is there also in danger – in addition, local authorities have taken over the European confusion of these people with Rroms and call them “gitanos”. This discourages self-esteem and hastens the fading of the mother tongue. One may wonder if it was still possible, by the end of the 20th century, to discover in Europe a “new” language, used by some 100,000 speakers and which had escaped the radars of researchers in linguistics. We hope we have given an answer to this question.

The case of Moeso-Romanian is of the utmost interest in terms of sociolinguistic studies and language policy because its very existence has been hidden – despite its number of speakers - due to mainstream attitudes inspired first by the Ottoman approach regarding nationalities and later by superficial categorizations in the Socialist regimes of former Yugoslavia and the Eastern bloc - in a different way, albeit leading to similar results. Furthermore, the attitude of various European institutions and foundations have continued the Socialist attitude of denial and consolidated a detrimental treatment of this language under some inappropriate principles, aimed theoretically at combating ethnic discrimination - but resulting in undermining the language under scrutiny. My conclusion would be to incite students to consider seriously the riches of the Moeso-Romanian linguistic and cultural heritage and devote a well inspired strategy of research to this subject, while avoiding the many ideological and nationalistic influences, unfortunately rampant in the domain.

Living-Language-Land: creative engagement with endangered and minority languages

“In our language, they left all of the lessons for us” Jessie ‘Little Doe’ Baird, Wampanoag Nation

With the international climate talks (COP26) taking place in Glasgow in November 2021, the British Council is supporting a series of projects that engage different audiences with the unfolding crises of climate change and biodiversity loss. One of these projects - Living-Language-Land - deals directly with the connections between language and relationship to land and nature, and there is a warm invitation to members of the FEL community to help guide and shape this project with their endangered language expertise.

The project’s instigators - UK-based artist Neville Gabie and creative producer Philippa Bayley - explain the focus and purpose of the project:

“The languages we speak shape how we understand the world around us, including our connections to land and nature. But as fast as we’re losing species from our planet, so we’re losing languages that offer different ways of seeing. What connections, ideas and wisdom are we losing as those languages are lost? What powerful strategies for sustainable living might they offer, to help us look afresh at the climate crisis?”

Part of the stimulus for the project was Neville and Joan Gabie’s engagement with the Wampanoag Nation of Mashpee, Massachusetts. They were led there by a 1663 printing of the Bible, translated into Wampanoag, which preceded a near extermination of the people and language. Efforts to reclaim the language have been led by Jessie ‘Little Doe’ Baird and other members of the Nation, as reflected in the short films Neville and Joan made. It was Jessie’s articulation of the importance of reclaiming the language and its messages of how to live that resonated with us. As Jessie says, “In our language, they left all of the lessons for us”.

Living-Language-Land is a creative project that invites people to see beyond the confines of their own language as we journey through minority and endangered languages that reveal different ways of relating to our planet. The project will share 26 words from different minority and endangered languages – and the stories behind them – in the weeks leading up to COP26. Contributors from across the world will share, in their own voices, what the words mean to them and their communities. And they will explain how climate change is challenging the deep bonds with land and nature that their words express. The project will take place online, using social media to engage a wide audience with these illuminating words. A dedicated website will share the stories behind the words and artistic and creative responses to the concepts that are shared. The project also hopes to have a presence at the COP26 conference itself, to engage directly with policymakers, researchers and NGOs. Together the words will form the beginnings of a rich word bank that offers a fresh, evocative perspective on our environmental crisis – one that’s beyond the scope of the Western-dominated conversation.

Living-Language-Land is already working with Colombian organisation Pedagogías Ancestrales and Muisca linguist Facundo Saravia on contributions from the Muiscan language. The project is also working with linguist Matthias Brenzinger (University of the Free State) on a contribution from the Khwe of Northern Namibia, and with artist Virginia MacKenny (University of Cape Town) on wider engagement in Southern Africa. We are exploring connections in Australia, India, Bhutan, Canada, USA and Russia, among others. We would welcome any other ideas or connections for the project to follow up.

Please contact Philippa Bayley (pipbayley@gmail.com) or Neville Gabie (NevilleGabie@gmail.com) with your ideas and suggestions.

https://www.nevillegabie.com/works/the-edge-of-things/
https://www.wlrp.org/project-history

A historic day for regional languages in France

By Paul Molac, Member of the French National Assembly for Morbihan’s 4th constituency, 8 April 2021, from the BreizhAmerika web-site (r.newsletter.breizh-amerika.com)

The bill relating to the protection of regional languages and their promotion, which I was defending, was definitively adopted by a very large majority this Thursday, April 8 in the National Assembly as part of the parliamentary day reserved for my group, Libertés et Territoires.

This is the first law devoted to regional languages definitively adopted under the Fifth Republic. This historic victory is due to the unprecedented mobilization of associations, educational networks and thousands of volunteers in all our territories who are committed to preserving this wealth which belongs to all of humanity. The determination of the deputies on all benches, and in particular of the majority, to adopt this bill in conformity with the outcome of the Senate is the symbol of the wide awareness of the need to save these regional languages in danger of dying out.

The purpose of this law is to enhance the protection, accessibility and visibility of regional languages in three areas: First of all in heritage, by recognizing that regional languages belong to France’s intangible heritage in order to be able to better protect them. Then in public life, by legally securing the display of regional language translations on inscriptions and public signs, as well as the use of diacritics from regional languages in civil status documents. We all remember the story of this Breton baby named Fanich, who had to go to the Court of Cassation to have the right to keep his tildé on the letter N.

Finally, in education, where we have now made significant progress, and in particular for the recognition of teaching by immersion in the regional language in public schools, as well as to make effective the payment of the school fee (forfait scolaire) for students in schools such as Diwan. Likewise, this law will make it possible to extend the possibilities for offering regional language education in public schools, so that as many establishments as possible can offer this education.

April 8 is a historic day for advocates of regional languages and I hope a turning point in the relationship between the Republic and its linguistic diversity.

More commentary on this legislation came in the newspaper Libération on 29 May 2021 (here translated by the editor):

Regional languages: the defenders of immersion are upset

By Miren Garaicoechea, Libération, 29 May 2021

The Constitutional Council has criticised that part of the law on regional languages that relates to immersion at schools in the public sphere. Appeals to demonstrate this Saturday bear witness to the fears for the permanence of the existing private structures.

“It’s an unprecedented attack on linguistic diversity in France,” claims the collective ‘Pour que vivent nos langues’ (So that our languages will live), which unites the main associations of private schools practising immersion in a regional language in France. This Saturday, in the Occitan region, Brittany, Alsace, Corsica and even the Basque country, demonstrations should be taking place in more than sixty towns to protest against the law criticised by the Constitutional Council for the protection of heritage and the promotion of regional languages. The law called ‘Molac’, named after Paul Molac, deputy for Morbihan, who tabled the bill (Libertés et Territoires group) has gone through a tortuous process. Initially broadly adopted by the National Assembly on 8 April (247 cross-party votes in favour, 76 against), it has been the object of a referral to the Constitutional Council, requested by 61 deputies in the majority. This move was certainly brought about by approaches from the Minister of National Education, Jean-Michel Blanquer. Initially interrogated as to the constitutionality of Article 6, on the financing of private schools, the Constitutional Council was finally concerned with two other propositions: the possibility of learning a regional language by immersion in the public sphere (Article 4) and of inscribing letters with diacritics in the civil state, such as the ñ in Breton or the ô in Creole or Occitan (article 9). Censured on 21 May by the Constitutional Council, these moves, very much expected by the defenders of regional languages, are actually absent from the law as promulgated on Sunday in the Journal official in its wake. “Experts” have expected that immersion teaching would confront Article 2 of the Constitution, which decrees that “the language of the Republic is French”. Advocates of immersion teaching in schools fear that this decision does not damage the sustainability of the sector of private education. Although modest, it has not stopped gathering more and more pupils.

To understand the reason for certain people’s anger, a reminder is in order. In France, regional languages can be studied in three ways. The first two apply to both public and private education, with the possibility of learning the language in a ‘living language’ class or with the choice of a baccalaureate subject, but also in bilingual teaching (50% in French, 50 in the regional language). Some 120,000 pupils study languages this way in schools of whom 60,000 study at ‘first’ level., according to the government.

The third way, immersion, is possible only in private establishments, often run by associations. In the Diwan schools in Brittany, the Ikastolas of the Basque country or the Occitan Calandretas, the pupils learn to read and write for the first time in their regional language in cours préparatoire (first grade). They talk with their teachers exclusively in their regional language, which promotes full mastery of the two languages. French is gradually introduced in certain courses, so that by the end of elementary school, the pupil can go on to a public college where the teaching will be completely in French. According to France Info, 160 establishments practising immersion would account for about 14,000 pupils, out of the 12 millions in France. “This method, which has existed for fifty years, gives excellent scholastic results, including those in French,” asserts Paul Molac.

Criticism of immersion in public education has caused a hue and cry. François Bayrou, the mayor of Pau (the capital of Béarn), and president of MoDem (the Democratic Movement), thundered to L’Express: “To delete with the stroke of a pen decades of efforts enacted to transmit these languages, which are part of France’s linguistic heritage, is inconsistent, unprecedented and dangerous. The President of the Republic should take up this issue.”
Ahead of the hemicycle on Tuesday, Prime Minister Jean Castex has affirmed that “regional languages are a chance for the Republic”. Two deputies are due to be mandated to list “all the consequences” of the decision of the Constitutional Council “several weeks” from now, an initiative demanded a short time ago by the minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, Jean-Yves Le Drian. “The languages of France are a national treasure, Emmanuel Macron asserted on Wednesday on his Facebook page, before indicating that he had “requested the government and Parliament to find means of guaranteeing the transmission of this linguistic diversity in the respect for the pedagogical outlines broadly recognised for the past half-century.”

The Minister of National Education, contacted by Libération, always prefers equally paired bilingual teaching to full immersion, and explains his view thus: “Experts praise the interest and the richness of plurilingualism. Now immersive teaching confines itself to a single language and thus does not permit fertile learning in school conditions as two languages, one of them French, do.” To reassure those who are anxious, at least in the short term he says: “The establishments concerned will not experience any evolution at the start of the next year.”

Paul Molac is worried about the short term as much as about the long one. “Thousands of pupils find themselves in legal uncertainty today, which is serious,” he told Libération. “The immersion method has been declared unconstitutional, not only for public education but also for ‘associated’ teaching. The decision of the Constitutional Council sets out that “if, in order to combine the protection and promotion of regional languages, the teaching of them can be provided in the establishments that ensure the public service of teaching or are associated with it, this is on the condition of respecting the requirements set out in Article 2 of the Constitution.”

Should the immersion schools integrate more of the French language? Should some classes or establishments promptly close? These questions will be exercising the demonstrators this Saturday. Véronique Bertile is a lecturer in public law at the University of Bordeaux, a specialist in regional languages. Her findings are twofold: “It’s fair to speak of judicial insecurity, because the decision allows one to infer that immersion teaching will be illegal, unconstitutional, contrary to Article 2. The way it has been edited may be worrying. Not only public education is referred to, but private as well, because they both have a mission of public service.” All the same, she strikes a reassuring note. “Despite this very rigid position, in practice the immersion method has not been abolished by any judge for the past twenty years. In practice, then, it is tolerated.”

Confronted with the many possibilities of interpretation, many would welcome a modification of Article 2 of the Constitution. This is true of Paul Molac, but also of Yannick Jadot, an MEP representing the Ecology Europe – the Greens faction. In a statement published by HuffPost on Thursday, he claims that “regional languages should acquire legitimate recognition and a legislative framework which would guarantee that they would no longer be at the mercy of regulatory reflexes inspired less by the long Jacobin, centralising tradition than by a concern to understand French society as it is: plural, polyglot, and interwoven with diverse languages and cultures.”

In confining regional languages to the sphere of bilingualism, the Minister of National Education makes no secret of the fact that he is trying to protect himself from something else. Here “the idea is to avoid having schools develop with teaching that would be in another language than French, according to separatist reasoning, financed by foreign states or organisations” – this is meaningless to Véronique Bertile: “Regional languages have a very particular status which responds to two criteria – historical and geographical. Languages which are the result of immigration, such as Arabic, do not have the same status. Politicians make play with this amalgam,” she ventures.

For the moment, the government is welcoming preparations for “a voluntarist plan to re-establish these options for foreign languages and to develop ‘synchronous distance teaching’ starting from the next intake,” explained Jean-Michel Blanquer to Ouest-France on 21 May. His office, questioned by Libération, specified: “A pupil will be able to follow courses provided by a teacher who is located in another establishment. This teaching will then be face-to-face, contrary to the option offered by CNED (National Centre for Distance Education), available from 2021 in four languages – Basque, Breton, Occitan, Corsican – and will be able to integrate distance interactions between the pupils concerned and the teacher.” The minister gave an assurance that “synchronous distance education does not do the job of substituting for face-to-face teaching, it is a supplementary option offering a real enrichment.” In parallel, some “practical initiation language studios” should be made available to “popular education collectives and associations.” Distance education? Studios? Can one be sure that this will be enough to ensure the transmission of the approximately seventy regional languages of France to future generations?

**Natural cures may be lost if indigenous languages die**

By Phoebe Weston, from the Guardian (UK), 9 June 2021

Knowledge of medicinal plants may disappear as some indigenous languages become extinct, a study has suggested. Indigenous languages contain vast knowledge about ecosystem services provided by the natural world around them. However, more than 30% of the 7,400 languages on the planet are expected to disappear by the end of the century, according to the UN.

The impact of language extinction on ecological knowledge was often overlooked, said the study’s lead researcher, Dr. Rodrigo Cámara-Leret, a biologist from the University of Zurich. “Much of the focus looks at biodiversity extinction, but there is a whole other picture out there which is the loss of cultural diversity.”
His team looked at 12,000 medicinal plant services associated with 230 indigenous languages in three regions with high levels of linguistic and biological diversity – North America, north-west Amazonia and New Guinea. They found 73% of medicinal knowledge in North America was found in just one language; 91% in north-west Amazonia; and 84% in New Guinea. If the languages became extinct, medicinal expertise associated with them probably would too.

“The loss of language will have more critical repercussion to the extinction of traditional knowledge about medicinal plants than the loss of the plants themselves, said Câmara-Leret. The areas with languages most at risk were in north-west Amazonia, where 100% of this unique knowledge was supported by threatened languages, and in North America, where the figure was 86%. In New Guinea 31% of languages were at risk. The anticipated loss of linguistic diversity would “substantially compromise humanity’s capacity for medicinal discovery,” according to the paper, published in PNAS [Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, USA].

Such knowledge included using plant latex to treat fungal infections, using bark for digestive problems, fruits for respiratory ailments, as well as natural stimulants and hallucinogens. “Even the best plant taxonomists out there are amazed by the breadth of knowledge of indigenous cultures,” said Câmara-Leret.

More than 1,900 of the languages spoken now have fewer than 10,000 speakers and the UN has declared 2022-2032 the International Decade of Indigenous Languages.

Jordi Bascompte, an ecologist from Zurich University and the paper’s second author, said European medicinal knowledge may be the “tip of the iceberg”. There may be many more chemical components in plants that could unlock new treatments. “Any insight, regardless of where it comes, from, may end up being useful.”

‘The right thing to do’

**Restoring Aboriginal place names key to recognising Indigenous histories**

*By Calla Wahlquist, from the Guardian (Australia), 28 May 2021*

The first recorded name for the finger of land that sticks out at the entrance to Lake Macquarie, 100km north of Sydney, is Keep Clear Point, an instructive if unimaginative label marked on a map drawn in 1841. In the 1900s it became known by another name — Coon Island, apparently for a resident named Herbert Greta “Coon” Heaney.

Now it is being renamed again. In February, Lake Macquarie council began a community consultation process to investigate alternative names. Among the options under consideration is to change the name to Galgabba, a name for the area used by the Awabakal people.

Similar conversations are happening around Australia. In 2017, the Queensland government renamed seven places that included the word “nigger”. In 2020, after global Black Lives Matter protests, Western Australia renamed the King Leopold Ranges, named after the brutal colonial Belgium monarch, the Wunaamin Miliwundi Ranges, using both the Ngarinyin and Bunuba names for the area.

But many Aboriginal communities argue that renaming landscapes should not be limited to removing overtly racist names.

In Bundaberg in south-eastern **Queensland** there is a push to rename places where massacres of Aboriginal people took place.

“A lot of those places are named after the … protectors or inspectors of Aborigines,” says Melinda Holden from First Languages Australia. Holden is a Taribelang woman, one of the traditional owners of Bundaberg.

Protector or inspector of Aborigines was the title given to people responsible for controlling, and often removing, Aboriginal people.

“You have to expose the truth at a lot of the massacre sites – truth-telling and getting appropriate names for them,” she says. “We have a few massacre sites here in Bundaberg that we’re trying to work with the powers that be to get them renamed. There’s still a lot of people that don’t want to change the names.”

Holden says sites of frontier violence, such as Cedar Creek in Bundaberg and The Leap in Mackay, named for an Aboriginal woman who was driven over a cliff holding a child in her arms, should be renamed and have their histories properly contextualised.

Other areas, such as Fraser Island or K’gari, should just be renamed in accordance with the wishes of local people, she says.

There may be a period of transition, just as there was when **Uluru** was renamed from Ayers Rock in 1993, “but in the end it’s the right thing to do”.

“That’s all we call [Uluru] now, nobody gets hot under the collar anymore,” she says.

The national park which spans most of Fraser Island was renamed K’gari, the Butchulla name, in 2017.

“We have always known this as K’gari, local people call it K’gari,” says Holden. “It should not be dual named, it should be named K’gari island, not Fraser Island.”

Most Australian jurisdictions now have dual naming policies, which allow geographical features to be identified by both their traditional and colonial name.
Dual naming is one way to teach the broader community the Aboriginal history of a place, Holden says. For communities that had language stripped from them through colonisation, it is a way to reclaim and preserve words which may otherwise have been lost.

“We’re confident enough now to make sure we hand it down,” she says. “We know our culture, and we know it through and through. A lot of people down south here, on the eastern coast, we didn’t have that exposure to our culture, like up in the central desert and northern Australia. We were robbed of that. It was taken off us by the protectors. Now we’re able to build on that and are a lot more confident about it.”

The introduction of native title laws in 1993 has aided the process to identify traditional place names in areas with fewer living language speakers. Researching the history of an area and its families, language and boundaries is part of the lengthy process to claim native title. It creates a map of who has authority to name what area.

“All our tribes, we have our boundaries and we know our boundaries,” Holden says. “Thanks to native title we have all had to sit down and work it out.”

But in the areas most devastated by colonisation, native title has provided little assistance. There have been no successful native title applications in Tasmania. There is no formal system to declare who speaks for what country. And in the past five years, the debate over dual naming has become very messy.

In 2016, the Liberal government introduced a “new approach to Aboriginal eligibility” which replaced the nationally used three-part definition of Aboriginality – descent, self-identification and community recognition – with just one step, self-identification.

Before that change, Aboriginal place names were put forward by the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre, which has been representing the Tasmanian Aboriginal community and conducting research on Tasmanian language and place names for more than 30 years.

“The remnants of language that were left were not enough to revive one single language from,” says the director of the TAC’s language program, Annie Reynolds. “So after months of discussions around the state in extensive consultations in 1993 and 1994, the community accepted that there would have to be, or that there could be, one language put together from all the original languages.

The result of that research is palawa kani, a reconstructed language for lutruwita (Tasmania). It was pieced together from word lists left behind by European settlers following extensive community consultations.

Place names in palawa kani are taken from the best available record of the local name for a place. Many were recorded by George Augustus Robinson, the “protector of Aboriginals” who toured Tasmania in the 1830s as part of an effort to round up people who had survived the Black War. He recorded more than 4,500 Aboriginal words in his journals and later made similar recordings in the Port Phillip area in Victoria.

Some of the languages spoken in Port Phillip were later captured in audio recordings of older speakers, which allowed the Tasmanian language researchers to reverse engineer the pronunciation of Tasmanian words and, using the international phonetic alphabet, develop a spelling system.

In 2012, the Tasmanian government recognised 13 traditional place names in palawa kani put forward by the TAC, including kunyani for Hobart’s Mount Wellington.

But the Liberal government changed the dual naming policy in 2019, and in March approved 15 new dual names nominated by groups other than the TAC, including Kennaook for Cape Grim, the site of an 1828 massacre in which 30 Aboriginal people died, and Taneneryouer for Suicide Bay.

The TAC contests the new names and put forward the name pilri for Cape Grim, taynayuwa for the cliff where the people were killed, and luwuka for Suicide Bay.

Earlier pushes to reintroduce Aboriginal names in the landscape of south-eastern Australia were met with considerable resistance.

In 1992, the Victorian government renamed the Grampians national park as the Grampians (Gariwerd) national park, but the decision was reversed after a change of government in 1992 and official use of Gariwerd was not reinstated until after the dual naming act was introduced in 1998.

Gariwerd, the name in the local Jardwadjali and Djabwurrung languages, was first recorded by George Augustus Robinson.

The area was named the Grampians by the Australian surveyor general Major Sir Thomas Mitchell in 1836.

Mitchell had issued a directive in 1828 to surveyors to “be particular in noting the native names of as many places as you can on your map”, but failed his own directive in south-western Victoria because his travelling party killed seven Aboriginal people at a place he named Mount Dispersion, meaning that local people would not speak to him.

Mitchell’s directive to use Aboriginal place names, where possible, echoed the practices of most European surveyors in Australia from the 1780s onwards, who transcribed – often incorrectly – local Aboriginal place names on maps used by settlers to carve up the land.
Names such as Wollongong, Wagga Wagga, Toowoomba and Coolangatta are derived from the languages of the Indigenous inhabitants.

Ian Clark was the geographer tasked with identifying local Aboriginal place names in Gariwerd in the early 1990s.

“There was significant opposition locally and across the state to the proposal,” Clark says. “I think because the approach [from traditional owners] was not upfront a willingness to accept dual naming. A lot of people were very uncomfortable with the erasure of non-Indigenous names, which they had formed a considerable degree of attachment to. And that process became more and more politicised as the debate went on.”

Had dual naming been put forward as a solution at the start, he says, the debate may not have become so heated. But some responses were “quite ridiculous”, he says.

“One person was saying, well what’s going to be next, are we going to change the name of the Dandenongs?” he says. “But the Dandenongs already have an Indigenous name.”

Some other place names were not adopted because they were seen as a risk to local tourism. The name for McKenzies Falls is Mikunung wira, the place where the blackfish (wirap) can go no higher. Mount Stapleton, named for Mitchell’s second in command, was known as Gunigalk, or excrement stick.

“That was actually a wonderful insight into traditional practices, because in traditional times Indigenous people were very concerned that their enemies never got access to any part of their human body, including their waste. So they deliberately carefully buried their excreta,” Clark says.

“But the local tourism authorities just could not accept a place name that meant excrement stick.”

4. Obituaries

Marcel Courthiade

As mentioned in the previous issue of Ogmios, the linguist Marcel Courthiade, who had so recently contributed an article for us and still had plans for more, died suddenly in Tirana on 4th March 2021. Below is an appreciation of him sent by his collaborator Philippe Boula de Mareuil. It comes from the French on-line journal Le Courrier des Balkans. (Saturday 6 March 2021) The translation is mine – Editor.

Romanies of the Balkans: Homage to Marcel Courthiade

The eminent linguist Marcel Courthiade, a specialist in the Romany language, died on 4 March 2021 in hospital in Tirana. He will be buried in the Albanian capital, where he lived with his wife Jeta. In Romany as in Latin, it is customary to farewell the deceased with “may the earth be light for him”. Marcel Courthiade was born on 2 August 1953 at Montceau-les-Mines, to French parents. He defined himself as a European, or rather an Indo-European, of Greek and Romany origins. He maintained the mystery of his origins. It must be said that Marcel was an atypical intellectual, one who was fascinating and engaging. His humour and his stutter marked his genius. It was as if his ideas ran faster than his words.

A linguist, a teacher, a researcher, and interpreter and an activist, he always worked with determination. His thirst for knowledge was limitless. He devoured books as his brother, a professional pianist, devoured scores. He had an elephant’s memory which allowed him to learn everything by heart, especially languages.

After studying medicine, he devoted himself to linguistics. With university degrees in Polish, Serbo-Croatian, Albanian and Macedonian, he even obtained a ‘DEA’ in Oceanic languages at INALCO in Paris. As a pupil of Georges Calvet, he became a specialist in Romany, in all its varieties. He also knew Sanskrit, Hebrew, Latin and Greek, and spoke English, German, Spanish, Italian, Hungarian, Romanian and Russian.

In a word, there was no quenching his thirst for knowledge. The vast territory of the Balkans was his preferred research area. He traversed it in every sense, engaging with its inhabitants. Passionate about languages, cultures and history, he was destined to spend his time in travelling, communicating, translating, reading, writing and publishing.

In 1990 in Warsaw he had participated in the Congress of the International Romany Union in the capacity of a language commissioner, providing the basis for the transcription and standardisation of the Romany language. Five years later in Paris he completed a doctorate on the ‘Phonology of Rom varieties and a graphic system for the Romani language’, supervised by Claude Hagège. Since 1997 he had been a lecturer in Romany language and culture at INALCO (Paris). His bibliography takes up thirty pages, full of voluminous references. He leaves behind him an immense intangible legacy and, alas, a good deal of uncompleted work. His departure leaves an enormous void.

Just before he died, Marcel had completed, collaborating with Philippe, an article on their research into Moeso-Romanian, which you will find in the Endangered Languages in the News section of this issue.

The Last Song: Semali Panai of Long Semadoh Rayeh, 1936 - 2021

By Jey Lingam Burkhardt, Sunway University, Malaysia

After a long journey into the tropical rainforest highland of Borneo, I arrived in Long Semadoh Rayeh, which is in the highlands of Lawas, a northern district of Sarawak which is nestled on the north by Sabah, south Brunei and east Kalimantan, Indonesia. I was in search of a “mumuh” singer, a traditional art of singing storytelling by the Lun Bawang people of Borneo. When I arrived in Long Semadoh Rayeh, I met this amazing gentleman.
Epu' Semali Panai walked directly to the house of Mr. Singah Buas, where I was stationed to conduct my recordings (epu’ means grandpa in Lun Bawang). A rather unassuming looking older gentleman (85 years old) in his work shorts and tattered shirt, he asked us what was the nature of our visit. When my interpreter (Mr. Joseph Dawat Langup) told him that I was there in search of “mumuh” singers and if he knew of any. He volunteered to sing some songs he knew, except that he told me to wait for a moment and that he would like to shower and change his clothes. After I had set up my recording station, there appeared this regal old gentleman in his beautiful tribal warrior attire [see cover picture]. That afternoon I managed to record his last rendition of a summarized version of “mumuh” and “benging”, with his clear diction and vocal resonance. He also played the local zither with a variety of local beats. And he seemed so proud of their traditional melody, attire and the archaic language used. Epu’ Semali Panai, sang beautifully that afternoon, unbeknownst to me that that would be the last time I would hear him sing.

Despite his daily duties as a farmer of the famous hill paddy of Borneo, “beras adan”, Epu’ was also a talented craftsman of tribal motif handicraft, which includes carving, weaving, and iron work decoration on machetes. He is well known also for his master craftsmanship in making things such as fish traps, blow pipes from hardwood, and animals trap for daily personal consumption of meat. People tell me that although he was well versed with his traditional songs such as “mumuh”, “benging”, “siga”, “labab”, “ada”, and “tulu”, his favourite song was, ‘Katu Luk ’nan Mawa Tu-tu’ (Amazing Grace). On 21 Jan 2021, Epu’ Semali Panai went into the hands of his Creator. He had sung his last song, and went home, creating a huge irreplaceable gap in the Lun Bawang heritage.

His full name was Semali Panai, of the tribe of Lun Bawang of Sarawak, Malaysia. His village was Long Semadoh Rayeh, Lawas district, Sarawak, and he was a farmer and craftsman. He was born on 15th July 1936, and had 10 children: daughters Saran, Maria, Demaris and Belinda, and sons Markus, Seliman, Johnny, Robert, Seems and Jeffery.

Note: My sincere thanks to Mr. Joseph Dawat Langup and Mr. Singah Buas for providing me with information needed for this write-up. Without their expertise and help, it would have been impossible for me to have made this precious recording.

5. Reviews

Visionary architecture and a language in peril

Nicholas Drofiak: IᴚÚSAN or, Canting for Architects

Series Architectural Knowledge. GTA Verlag, ETH Zurich 2020. ISBN 978-3-85676-408-1

This extraordinary book falls between so many stools - architecture, cultural history, endangered language studies, typography and graphic art – that it could easily be overlooked by anyone wanting to stay within the narrow ambit of their own field. So I’m grateful to the author for sending it to me for review, because, as you can see from the title, the average scholar of endangered languages is unlikely to notice its existence.

Briefly, the background to the tale it tells is this: In 1931 the architect Ivan Ilich Leonidov was sent 2,800 kilometres northeast of Moscow to assist in constructing the Soviet Union’s new Arctic port of Igarka. Presented as an inscription of the future into the vast void of Siberia, the city in fact stood in the traditional territory of speakers of an indigenous language, Ket. The last survivor of its linguistic family, today spoken by fewer than twenty people, Ket offers a grammatical model of reality unrelated to Indo-European language structures.

To quote from the cover blurb, “This transdisciplinary work engages the Ket language as a medium of academic architectural discussion. An encounter mediated between Leonidov’s fantastical ‘City of the Sun’ drawings and Ket speaker and linguist Dr. Zoá Vasil’evna Maksunova becomes the lens through which to investigate uncertain, creative processes of hybridisation, fiction-making and translation both as subjects and as means of research practice. Linguistic theory is fused with historical eclectics to question diverse interpretations of Siberia, Igarka’s landscape and indigenous positionality, while the work’s graphic elements and lyrical prose challenge conventional ways in which architectural history and knowledge are constructed.”

That is an accurate assessment. Everything about this book seems unique: the typography, layout, even orthography, the photographs, the reproductions of Leonidov’s highly abstract and visionary architectural drawings, and the discussions of the Ket language and the world-view it represents. It is a mixture of the playful, the scientific, the philosophical and the artistic.

The author, Nicholas Drofiak, is not a professional linguist but an early career fellow at the School of Creative Arts, Performance and Visual Cultures, University of Warwick. He earned his doctorate from the Institute for History and Theory of Architecture at ETH Zurich in 2016 and a Master of Architecture from Cardiff University in 2012.

Reading this book is an adventure. Not only are the typography and (occasionally) orthography unusual, but each page is festooned with footnotes and asides, which would be annoying if there weren’t so many other visual diversions. The book is itself rather self-analytical: over several pages toward the end it contains an ‘Analytical Table of Contents’. This is rather frustrating as a guide to the rest of the book, and it is difficult to even find out the meaning of the book’s title and the term ‘canting’, which seems to refer to parsing of grammatical and morphological concepts in Ket which are not found in Indo-European languages.

Ivan Leonidov (1902-1959) was a visionary Russian architect who matured in the ferment of Constructivism. He was very prolific on paper, though little of what he proposed and designed was actually realised. His ‘City of the Sun’ project was a private vision which extended over many years, not just the brief Igarka phase; there isn’t much biographical detail in this book that extends beyond that phase.

A reviewer for a journal of architecture might be just as puzzled and fascinated by this book as a reviewer for an endangered...
language journal is. That’s not to say it isn’t a rewarding experience, but if you want to learn about the Ket language and its structure, you had better look elsewhere. If you want to discover the collision of the isolated Ket culture with Soviet central planning and with one man’s vision, then you will be fascinated.

Chris Moseley

Poems from the Edge of Extinction

Chris McCabe (ed.): Poems from the Edge of Extinction: an anthology of poetry in endangered languages.

Introduced by Mandana Seyfeddinipur and Martin Orwin.


Poetry might be called the distillation of language in concentrated form, and therefore the most distinctive features of any language appear in poems in sharpened relief, either because of the intensity of expression, the vividness of the imagery, or the dexterity of syntax one finds in poems. This volume is a very welcome addition to the library of any endangered-language enthusiast, and any lover of poetry, and now that it’s here, it seems somehow long overdue. Previously it’s been possible to sample poetry in one particular language or from one region, and we’ve reviewed some of those collections on these pages – but this work is of a different order or magnitude. It is a parallel-text volume, arranged on a continent-by-continent basis, starting with Africa and moving alphabetically through the Americas, Asia, Europe and the Middle East to Oceania. Within each continent the languages are also arranged alphabetically. Of course the languages represented in 336 pages are only a small sprinkling of the possible languages available, but writing in a small indigenous language has to be done out of love for the language itself, as there are unlikely to be pecuniary rewards. There are some real gems here, and it is a true linguistic feast.

Background information about each language and each poem is provided by the editor, who has obviously done diligent research. Chris McCabe is better qualified to do this than most: he is National Poetry Librarian at the National Poetry Library in the Southbank Centre in London (where poets from indigenous communities have frequently performed); Chris launched the Endangered Poetry Project in 2017, and this effort to collect poetry in the disappearing languages of the world has resulted in this treasure of a book.

Two introductions start off the book: one by Dr. Mandana Seyfeddinipur, director of the Endangered Languages Documentation Programme and the Endangered Languages Archive at SOAS in London, and one by Dr. Martin Orwin, Senior Lecturer in Somali and Amharic at the same institution.

Highly recommended!

Chris Moseley

Book on Revitalizing Endangered Languages

Long-term FEL member and supporter Julia Sallabank, Professor of Language Policy and Revitalisation, at SOAS in London, in collaboration with Justyna Olko (University of Warsaw), has edited a new book: Revitalizing Endangered Languages: A Practical Guide, published by Cambridge University Press. The book is an outcome of the Horizon 2020 Twinning project (2016–19) and includes contributions from many of our collaborators. We hope to review the book in the next issue.

Book on Contested Languages of the Old World

On 23 March 2021, the book Contested Languages of the Old World, edited by Marco Tamburelli (Bangor) and Mauro Tosco (Turin), was launched at an on-line event conducted by the Associazione Gilberto Onerto with the participation of the co-editors and interviewers Gianfrancesco Ruggeri and Simona Scuri. The event was recorded and is accessible through this Facebook link:


The book, which is a collection of conference papers, is published by John Benjamins and has been reviewed in The Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development; the review is accessible on this link:


6. Activities on the Internet

StAnza Poetry Festival 2021

StAnza 2021, the Scottish international poetry festival, took place from 6 to 14 March 2021 as a hybrid festival, partly in person, partly on-line. Participating in it among the international guests were the three poets from Latgale, Latvia, whose collective volume was reviewed in Ogmios 68. More details of the festival and its presentations can be found on the StAnza web-site: https://stanzapoetry.org/

Virtual workshop on Endangered Languages & Artificial Intelligence

We received news of this event too late for the previous issue. Peter Dekker is a PhD student studying language change using agent-based models, at the AI Lab of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel. Together with his colleague Katie Mudd, he organised a workshop on the use of agent-based computer simulations for language preservation, targeted at linguists and development organizations. Agent-based models can be used to simulate the factors that endanger languages, and evaluate possible measures that can be taken before implementing policies in real life.

The event was held on Thursday 25th of March. The on-line introduction explained the issue:

How can AI techniques be used to help language preservation and documentation efforts? In this half-day virtual event, language researchers from the VUB AI lab will provide an introduction to how agent-based computer
simulations can support field linguists and development organizations. Agent-based models can be used to simulate the factors that endanger languages, and evaluate possible measures that can be taken before implementing policies in real life.

- Theory about agent-based models
  - Introduction by Prof. Bart de Boer
- Four case studies to showcase agent-based modeling for language documentation and preservation
  - Katie Mudd discussed her research.

Council for European Studies: 27th International Conference

FEL was represented on a panel at the 27th International Conference of the Council for European Studies, held on-line from 21 to 25 June 2021. The conference, originally scheduled as a live event in Reykjavík in June 2020, was postponed to this year and inevitably became a virtual one. Language was only one of the many Europe-related topics covered by this huge week-long conference. Our panel, chaired by Eda Derhemi, was concerned with endangered languages in Europe, and FEL was represented by Eda, Chris Moseley, and Riitta Valijärvi. The late Marcel Courthiade had also been due to speak, but he passed away in March (see article, this issue), so Eda delivered his paper in his memory...

More Pictures of Semali Panai singing in Lun Bawang attire...

... and playing the telingut, a traditional instrument.