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Contact the Editor:
Christopher Moseley,
9 Westdene Crescent,
Caversham Heights,
Reading RG4 7HD, England
chrmos50 at gmail.com

Assistant Editors: Eda Derhemi, Serena d’Agostino
Formatting Editor: Nicholas Ostler

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1. Editorial

The Foundation for Endangered Languages can now look back proudly on 25 years of activities on behalf of the world’s disadvantaged language communities. In this issue we will show off a little: apart from the usual news items on the world’s endangered language communities, we have an article on some of the grants we have awarded over the past few years and their recipients. They come from all over the world and they have fascinating tales to tell.

We have a celebration to mark our anniversary at the Aga Khan Centre in London. You will be receiving this issue when it has already passed (8- April), and I apologise once again for the lateness of this issue in reaching you; the delay has been caused partly by the preparations for the anniversary.

Preparations are also under way for our next annual conference, which is about to be announced as I write. The venue will be Albuquerque, New Mexico, and the date will be in the first week of November. Please watch this space, and our website www.ogmios.org, for further details and the Call for Papers.

Speaking of conferences, important changes are afoot in the way we produce our annual conference Proceedings. FEL has entered into an agreement with Brill, the distinguished publishers of scientific volumes on language, to produce our Proceedings volumes in future years as part of a series of Yearbooks. Not only past three years as well. As you will know, the Proceedings of FEL XXIII (Sydney), and FEL XXIV (London) have not appeared yet, and FEL XXV (Tirana) has been distributed to guests at the conference but not been made generally available yet. Now, with a series editorial board and the publishing and distribution expertise of Brill, we hope to put our annual volumes on a surer footing for the future.

In this issue we also proudly present an article on the life and work of one of our senior Committee members, Dr. Tjeerd (Tseard) de Graaf, reproduced by kind permission of the CIPL journal. Chris Moseley

2. Development of the Foundation

FEL Impact, Supporting Endangered Languages through Grants:

By Hakim Eliazarov, FEL Grants officer

The United Nations has proclaimed an International Decade of Indigenous Languages which has started in 2022. It is recognised that most of the indigenous languages are endangered and their preservation requires concerted efforts, which UN has acknowledged and promotes through its UNESCO programs.

Foundation for Endangered Languages (FEL) had taken the challenge of supporting the endangered languages 25 years ago. While FEL marks its Silver Jubilee, it is worth reflecting on the revitalisation efforts and the activities which the organisation has undertaken in the course of a quarter of a century.

We take pride in our efforts to support increasing number of projects and proposals annually and award grants to some of the exceptional initiatives. We have enabled many researchers, activists and speakers of endangered languages to protect and revitalise their languages in many corners of the world.

Starting from 1998 FEL awarded grants to almost 170 applicants from over 30 countries worldwide, including Europe, Asia, Africa, Pacific Ocean. North and South America. It is worth mentioning that most of the grants are awarded to projects in developing countries of Asia and Africa, where the Endangered Languages are most vulnerable. FEL awarded over 80 grants to the applicants from these continents. Though the FEL grants are modest, we are witnessing the growing interest in our grants and are receiving reports and success stories from the field attesting to the impact of the FEL sponsored projects primarily in generating enthusiasm among the local communities who have vast interest in the preservation of their tradition and culture.

In this edition of Ogmios we will highlight the work of the grantees, their success stories and challenges. Our grant recipients are truly messenger of good will, who work relentlessly with speech communities documenting their languages, creating written scripts, organising training programs, developing learning and teaching materials, capturing oral traditions and publishing resources for the communities to appreciate and revive their vanishing languages.

We start with highlighting and introducing our last year grant recipients, who, in spite of the challenges of Covid 19 embarked on their projects. Some of them are at the final stage of the completion of the projects and some have already shared with us the outcome of their endeavours in the form of dictionaries and learning materials.
Meet our Grantees

By Hakim Elnazarov, FEL Grants officer

Akpobome Diffre-Odiete works at the Department of Language Documentation and Preservation which is part of the African Literature Preservation Enterprise. He has BA in Linguistics and has vast experience in computational language documentation. He has already carried out various projects, including ‘Pictorial and Audio-Visual Documentation of Oral Genres of Okpe’, ‘Documenting the Endangered Material Knowledge of the Broom and Fibre Rope Production of the Urhobo People of Nigeria’ and other projects funded by various international organisations.

Akpobome Diffre-Odiete

FEL has awarded Akpobome Diffre-Odiete with a grant for his project ‘Documenting Uvwie and Developing a Comparative Reader of Cultural Unity for Okpe, Urhobo and Uvwie Speakers of Nigeria’. The project entails collecting data on Uvwie language, and producing a reader for the three languages of the Urhobo people. Akpobome Diffre-Odiete aims to erase the fear of ethnic division and make the resources acceptable to the Urhobo community in Nigeria. This project will complement his former works and will enable children to use the languages in schools.

Madina Saidshoeva

Madina Saidshoeva comes from Central Asia from the Pamir region, which is home to some of the most endangered languages of the region, including Shughni, Rushani, Ishkashimi, Wakhi, etc. FEL supported number of projects in the region and even organised an international conference in Khorg, Tajikistan at the heart of the Central Asian Mountains, in collaboration with local academic institutions.

Madina has Ph.D. in Ethnography and Anthropology from the Tajik National University (Dushanbe, Tajikistan). Apart from being a Shughni speaker, she has intensive experience of interviewing speakers of the Pamiri languages for various projects. Madina feels that she has a deep connection to the culture surrounding the target language and to the mission of its preservation. In the last eight years, she was engaged in many projects related to the Shughni language and Pamiri culture overall. Madina is part of the local network of researchers and activists who strive to encourage the use of Shughni in public spheres.

The title of Madina’s FEL-sponsored project, is “Tales of Pamir”. The project aims to collect short stories across the Pamir region (GBAO province, Tajikistan). Told by various Shughni-speaking residents of different ages, gender, and background it aims to preserve the essence of the Shughni language through the collection of real-life stories. The stories collected in form of series of video and audio interviews will be shared across several social media platforms, and further will expand into a blog and published in a form of book. The book will be multilingual with Shughni as a primary language and Russian-English accompanied translations as a helpful guide for researchers and language activists in Tajikistan and abroad. The project will be carried out with a team of a local organisation “Verudam” (tr. We have discovered) in Tajikistan, which is working on preservation of the Pamiri languages.

Alejandro Machuqui Domínguez

Alejandro Domínguez is associated with organisation known as Central Indigena de Pueblos Originarios de la Amazonia de Pando (CIOAP) in Bolivia. His is a speaker of endangered Ese Eja language spoken in the northern Bolivian Amazon. A sociolinguist by profession, Alejandro has been a member of the Ese Eja Language and Culture Institute and participated in the
design and officialization of Ese Eja alphabet. He strongly believes in the importance of passing the knowledge of the community through language to future generation of the indigenous community.

Alejandro utilises the FEL grant to develop a Digital Dictionary for Ese Eja, an Endangered Amazonian Language of Northern Bolivia.

Ese Eja is a Takanan language located in the northern region of the Bolivian Amazon. It is spoken in different communities by members of all ages. However, the rapid incursion of Spanish into the communities and surrounding areas represents a menace to the vitality of the language since many speakers are shifting to Spanish, especially children.

This dictionary project consists of the creation of a lexical database solicited from native speakers of Ese Eja. Lexical items and more specialised vocabulary will be obtained from the elders through focus groups and meetings. The database will be exported in two formats, into a printable document for a paper dictionary and into an easy-to-share digital dictionary for cell phones and tablets. The entries in the dictionary will contain a headword, a phonetic transcription, a grammatical category, a gloss and some will contain example sentences and pictures. The digital dictionary will have an extra feature which will be audio samples of all entries pronounced by native speakers. The materials are expected to be widely spread among the speakers, young learners of the language, researchers and the general public interested in the language documentation and preservation.

Jarrette K. Allen and Rebecca J. Moore

Jarrette K. Allen

Rebecca J. Moore

Jarrette K. Allen and Rebecca J. Moore are doctoral candidates at the Tulane University, USA and are actively involved in the Language Program of the university. Jarrette is currently the Assistant Professor of French at McNeese State University in Lake Charles, Louisiana.

Jarrette and Rebecca received FEL grant for their innovative project called Development of Online Collaborative Dictionary Software for Bantayanon. Bantayanon belongs to the larger Austronesian family and is spoken in Bantayan Island in Cebu Province, Philippines. Though the language has around 100
A thousand speakers, it is only transmitted intergenerationally in informal settings like at home and in the market.
The project aims to create an online, collaborative dictionary software for the use in the Bantayanon Language with the goal of expanding its use to other dictionary projects under the title “CollaLex SaaS”. The software is unique in that it is collaborative, browser-based, and customizable.
The software is COLLABORATIVE in that it allows an unlimited number of users on site or around the world to contribute to the development of the dictionary, while also allowing public users to make comments and suggestions on the entries.

Being BROWSER-BASED, this software will solve the myriad difficulties associated with traditional dictionary software installed on a local computer: 1) it will work on any operating system (Windows, Mac OS, Linux, etc.), 2) it eliminates conflicts caused by multiple users having to periodically sync to a central server, 3) edits are in real time and immediately available to other users, 4) there is no installation necessary, and it can be used on any computer with a browser, even smart phones, 5) the speed of the software is unaffected by the size of the lexicon, and 6) it keeps all data safe from inevitable mishaps on the field!

Finally, the software is CUSTOMIZABLE to each project’s specifications and can be integrated seamlessly into the project’s website. For more information on Stage 1 (funded by FEL grant) and further development, please visit http://collalex.com.

Jarrette K. Allen and Rebecca J. Moore presented their software at the FEL XXV Conference ‘Endangered Languages and Diaspora’ which took place in Tirana, Albania last year from 16-19, December. See the conference program: http://www.ogmios.org/conferences/2021/index.php

Yarjis Zhong sought the FEL grant for her project entitled ‘Development of an online ethnographic trilingual dictionary: Western Yugur-Chinese-English’.

Yarjis Xueqing Zhong

The Yugur are one of the smallest ethnic minorities in north-western China. They speak distinct languages: Western Yugur (a Turkic language), Eastern Yugur (a Mongolic language), and the local Mandarin Chinese dialect. Both Western and Eastern Yugur are critically endangered with about 2,000 speakers each.
The objectives of the project are to transcribe and analyse some of the rich data from a range of naturalistic speech practices in everyday conversation contexts and oral literature of the Yugur speakers. The data will be used to compile comprehensive ethnographic online multimedia Western Yugur-Chinese-English trilingual dictionary. This resource will be a repository of lexical and cultural knowledge as well as a pedagogical tool for revitalizing the Western Yugur language. This project could help the Western Yugur language continue as a living language in the community. It is envisaged that the dictionary will open it to the world and generate further interest and greater support from linguists and organisations in the field.
Gladys Camacho-Rios

Gladys Camacho Rios is a speaker of South Bolivian Quechua. She is currently a PhD candidate in Linguistics at the University of Texas at Austin and works with Kalallusta Quechua Community Centre to support it in its revitalisation efforts.

FEL awarded Gladys grant for her proposal ‘Documentation and preservation of vanishing Quechua varieties spoken by elderly Quechua-Aymara bilinguals in the North of Potosí, Bolivia’. The project aims to document highly endangered Quechua varieties which is spoken in two small towns in the surroundings of San-Pedro-de-Buena-Vista, Northern Potosí. These varieties are severely endangered. They are only spoken by a few elders and their unique speech is not being passed to younger generations. Such varieties are vanishing as the settlements undergo reduction in population without leaving any records of oral narratives in mother tongue. The project will document and, thereby, preserves naturalistic speech. The data will be transcribed, translated and deposited in a digital archive for preservation for the relevant speech communities and for the use by broader scientific community.

Panchanan Mohanty

Panchanan Mohanty is a distinguished linguist with a vast experience in language documentation and preservation. He has published over 30 books and 160 papers on various aspects of linguistics. He joined the Centre for Applied Linguistics and Translation Studies at University Hyderabad, India in 1990 and worked there as a professor of Applied Linguistics from 1998 till his superannuation in 2018. Professor Panchanan held positions in different professional linguistics associations and journals; he served as the President of the Linguistic Society of India, Pune; President of the Dravidian Linguistics Association, Thiruvananthapuram; Chief Editor of Indian Linguistics, journal of the Linguistic Society of India, Pune, etc. He was a member of the Government of India Delegation on “A Policy Dialogue on Multilingualism and Quality Assessment” to European Union at Brussels and Warsaw and a member of the Expert Group Meeting “Towards UNESCO Guidelines on Language Policies: A Tool for Language Assessment and Planning”, UNESCO, Paris. He continues his collaboration with various national and international organisations and Journals as member of their committees and editorial boards. At present, Panchanan is working as Professor of English Linguistics and Head of the Department of English at GLA University, Mathura, Uttar Pradesh.

Panchanan Mohanty was granted the FEL award for his project ‘Revitalization of Gorum, a moribund Munda language’. Gorum is a South Munda language spoken in the Nandapur area in Koraput district of the Odisha state in India. It is one of those Munda languages which are declining steadily. As per the report of the 1961 Census of India, there were 767 speakers of this language. But during his recent fieldwork in the Nandapur, Panchanan discovered that only 20 to 25 fluent speakers of this
language has remained and those are above 65 years of age. Those who are above 50 years can understand the language but cannot speak it. The younger generation neither understand nor speak the language.

Except for few descriptions, there are no publications on Gorum. Panchanan prepared a Gorum-Odia-English trilingual dictionary of about 3,000 head words in collaboration with others which is yet to be published.

With the help of the FEL grant Panchanan will prepare a primer for Gorum. The primer is intended for teaching the language to the school children and for introducing literacy to the illiterate adults. In addition, our grantee will prepare a grammatical sketch of this language. All these materials can be used by researchers for various synchronic as well as diachronic studies of the Munda languages.

The article is prepared by Hakim Elnazarov, the FEL Grant Officer with thanks to the FEL grant recipients who shared their photos and background information for the FEL publicity.

3. Endangered Languages in the News

Century-old letters added to archives in Aramaic at UC Berkeley

By Eden Naby, PhD

Between April and June 2022 an exhibit based on a cache of some 100 letters written in neo-Aramaic among Assyrian family members from a village outside Urmia, Iran will examine issues related to a thriving Assyrian community in northwest Iran and Eastern Turkey. This community, virtually forgotten by most historians, though not Gibbon (1737-94), flourished during the 19-century until genocide during World War I cut its numbers by two-thirds.

It is to the credit of the Americanized descendants of Dr. Joseph D. Joseph (1876-1922) that these letters, a journal, and many items from pre-WWI have survived. Family members, descended from this Assyrian villager and his Irish wife, no longer speak, let alone read the neo-Aramaic in which the letters were written. But they sensed their importance as does Bancroft Library at the University of California at Berkeley. Thanks to an endowment for archival preservation of modern Assyrian materials, these letters will be available for scholars to examine for an understanding of what happened to this family and other Assyrians when Russian and Ottoman armies clashed. In 1917, the Russian Revolution saw the disintegration of Tsarist forces that were the main source of support for the Assyrians and Armenians abandoned in that remote region.

The letters are posted from various locations in Iran and Transcaucasia to Mountain View, California where Dr. Joseph settled on a cherry orchard when what is now Silicon Valley was still idyllic farmland. Many letters from 1896 to 1904 deal with how Dr. Joseph, Bertha Menaul and their young family adjusted to living in villages and towns in northwest Iran as they built a lucrative medical practice among Armenians, Kurds, Azari and Persian nobility as well as Assyrians.

By 1896 Assyrians in Urmia, with much nurturing from American, French and later Russian and German missionaries, enjoyed a rich periodical press written solely in neo-Aramaic and printed mainly at the American press in Urmia. Committing the writing of the vernacular, as opposed to the centuries manuscript production in Syriac, developed during the 1830s and 1840s, together with an extensive system of schools for girls and boys through grade twelve. By 1900, literacy was likely the highest among Assyrians in Iran than any other ethnic group, including Persian speakers.

An example of a letter from 1910 written to Joseph from his father in the village of Qarajalu, tells of brigands, a poor harvest, and disease among cattle. Economic conditions deteriorated prior to the outbreak of War leaving many orphans and widows to fend in harsh conditions among all the ethnic groups whose animosities surfaced as they competed to survive.

In terms of language preservation, the letters represent a high point in the life of modern spoken and written Aramaic. In the aftermath of WWI, diaspora into Russia, France, and especially the United States resulted in a community that after three generations began to publish the bulk of its periodicals in foreign languages, with an often symbolic section of poems and obituaries printed in its native language. Even the neo-Aramaic speaking Jews living in Israel, hard-pressed to preserve their first language, do not write it.

Of course, Joseph’s letters to his family, friends and American missionary mentors are lost as few survivors preserved paper when they needed to preserve bread and cheese. What is left of a bright past of the written Aramaic language thus remains in scattered locations, if at all.

On the other hand, new technologies have emerged to preserve the spoken language in the form of podcasts, videos, music, performance and who knows what is next. Clusters of Aramaic speakers, the majority living outside their indigenous region, communicate in ways that those men and women licking colorful stamps and putting fat envelopes into postal boxes could not have imagined. [For illustration see below]
The ‘Wonder of Afrikaans’
by Hermann Gilmoree

In 1959 the festival Die ‘Wonder van Afrikaans’ was held to celebrate the founding of the South African Academy of Sciences and Arts in 1909. The main purpose of the Academy was to promote the language that would serve with English as the official languages of South Africa. In 1909 there was still no consensus on whether that language would be Dutch or Afrikaans. The rise of Afrikaans as a versatile public language is a remarkable story. With the Union in 1910, many people were convinced that English would be the only public language to triumph. In 1913, Violet Markham, a British journalist, wrote in her book The South Africa Scene that the onslaught of ‘Anglo-Saxon civilization’ made Afrikaners feel helpless threatened. The constitution recognized English and Dutch as the two official languages, but the English-speaking community tended to regard it merely as a symbolic gesture. General recognition would only follow if the Afrikaners prospered economically and built up a respected Afrikaans culture.

At that time, the English community was at a much higher level economically, educationally and culturally than the Afrikaners. In 1915, only 15 percent of Afrikaans children progressed beyond standard five and only 4 percent were fluent in English. The Afrikaner share in the entrepreneurial function in the economy remained low for more than half a century after Union. By 1960 the share of businesses established by Afrikaners in both the mining and manufacturing sectors was less than 10 percent. The civil service would only reflect the composition of the white community by the mid 1960s, more than fifty years after Union. The great progress of Afrikaans as a full-fledged official language relied on two sources in particular. First, the Union Constitution guaranteed equal privileges, rights, and freedoms for the two official languages. Secondly, there was a tendency in the Westminster system of the ‘winner-takes-all’ government that the largest ethnic group in the electorate benefited the most. Much depended on whether there was something that bound the Afrikaners together as an ethnic community. Especially Afrikaans schools but also newspapers, books and universities have become the sources of power for the Afrikaners’ rise in public life.

South Africa’s entry into the war that broke out in Europe in 1914 was the catalyst that brought about a reshuffle in local politics. For many Afrikaners it was unacceptable that just over ten years after the Anglo-Boer War, South Africa sided with Britain in a war against Germany, which the Boers were sympathetic to. They were also opposed to the great political influence of the mining companies.

In these circumstances, a remarkable figure in the person of J.H. (Jannie) Marais stepped forward. He had left Stellenbosch as a young man to make a fortune on the diamond mines. Upon his return, he was elected Member of Parliament for the Stellenbosch seat in 1910. In 1915, Marais’ financial support made it possible to establish the publishing company Nasionale Pers (National Press) in Cape Town by buying a quarter of the first twenty thousand shares of £1. The first issue of De Burger (later De Burger), appeared in 1915. A few years later, De Huisingenoot (The House Companion), a family magazine, was published.

There has been a growing demand for popular books in Afrikaans. Initially, the outstanding writers were the remarkably versatile C.J. Langenhoven, the popular historian Gustav Preller, and M.E. Rothman (MER), a woman who wrote sensitively about the poor white issue and women’s issues in her own name and under the nickname MER.

Shortly after Jannie Marais’ death in 1915, news broke that the government was seriously considering accepting two mining magnates’ offer to help fund the country’s first lecturing university. A public protest led the government to decide to also transform Victoria College in Stellenbosch into a full-fledged university. The condition was that £100,000 be raised privately for the purpose from the public. Marais had left this sum in his will. His express condition was that Dutch or Afrikaans should not occupy any lesser place than English on campus. The donation made the establishment of Stellenbosch University (1918) possible. It soon accepted Afrikaans as the only medium of instruction. Lecturers had to become proficient in Afrikaans for a permanent appointment.

Other Afrikaans universities followed: University of Pretoria (1932), University of the Orange Free State (1950), Potchefstroom University (1951), and Rand Afrikaans University (1968). The University of Port Elizabeth (1964), initially had an Afrikaans stream of teaching. The University of South Africa, as a distance-teaching institution, offered instruction in both languages. In recent times, the Solidarity movement has established Akademia as a private institution that offers five degree courses.

In 1918 J. F.W. Grosskopf, a young Stellenbosch lecturer, published a remarkably far-sighted article about the mission that an Afrikaans university had to pursue. He argued that Stellenbosch, like any university in the world, had to identify with humanity’s common intellectual heritage. As an Afrikaans university it had to focus on local interests in the first place, and embrace local values.

It also had to pay attention to the international forces that are influencing society here. However, care had to be taken against the elevation of the British Empire and British culture to the highest good. A good example of the latter attitude can be found in the work of the liberal historian C.W. de Kiewiet. He writes in the preface to his History of South Africa (1941) as follows about the British Empire: ‘The Empire is more than a political system; it is more than an economic structure. It is a spiritual achievement, with the enduring qualities of spiritual achievements, whether in literature, art, science or in the relations of human beings in the face of the earth.’

For Afrikaans writers and thinkers, it was a huge challenge to research what is valuable and exceptional in South Africa, but at the same time to publish work on science in general. In 1980, Afrikaans titles were the 32nd of the articles included in Chemical Abstracts (more than Hindi, Armenian and Arabic) and 25th in the index of articles published on the medical sciences.

In some disciplines, academics have developed their own intellectual paradigm. Afrikaans law faculties emphasized Roman-Dutch Law. In 1937 they started the Journal of Roman-Dutch Law. As more and more graduates of Afrikaans universities were appointed to the judiciary, the influence of Roman-Dutch law increased.

The first trained Afrikaner historians began publishing their studies in the 1930s when the British Empire was in full swing. I.D. MacCrone then published his study on the origins and spread of racism in South Africa. He attributed its origin especially to the influence of the Afrikaners farmers on the eastern border of the Cape Colony who were involved in a struggle over land and livestock with the Xhosa in the late eighteenth and during the course of the nineteenth century.
Afrikaans historians have been critical of this interpretation and especially of the underemphasis or even silence of the role of the imperial government or of English speakers after the emergence and spread of racism. They also argued that cultural and ethnic influences act as strongly as material forces on history.

The forerunners of scientific Afrikaans historiography were the historians H.B. Thom, P.J. van der Meew, C.F.J. Muller and A.N. Pelzer, who in the middle third of the century wrote particularly informative works about the migrant farmers and the Voortrekkers, who played a unique role in South Africa's history.


The language issue became increasingly intertwined with the political struggle between the two white communities. G.H. In his book There are no South Africans (1940) Calpin made the following insightful observation: ‘The British, in fact, did not want to learn Afrikaans - and for reasons which have little to do with the oft-repeated assertions that Afrikaans was no language at all, and much to do with the fear of an Afrikaner advance.’

Some English commentators used the multiracial descent of Afrikaans to put the language in a weaker light. In response, there were Afrikaners who described Afrikaans as a white creation. Langenhoven even referred to the language as the only ‘white man’s language’ made in South Africa.

Such unfounded statements alienated many coloured Afrikaans speakers from Afrikaans. It was brought home to Langenhoven when he attended a function at a coloured school where, with one exception, only English poems were recited. Upset, he exclaimed: ‘There are a million, yes, a million potential readers of Die Huisgenoot... and what do we do for these people; what is our attitude towards them, that they stick to their mother tongue, Afrikaans, and do not become estranged?’

During the twentieth century, some of the most scathing criticisms of segregation and apartheid came from coloured writers who used Afrikaans. Initially, the strongest voice was that of Dr Abdullah Abdurahman, who was of Malay origin and obtained a medical degree in Glasgow. In Cape Town he practised as a medical doctor and became leader of the African People’s Organisation (APO). His column ‘Street Talks’ appeared between 1909 and 1922 in the APO, the official mouthpiece of his party. In this the spoken language of coloured Cape workers is used to poke fun at politicians, and especially Afrikaner leaders. English words are used freely, as well as slang and amusing expressions.

In the heyday of apartheid, education leader Richard van der Ross under the pseudonym Gus Adams expressed sharp criticism of apartheid in an Afrikaans Sunday newspaper. In his play Kanna he ko hys, the playwright Adam Small captured the disintegration and displacement of the coloured community under apartheid.

Coloured opinion makers were also bridge builders who enjoyed credibility about the value of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction. As head of a research centre, Neville Alexander strongly recommended the use of mother tongue teaching for pedagogical reasons. In 2001, Jakes Gerwel, Director-General in the office of President Nelson Mandela, tried to persuade the rectors of the Afrikaans-medium universities to appoint two universities with the task of promoting Afrikaans. His courageous effort was thwarted by the reluctance of any rector to scale down his institution's Afrikaans offer.

Coloured Afrikaans-speaking school children and students are the biggest victims of the post-1994 deal for school education and for tertiary education where English is elevated to the dominant language. At present, more than half of the coloured children are taught in English in secondary classes, although the home language of most coloured people in the Western Cape is Afrikaans. Coloured Afrikaans speakers have the lowest participation rate in university education and the lowest throughput rate.

During the National Party rule, the Afrikaans community carried more weight on comments and criticism from Afrikaans scholars than any other critique. Breyten Breytenbach in particular exerted a particularly great influence with his poems and essays.

Elsa Joubert’s novel Poppie! Nongena’s Wandering Years (1979) had a strong impact. It tells the moving true story of Poppie, a black domestic worker in Cape Town. She desperately tries to keep her family together while the law book, especially influx control, is applied mercilessly and the black resistance movement puts more and more pressure on black youths to join their struggle. The book has been included on lists of the best African novels of the twentieth century.

In 2016, there were about half a million Afrikaner pupils in the education system. Half were Afrikaans single-medium schools, a third in the Afrikaans stream of a parallel-medium school and the rest in English-medium schools.

Thanks to mother tongue education, Afrikaans schools continue to perform well. Afrikaner schools represent 11 per cent of all schools, but according to the calculations of the demographer Flip Smit, they produce 21% of those who get admission for a B. degree at university. The pass rate of Afrikaans schools is 90% compared to the average school population's average of 71%. Afrikaans schools produce a fifth of the Matriculants who pass Mathematics with distinction.

Compared to the schools, the universities that until fairly recently were Afrikaans-medium institutions, except for the Potchefstroom campus, present a sad picture. As Smit, a former rector of the University of Pretoria, puts it, some universities have gone overboard in their attempt to rise on the international rankings and thus escape the stigma of apartheid.

However, the pressure of English should not be underestimated. In the Western world, English is increasingly accepted in academia as the lingua franca. Professional journals in English are gaining more and more prestige and lecturers who publish in them have a better chance of promotion.

These developments coincided in South Africa with a huge increase between 1986 and 2018 from student numbers from a quarter of a million to just over a million. While white numbers remained static at about 150,000, between 1986 and 2014 the number of black students rose from 54,997 to 679,800, those of coloured students from 13,552 to 60,716 and those of Indians from 22,838 to 53,611. By far the majority
of students from the latter three groups insisted on teaching English.

The influx led to two flights. In the first one, large numbers of black students who had previously been forced to go to the ‘homeland’ universities flowed to the former ‘liberal’ English-medium universities.

Periodic disruption of classes and campus life led to a second flight. It was from white English-speaking students and lecturers from the old ‘liberal’ campuses to the historically Afrikaans campuses, which was seen as an attractive alternative.

For some Historically Afrikaans Universities, this development has created a dilemma. The reaction was sometimes something that is described in English as ‘cultural cringe’. This was especially the case with those who were now with the government and its support institutions before 1994.

This was particularly the case with those who now associated themselves with the government and its support institutions before 1994. It was almost as if the sacrifice of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction was a ritual act to demonstrate an identification with the new political order.

The two Afrikaans campuses that were really ready for the revolution were the Potchefstroom Campus of North-West University where the rector, Dr. Theuns Eloff, introduced real-time interpreting after observing the proceedings of the European Union.

The other one was the campus of the University of the Free State, led by the rector Dr. Francois Verster. In discussions with the teaching staff, he developed a form of parallel medium with which the undermining of the local language, which this system so often entails, is effectively combated.

Under the leadership of his successor, the Afrikaans stream was abolished. However, the Constitutional Court rejected parallel medium as a form of discrimination without obtaining any evidence.

The University of Pretoria also introduced a form of parallel medium, but so ineffectively protected the Afrikaans supply that it shrunk rapidly. At the insistence of militant students, a rector later abolished the limited offer without any consultation.

Stellenbosch University performed the worst. First, it introduced a dubious option, the so-called Bilingual Option (T-option), according to which English and Afrikaans were used alternately by lecturers without any requirement for language proficiency being imposed on the lecturers or students. Dr. Van Zyl Slabbert, first a SU lecturer and later leader of the parliamentary opposition, rightly described it as ‘pedagogical nonsense’. In practice, it became a Trojan horse that cunningly conquered the fortress.

In 2008, the system was set out by Jean Laponce, author of the influential work Language and Territories. He is an internationally recognized authority on the process of language acquisition and language transfer. His answer was: ‘The system is absurd and to the eventual advantage of English, with Afrikaans being retained as a mere decoration.’ He correctly predicted that Afrikaans would remain only as decoration at SU.

In 2008, Afrikaans was the mother tongue of more than half of the undergraduate students at SU. An independent opinion poll, requested by the SU Council, reported in April 2008 that more than 80 percent of SU’s Afrikaans-speaking students indicated that they wanted Afrikaans as a medium of instruction.

The SU administration did not bother with the opinion poll. Without any government pressure, it enrolled more and more white and brown English-speaking students who chose to receive instruction in English. Thus, the language character of the university has changed significantly. During the language struggle that raged, the management of the SU Convocation of Alumni and Afrikaans education unions spoke out strongly against such a significant change in SU’s language composition.

In 2016, SU introduced English as the primary language of instruction and communication. The SU administration left little doubt that their main driving force was the desire to improve its place in the rankings of the top universities.

In 2017, an article in University World News warned that the preoccupation with ranked universities undermines the true function of universities, namely the transfer of knowledge and skills to the communities in which graduates will one day work.

For all practical purposes, the university has abandoned cultural transfer as an important function of the university and in its place made greater international prestige the highest priority.

In response to the policy of converting SU into an English university, J.M. Coetzee, a winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, wrote to a group of objectors in Stellenbosch:

‘My sympathies are all on your side. The crucial fact, for me, is that the official Language Policy document does not even use the word ‘culture’. The university administration seems to conceive of language as an instrumental communication system without any culture-bearing role.’

On 16 April 2016, Breyten Breytenbach, the greatest Afrikaans poet and a recipient of the Zbigniew Herbert Award, wrote this open letter to the SU rector, Dr. Wim de Villiers:

‘Do you have any understanding of the scope of Afrikaans? Do you not know how it came about from the vitality of transformation and resistance and coexistence in the Boland? Can you in all sincerity pretend that you do not realize that your proposed language policy means turning your back on the Karoo, the Little Karoo, Namaqualand, the Cape…. Do you not realize then that your policy will in the foreseeable future lead to the destruction of an absolutely unique and indigenous vernacular that lives in the many mouths of fishermen and workers and farmers and teachers and church leaders and lawyers… and is an asset to the world’s existential ecosystem?’

Foreign scholars also pointed out the precious heritage that Afrikaans represents. One of them was Mahmood Mamdani, a native of Uganda and author of the influential study Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Colonialism (1995). The study shows that the European imperial powers enforced their authority by enforcing indirect government and the use of the imperial language.

In 2017, Mamdani stated in a public lecture at the University of Cape Town that African universities in general have not
succeeded in developing an authentic academic tradition. He pointed out that the big exception is the Afrikaans universities, which are bearers of their own special intellectual tradition. He argues that Afrikaans and Afrikaans institutions have developed into the most effective agents of decolonization on the continent of Africa.

In 2018, Kwesi Prah, a linguist from Ghana, described Afrikaans, together with Indonesian-Malay and modern Hebrew as the three ‘language miracles’ of the past three hundred years. (Litnet blog, described 22 May 2018).

The position of Afrikaans at university level has weakened greatly. Between 2005 and 2017, the proportion of enrolled students with home language Afrikaans decreased.

The story of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction at university level is sad, except for the case of the Potchefstroom campus. The loss is especially great at the University of Stellenbosch, which was best placed to not only retain Afrikans but also to expand it.

At school level, however, Afrikaans is still strong. Most Afrikaans parents continue to have their children taught in Afrikaans. In 2016, about half a million Afrikaner children were in school. Half were in Afrikaans single-medium schools, a third in Afrikaans from a parallel-medium school and the rest in English-medium schools.

In the economy, National Press (now Naspers) stands out as the largest company in Africa that had its origins on the continent. It retained its Afrikaans roots while becoming a multinational enterprise with many facets. It currently has a market capitalization of more than R1 trillion.

The company's growth is mainly due to a share acquired early in the company Ten Cent, an internet group, which was founded in 1998 in the Cayman Islands. It has a share in pay-TV through the Kyknet television channels, which are especially aimed at Afrikaans viewers, and also in cellphones and the internet.

The publication Huisgenoot today sells the best of all South African magazines and is followed by YOU, an English version of Huisgenoot. Afrikaans newspapers have been scaled down but are still of a higher quality than the English dailies with a smaller market.

Deon Meyer, who writes in Afrikaans and has his work translated, is the author whose books currently sell best in South Africa. In 2018, its total sales worldwide amounted to 39 million. His books are published in 25 languages. (Postscript: The situation of Afrikaans in South Africa today, By Mikael Grut)

As the article The ‘Wonder of Afrikaans’ indicates, the seven million Afrikaans-speakers do no longer have a single university which teaches in their language, which is a pity and which endangers it as a scientific language, but then universities all over the world are teaching more and more in English, the new Latin. The language may change in the future because Afrikaans as we know it today is the language spoken by the white Afrikaners, but the biggest group with Afrikaans as their first language is the coloured (mixed race) people of the above-mentioned two western provinces, and they speak a different form of the language.

MRI scanners talk Doric to native speakers

From the (Aberdeen) Press and Journal, Scotland, February 2022
By Dan Barker

Going in for an MRI scan can be a stressful experience but now, thanks to a technology overhaul, Doric speakers in Aberdeen will be able to hear instructions in their native tongue. The University of Aberdeen’s MRI scanner already had 17 languages programmed into it and now, with help from the university’s Elphinstone Institute, the machine can issue instructions in Doric.

Dr. Gordon Waiter, a senior lecturer and brain imaging expert at the university, said that for many an MRI scan “can be unnerving so anything that makes the experience more relaxing is welcome”. Now when patients are put into the machine, if selected, the Doric voiceover says: “The neist scan’ll tak five minites.” And, rather than an English accent voiceover saying “In between the next few scans the table will move,” patients will now hear: “In a’twente the neist puckle o’scans the table will move aboot.” Research by the Institute’s Dr. Thomas McKeans shows how those with dementia can often end up communicating in their native tongue, which in north-east Scotland is Doric.

The Digital Pallas, an eighteenth-century Russian dictionary with 60,000 language entries

By Nicole van der Seij, INT Leiden and Radboud University Nijmegen, reprinted by permission from the CIPL newsletter

A team of researchers is preparing an annotated digital edition of the eighteenth-century Russian Comparative dictionary of all languages and dialects, compiled by the Prussian scholar Peter Simon Pallas on the initiative of none other than the Russian Empress Catherine the Great. This dictionary contains language data of hundreds of different languages, some of which are now extinct, others are endangered. For some languages the data in the dictionary are the oldest or one of the oldest known source. How did this dictionary come about?

In 1784 Empress Catherine threw herself into the study of languages. She made a list of some three hundred Russian concepts and had these translated into all the languages and dialects she could find. She even single-handedly began composing a dictionary on the basis of the collected material, starting with ‘Caribbean’ words; see Figure 1 below. In her
opinion this dictionary was ‘perhaps the most useful research ever conducted in the field of all languages and dictionaries, and especially relevant to the Russian language’.

In 1785 she sought the help of the Prussian physician, zoologist, botanist, geographer and explorer Peter Simon Pallas, who had entered Russian service in 1767 and was a member of the Russian Academy of Science. Pallas was an internationally renowned scholar who had a great knowledge of languages. He expanded Catherine’s word list and composed a Modèle du vocabulaire qui peut servir à la comparaison de toutes les langues with 443 concepts in Russian, German, Latin and French. This ‘model’ was sent not only to the administrators of the provinces of the vast Russian empire, but also to Russian diplomats all over the world, and it was handed out to foreign diplomats in Russia. All recipients were asked to provide translations of the concepts in as many languages as possible. As a result, a great number of language data were submitted to Pallas, to which he himself added material from printed dictionaries.

Already in 1787 the first part of the Linguarum Totius Orbis Vocabularia Comparativa Augustissima Curæ Collecta, or in Russian Сравнительные словари всехъ языковъ и нарьчий собранные дь снисько всевозможной особы was published, anonymously but with a foreword by Pallas. The second part of this ‘Comparative glossaries of all languages and dialects in the world collected thanks to the care of a royal person’ came out in 1789. The two parts contained 273 concepts with their translation in 200 numbered languages, ending with the names of the numerais, 1-10, 100 and 1000 in 222 languages. The first concept was Богъ (God), which can serve as an example of the simple layout of the dictionary (between square brackets I have added the translation):

Богъ (God)

1 По Славяно–Български – Богъ. [1 Slavic Бог]
2 По Славяно–Венгерски – Бжygъ. [2 Slavic–Hungarian Бог]
3 По Иллрийски – Богъ. [3 Illyric Бог]

199 На островахъ Марианскихъ – Еаго. [199 On the Marquesas Islands Itu]o
200 На островахъ Сандвича – Игуа. [200 On the Sandwich Islands Itu]

After the publication new language data kept coming in, which led Catherine to commission a new edition, with a new structure: she ordered the words in the various languages to be arranged alphabetically. The new edition was published anonymously and without foreword. The editor was Theodor Jankiewitsch de Miriewo, director of the college of education, since Pallas was engaged otherwise, according to Friedrich Adelungs extensive publication on the dictionary, titled Catherinæns der Grossen Verdiene um die vergleichende Sprachenkunde (1815). The four volumes appeared in 1790-1791 with a slightly altered title: Сравнительная смнаяость языковъ и нарьчий, по алфавиту расположенный or Comparative dictionary of all languages and dialects, in alphabetical order.

The dictionary is set up in three columns (word, concept and language), starting:

АКтоPo Ирландский [a, who, Irish]
АОнь
По Сарамакски въ Суринамъ [a, he, Saramaccan in Surinam]
АОтСурина́мский Креолский [a, he, Surinam creole]
АОнаСурина́мский Креолский [a, she, Surinam creole]
АДа Татарский около Кузнетска [a, yes, Tatar around Kuznetsk]

Scholars outside of Russia are unfamiliar with the dictionary, because it is written in Russian and Cyrillic. But even within Russia it is largely unknown, since most of the thousand copies of the second edition were immediately stored at the Imperial Cabinet. This ignorance is regrettable, since the dictionary contains a wealth of language data. To remedy this, a team of researchers in the Netherlands has in 2020 devoted themselves to digitize and annotate the second edition of the Pallas dictionary. The Institute for the Dutch Language in Leiden has provided ‘The Digital Pallas’ with the Lexicon Interactive Tool Lex’. With this tool all the data of the dictionary have by now been added to a database.

From this database we learn that the dictionary contains 61,960 words for 296 concepts in 328 different languages – which is much more than was previously known. These include a large number of native languages in North and South America and Africa. We found remarkable differences between the number of words per language: for some languages the dictionary mentions a great many synonyms, for instance for Japanese (859 words for the 296 concepts), for other languages the amount of words is very small (23 words for Sinhalese, only 2 words for Thai).

Our next job is to add transcriptions and the original (non-Cyrillic) spelling to the words in the various languages, and to add modern English names to the language names and language classification as used by Pallas. It comes as no surprise that we chance upon all kinds of irregularities during this annotation process. For instance, words are not always assigned to the language they belong to (Wand ‘belly’ is German, not Dutch as Pallas asserts), and concepts are wrongly translated (Russian шум ‘noise’ is not the same as Dutch alarm ‘alert, uproar’).

After finishing the annotation we will put the annotated database on a public website, since we expect comparative linguistics, lexicostatistic and colexification research to profit from the Pallas data. Finally we intend to publish an edited volume with chapters devoted to the historical background of the Pallas dictionary and to the various language families that are included in the dictionary. Anyone who is interested in the project or needs more information is invited to contact Nicoline van der Sijs: post@nicolinevdsijs.nl.

The Digital Pallas project is coordinated by Tjeerd de Graaf, Wim Honseelaar, Janine Jager, Bruno Naarden and Nicoline van der Sijs. Collaborators are Melle Groen, Marien Jacobs, Richard Kellermann Deibel, Martijn Knapen, Djoek Legu potrzek, Sasha Lubotsky, Michael Nestorowytsch, Tamara Schermers and Vincent Wintermans.

Tjeerd de Graaf, a physicist who became a language rediscoverer

Interview by Camiel Hamans, reproduced by permission from the CIPL newsletter
From the stars to the tundra

‘My interest in languages started as early as my high school days. In addition, I grew up in Frisian, the Dutch province where, next to Dutch, Frisian, my mother tongue, is spoken. Frisian is now an officially accepted regional language. In Frisian, my name is written as Toard. However, there was little room for me to study languages as the secondary school programme that I followed was focused on math and science. That’s why I enrolled in Physics at the nearest university, the University of Groningen. In 1969 I defended my PhD thesis on the role of neutrinos in the cosmos.’

‘When I was a beginning student in 1956, the university employed a Russian language teacher. I was intrigued and decided to take Russian as a minor subject. In 1960, after I had obtained my Bachelor’s degree in Physics, the Polish government offered a scholarship. Nobody wanted to go to this terra incognita, this supposedly barren land behind the Iron Curtain, but I dared to accept the challenge and went to Kraków for six months. After I returned, I decided to study Slavic languages in addition to my Physics studies. My professor of Slavic linguistics was André van Holk, who succeeded in making Slavic a major subject. He was interested in the combination of studies that I had chosen, and I wrote a thesis for him about machine translation. Unfortunately, I only managed to get my BA in Slavic languages and literature because I had to finish my doctoral dissertation and had to take care of a family. Immediately after my PhD in Theoretical Physics in 1969 I was awarded a British Council Fellowship and spent two years in Cambridge, where I was lucky enough to have met Stephen Hawking. My interest then shifted more and more towards astronomy, so when I came back to Groningen I was asked to become a kind of contact person between physics and astronomy. However, the work also involved other tasks that didn’t interest me, and around 1974 I started to look for another job.’

Phonetics

‘In 1972 the University of Groningen established a Department of Phonetics, and Don Graham Stuart became its first professor. I knew him already, since he was also interested in machine translation. Moreover, he was a specialist in Asian languages and – amongst other things - taught Japanese classes. Later, Groningen University launched its Center for Japanese Studies, where I also lectured until 2005. My background in Physics and my interest in languages made me a welcome professional partner for Graham Stuart. I was Associate Professor of Phonetics from 1975 until my retirement in 2003. In Groningen we closely cooperated with the Phonetics Institute of the University of Amsterdam, which at the time was led by Hein Mol, a physical engineer. In his laboratory, Mol’s associate Gerrit Meinema and I found old Edison wax rolls of sound recordings made by Louise Kaiser, the first Dutch phonetician and the first to hold the Chair in Phonetics at the University of Amsterdam. The challenge that we were faced with was how to save and preserve those wax rolls, and especially the recordings of Dutch dialects, so that they could be used for future consultation and research.

Ainu

‘Since 1985 I have increasingly focused on sound archives. I became interested in a technique that aimed to reconstruct them with laser beams. It turned out that there was a colleague in Sapporo, Japan, who used a similar approach. We were first introduced in 1986, and in 1988 Asakura Sensei invited me to Hokkaido University, for three months, where Japanese colleagues and I continued to work on techniques to save old sound recordings. The rest is history, and the step from endangered archives to endangered languages proved to be a small one. Quite a few of these sound recordings contain language material from unknown, endangered and sometimes even extinct languages. And so my interest in endangered languages grew, as did my interest in less endangered indigenous languages. In 1990 I went on my first six-week Japanese fieldwork expedition to record and describe the endangered languages of Sakhalin and to look for the remnants of Ainu. Ainu is a language that is now only spoken on Hokkaido, where it is moribund. Until the beginning of the 20th century Ainu, which genetically speaking is unrelated to any other language and must therefore be described as isolated, was also spoken on Sakhalin and the Kuril islands, an island chain in the Russian Far East. The last speaker of Sakhalin Ainu passed away in Japan in the early 1990s. On Sakhalin we did not find any more Ainu speakers, but we started projects on the endangered Nivkh language, about which my student Hidetoshi Shiraiishi defended his thesis at Groningen University in 2006.

In the same period I also developed excellent relations with colleagues in Saint Petersburg, especially with the people of the Phonogram Archive in the House of Russian Literature, also known as the Pushkin House. The museum has a wonderful collection of old wax rolls with sound recordings of numerous indigenous Arctic languages. I was able to turn the preservation of this collection into an international project, for which the European INTAS organisation and the Dutch science foundation NWO were willing to grant funding. With their funds, I was able to employ Russian scholars. Other collaborating partners were the Vienna Phonogram Archive and the BBC. A later, similar project was supported by the Endangered Archives Programme of the British Library. In 1998, I was awarded an honorary doctorate in St. Petersburg because of my work for the preservation of the archive of the Pushkin House.

Pilsudski

‘My goal was not only to technically preserve the sound and language data, but also to describe them in terms of their content. In the years that followed, I therefore repeatedly went on expeditions to make recordings and record language data in Eastern Eurasia. Wherever possible, my colleagues and I also tried to help indigenous communities to revitalize their language. Amongst many other things, I did fieldwork on the Arctic languages of Siberia (Voices of the Tundra), on the languages spoken on Sakhalin, on Russian dialects, on Balto-Finnic languages, on Yiddish (Voices of the Shtetl) and on Plautdietsch (the language of the Siberian Mennonites). Via the orientalist Alfred Majewicz from Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, whom I met in 1985, I learned about the archives of Bronislaw Pilsudski, the older brother of Józef, the later Polish strongman. The Polish-speaking brothers Pilsudski grew up in Lithuania, then part of the czarist empire. Bronislaw and Józef studied in Saint Petersburg, where together with Lenin’s older brother Alexander they became involved in a socialist plot to assassinate the Czar in 1887. Alexander was hanged, but Bronislaw/Pilsudski was only sentenced to 15 years of forced labour on Sakhalin, thanks to the influence of his father. On Sakhalin, Bronislaw became interested in the Ainu people, married an Ainu wife, kept a Sakhalin journal and made numerous recordings – which we deciphered with our laser technology and which were studied by Majewicz. Pilsudski’s historical material proved to be an enormous addition to our knowledge of the Ainu and their language.’
Plautdietsch

‘In 1992, on my way back from Japan to the Netherlands, I was invited to attend a conference in Novosibirsk, where I was approached by a lady who claimed to be of Dutch offspring. Her great-great parents were Mennonites, a protestant sect set off from the eastern part of the Netherlands and Westphalia where they were seriously persecuted in the second half of the 16th century. Hence, they migrated to the East, the Gdansk region, later to the Ukraine and subsequently to Siberia after further persecutions and splits. The Mennonites kept their original language Plautdietsch, a language which resembles the dialects still spoken in the province of Groningen. I was introduced to a region near the border with Kazakhstan, where many native speakers of Plautdietsch were living. Since the language is vulnerable, to say the least, I decided to start a project to record and describe it. The result was the magnificent doctoral dissertation written by my student Rogier Nieuweboer. Following this path, I also realized that Yiddish is on the verge of disappearing in Central and Eastern Europe. We started a small Yiddish reading group in Groningen and a similar group in Saint-Petersburg. All these different activities spread my fame in the world of minority languages, and so I was invited to become a member of the UNESCO Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages, which is how I came into contact with CIPL. CIPL is one of the founders of UNESCO’s Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger.’

Frisian Academy

‘When I worked in the Phonetics Department of Groningen University, I was also a Board member of the Frisian Academy in Ljouwert/Leeuwarden. This academy was founded to protect and stimulate the Frisian language and Frisian culture. It is also the academic centre for research on Frisian language, literature and history. Connected to the Frisian Academy is the Mercator European Centre for Multilingualism and Language Learning, partly sponsored by European funds and led by Cor van der Meer. After my retirement from Groningen University I was invited to become a senior research associate at the Academy and the Centre, a position I still hold today. I have co-authored publications and encouraged colleagues to produce several articles and reports on endangered languages and on the linguistic situation in a number of European countries, recently also in Siberia. I also joined the Board of the UK-based Foundation of Endangered Languages, and I accepted a visiting professorship of St. Petersburg University and a guest researcher post at the Linguistic Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg. I also became a fellow at the Centre for Russian Studies of Groningen University and the Kulturstiftung Sibirien in Germany.’

Witsen

‘In 2010 I joined the Witsen project group initiated by Bruno Naarden. In the 17th century, Nicolaas Witsen was mayor of Amsterdam and a friend of Czar Peter the Great. He visited Russia and wrote about it, he was an art collector, and he had a very wide scope of interest. He asked travellers to bring him exotic products, plants, seeds, animals and even humans from all over the world. He was also interested in languages and in 1692 published a voluminous work about the languages and cultures of what he called North and East Tartary (Siberia and surrounding territories). Following editions appeared in 1705 and 1785, all written in 17th-century Dutch. In his book, Witsen presents amongst other things the first lists of words in the Yakut language and in other Siberian languages, highly interesting information for linguists. The book was translated into Russian by an interdisciplinary team of specialists, and we prepared an edition on the languages. This was published in 2018 by Pegasus Publishers in Amsterdam.

I am currently taking part in a new project started by Nicole van der Sijs, who wants to make a digital edition of Peter Simon Pallas’ Linguarium totius orbis vocabularia comparativa (1786-1789, second enlarged edition 1790-1791). In this dictionary, commissioned by Czarina Catherine the Great, Pallas collected terms for 285 concepts in 224 languages. I am also working on a few reports on smaller languages in Russia, to be published by the Mercator Centre in due course.’

Info

Mercator European Research Center (www.mercator-research.eu)
Foundation for Endangered Languages, UK (www.ogmios.org)
Foundation for Siberian Cultures, Germany (www.kulturstiftung-sibirien.de)
Centre for Russian Studies at Groningen University (centreforrussiansstudies.ub.rug.nl)

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CIPL (Comité International Permanent des Linguistes / Permanent International Committee of Linguists) is an international organization founded to assist in the development of linguistic science. It tries to further linguistic research and to co-ordinate activities undertaken for the advancement of linguistics.

The Nalik Language Online

From Professor Craig Alan Volker

The Nalik language (Ethnologue / ISO code nal) is an Austronesian language spoken in a band across the narrow island of New Ireland in the Bismarck Archipelago of northeastern Papua New Guinea. It is one of the 25 indigenous languages spoken in New Ireland Province, which has a population of approximately 300,000 people. It is bordered to the north by the closely related Lakuramau and Kara languages and to the south by Non-Austronesian Kuot. Nalik-speaking society is part of the matrilineal Malagan culture of New Ireland.

All Nalik people today speak Tok Pisin and most have at least a passive understanding of basic English. There is extensive intermarriage with speakers of other languages and, because of the relatively high levels of education in New Ireland, many families live in urban areas or even overseas for extended periods. As a result, Tok Pisin, and, to a lesser extent, English are used for increasingly more activities, even malagan and other traditional ceremonies. After an unsuccessful attempt to use Nalik in lower primary school, today all education is in English. Tok Pisin is used as the dominant language in a majority of families, even when most parents are ethnic Nalik.

For a number of years Adjunct Professor Craig Alan Volker of The Cairns Institute at James Cook University has documented Nalik. He recently set up a collection of downloadable files related to Nalik language and culture in the JCU Language Archives. This includes literature in Nalik, works on Nalik grammar, and a working draft of the Nalik-English dictionary he is currently compiling. This online resource can be accessed at https://www.jcu.edu.au/language-and-culture-research-centre/resources/language-archives.
4. Obituaries

Chilean indigenous language vanishes as last living Yamana speaker dies

From the Guardian (UK) online edition, 16 February 2022

An indigenous language from South America’s extreme south has all but vanished after the death of its last living speaker and guardian of its ancestral culture.

Cristina Calderón died on Wednesday [9 February], aged 93. She had mastered the Yamana language of the Yagan community, and after the death of her sister in 2003 was the last person in the world who could speak it. She worked to save her knowledge by creating a dictionary of the language with translations to Spanish.

“With her an important part of the cultural memory of our people is gone,” said Lidia González, Calderón’s daughter, on Twitter. González is one of the representatives currently drafting a new constitution in Chile.

The dictionary, however, meant there was hope of preserving the language in some form, she said.

“Although with her departure a wealth of especially valuable empirical knowledge is lost in linguistic terms, the possibility of rescuing and systematizing the language remain open,” she said.

Although there are still a few dozen Yagans left, over the generations people from the community stopped learning the language, which was considered “isolated” since it was difficult to determine the origin of its words.

Calderón lived in a simple house and made a living selling knitted socks in the Chilean town of Villa Ukika, a town created by the Yagan people on the outskirts of Puerto Williams.

The ancestral ethnic group used to populate the archipelagos of South America’s extreme south, now Chile and Argentina, an area which nudges towards the frozen Antarctic.

5. Events

Amazônia travelling photography exhibition

From the website scienceandindustrymuseum.org.uk

Sebastião Salgado, winner of the 2021 Praemium Imperiale award for painting, presents Amazônia, a breath-taking photography exhibition that celebrates the indigenous peoples and varied landscapes of the Brazilian rain-forest.

For seven years, Salgado worked with twelve indigenous communities to create this magnificent photography exhibition. The result is an incredible collection of powerful black-and-white photographs that reveal Salgado’s vision of the Amazon when the forest is approaching a crucial tipping point in the fight against climate change.

Feel immersed in the Amazon rainforest as you delve into dramatic landscapes and sweeping aerial shots of immense waterfalls and stormy skies and discover the stunning portraits of indigenous leaders and their communities, accompanied by a soundtrack evoking the sounds of the forest by renowned composer Jean-Michel Jarre.

Amazônia comes to the Science and Industry Museum in Manchester as part of an international tour that includes the Philharmonie in Paris, the MAXXI in Rome, the Science Museum in London, SESC in Sao Paulo and the Museum of Tomorrow in Rio de Janeiro.

Endangered Languages Project announces Festival of Indigenous Languages

On 6 January Anna Belew and Amanda Holmes of the Endangered Languages Project announced to participants in the Project’s previous Revitalization Helpdesk Workshop an invitation to an event hosted by ELP: the Festival of Indigenous Languages, to celebrate the start of the UN International Decade of Indigenous Languages. This online festival was intended to bring together people around the world, to share their goals and hopes for the upcoming Decade.

The Festival ran from January 14-23, completely online, and completely free.

Each speaker gave a short “talk from the heart” (rather than a formal presentation) about what’s inspired and encouraged them most in their past decade(s) of work, and what they hope to see happening in language revitalization over the next decade - to reflect on where we’ve been, and where we’re going.

In addition to talks by language revitalization practitioners, there was an opening reception on the 14th, featuring music performances by Kaqchikel youth musicians, and a “language potluck” for folks to share greetings and well-wishes in their languages. There were also informal Zoom rooms where people could share songs, stories, or poetry in their languages, meet and chat with other language revitalization folks, and find the pleasant socializing we’re missing at conference coffee breaks or event parking lots.

The announcement and the event itself came too late to be published in Ogmios, but we include it here as a matter of record. And here is another event that might have passed you by:

Cherokee Nation and Global Indigenous Languages Caucus host International Decade of Indigenous Languages launch event

From the Cultural Survival website (www.culturalsurvival.org) 4 January 2022

On December 18, 2019, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed an International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022-2032) as a follow up to the International Year of Indigenous
On January 5-7, 2022, the Launch Event for the International Decade of Indigenous Languages was hosted by the Cherokee Nation and the Global Indigenous Languages Caucus in Tahlequah, Oklahoma. The event focused on grassroots language revitalization efforts conducted by Indigenous communities across the globe. The most critical measure of language revitalization is the creation of new speakers, and this, along with securing adequate funding, needs to be the focus of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages. Resources need to specifically target Indigenous-led, community-based language programs that are built on immersion.

Recordings of the days’ proceedings are available at https://www.culturalsurvival.org/news/cherokee-nation-and-global-indigenous-languages-caucus-host-international-decade-indigenous

Call for Papers: Interdisciplinary Workshop in Australian Languages

From Christina Ringel: christina.ringel@uni-koeln.de

We are very pleased to announce a two-day online interdisciplinary workshop specifically designed for early career researchers and emerging scholars (doctoral students and postdocs less than five years after completion of their PhD) whose work is situated in the broad field of Australian Studies. This event, which will be hosted by four scholars from the Centre of Australian Studies (University of Cologne), functions as intersessional event before the biennial Association for Australian Studies Conference in Duisburg-Essen (2023). Our major goal is to bring together the next generation of Australian Studies scholars from around the world, providing a forum for exchanging ideas among peers, for sharing research, for providing and receiving constructive feedback, and for generating new ideas. Though larger academic conferences increasingly invite early career contributions, the foundational premise of this workshop is that especially research at an early stage needs an explicitly accessible, appreciative and stimulant space to experiment with inchoate ideas and build interdisciplinary networks. The workshop is designed to allow for international as well as local participation (morning and noon sessions in Germany, which translate to afternoon and evening panels in Australia). Should you be interested in presenting, please send us an abstract of no more than 350 words by 15th April 2022. Presentations should be no longer than 20 minutes to ensure a minimum of 10 minutes for discussion. We plan on including academic keynotes and literary readings, as well as plenty of breaks for formal and informal chats. If you are an early career researcher working in Australian Studies, if you have just obtained your master’s degree and think of pursuing a PhD, or if you are a senior scholar who knows a person who might be interested in joining this interdisciplinary workshop, please do not hesitate to get in touch with us! Visitors are most welcome to join us even if they do not aspire to present a paper. There will be no attendance fee. More detailed information about the event will soon be made available on the Centre for Australian Studies website: http://centreforaustralianstudies.org/events/workshop-early-careerresearch-in-australian-studies/ We are excited for this event and look forward to your contributions!

If you are interested in contributing but cannot make the deadline, please contact us.

Thomas Batchelor (thomas.batchelor@uni-koeln.de) Leonie John (l.john@uni-koeln.de) David Kern (david.kern@uni-koeln.de) Christina Ringel (christina.ringel@uni-koeln.de)