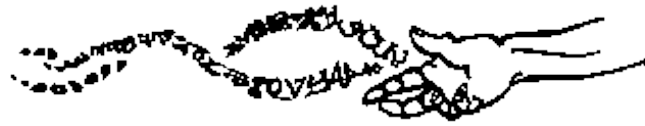


FOUNDATION FOR ENDANGERED LANGUAGES



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OGMIOS



OGMIOS Newsletter 71

31 October 2021



The Endangered Alphabets Project, led by Tim Brookes has created **ULUS**,
adopting the Mongolian word for
“tribal community, all the peoples affiliated to a khan “
This is a tabletop game to introduce and support traditional Mongolian
culture and language, currently under threat in Inner Mongolia.
More details of the game are at ulusgame.com
and at the end of this newsletter.

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31 October 2021

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1. Editorial

Pardon your Editor that this issue is reaching you later than the cover date yet again. My excuse is the time taken by intensive preparations for our forthcoming 25th annual conference in Tirana in December, and for our festive 25th anniversary event, also in December. It has nothing to do with the fact that I've received almost no contributions from any of you. This journal doesn't write itself, you know: you can send articles and attachments to chrmos50@gmail.com. News of those coming events is in this issue.

If FEL is a campaigning and lobbying organisation, then we need to make ourselves known to those who are abusing, neglecting or undervaluing their indigenous populations in multilingual nations. We've publicised the dire situations in Brazil and Belarus in recent issues of *Ogmios*, but actually addressing the governments is something we haven't been very well equipped to do. To say nothing of the government authorities not being equipped to receive our scoldings and protests.

So who is lining up to receive a tongue-lashing from FEL at the moment? The latest contender might be the new military government in Sudan, but it's too early to tell how that will pan out for Sudan's multiple linguistic minorities. In a case like Sudan's, we shouldn't be content with a mere continuation of business as usual; we should encourage new authorities to make more effort to ensure the survival of indigenous languages.

A more obvious recent case is Afghanistan, another multilingual country. We examined the situation in that country in an article just two issues ago, focusing on one particular minority language. At the moment the Taliban has much more dire problems on its hands than those of Afghanistan's minorities, starvation to begin with, but more importantly for us, they haven't announced a government or cabinet with individual portfolios to whom we could address our complaints. The 'students' (their literal name) are at the moment just a rabble of naughty schoolboys. But if we can't address their government, we can at least publicise the plight of their endangered languages.

Chris Moseley

2. Development of the Foundation

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

Main Theme: Endangered Languages and Diaspora

Special Theme: The State and Study of Arbëresh as an Endangered Diaspora Language: Tirana, Albania, 16-19 Dec 2021

- **Venue:** Qendra e Studimeve dhe Publikimeve për Arbëreshët - QSPA (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 was English; in a few grouped sessions Italian and Albanian will be used. English translation provided for the keynote talks that are not in English.
- **Conference website:** <https://europe.illinois.edu/news-events/2020-21-initiatives/conference-foundation-endangered-languages>
- 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.
- In the next Ogmios (31 March 2022), the Conference Chair, Eda Derhemi, will describe the main moments of the FEL-XXV conference.
- For further enquiries contact: edmond.cane@qspa.gov.al

The [Foundation for Endangered Languages](#) and **The Center for Research and Publication on Arbëresh (QSPA)** in collaboration with the University of Tirana invited international scholars, institutions, and community members working on the revitalization of endangered languages and their documentation and archiving, to contribute to the International Conference on “**Endangered Languages and Diaspora**”, taking place in Tirana, Albania, on 16-19 December, 2021. While this was primarily planned as a face-to-face conference, with a possibility of virtual connection for some papers, measures were also undertaken in case pandemic security in December did not allow scholars and activists to attend in person. Selected papers among the abstracts accepted were also published by QSPA beforehand, ready for distribution during the event.

All the written conference material was classified in advance, and this process should allow production of a peer-reviewed volume in due time.

Note on Publications

All members will receive a PDF copy of the FEL XXV proceedings (edited by the conference chair Eda Derhemi) as distributed at the conference in Tirana. There will also be a focused, and peer-reviewed, Yearbook of selected papers, available for sale. This will be produced by the major academic publishing house, Koninklijke Brill NV of Leiden in the Netherlands.

The Foundation has recently (in December 2021), and largely through the untiring efforts of its Secretary Salem Mezhoud, secured an agreement with Brill, recorded in a Memorandum of Understanding: Brill will henceforth publish annually a Yearbook of the Foundation’s conference papers, selected and peer-reviewed, beginning with the back-log items of FEL XXIII (Sydney) 2019, FEL XXIV (London) 2020 and XXV (Tirana) 2021.

FEL Subcommittees on Regulations and the 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.

3. Endangered Languages in the News

The language question in the Australian census form 2021

In September 2021 Australia conducted its national census. There is a question about language use in the home in it, as follows. It's an indicator of the method of collecting data about home language use in Australia.

18. Does the person use a language other than English *at home*?

- If more than one language other than English, write the one that is used most often
- Include the use of sign languages (for example, AUSLAN) in the 'please specify' option
- Include use of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander languages in the 'please specify' option
- Mark one box, like this =

No, English only > **Go to 20**

Yes, Mandarin

Yes, Arabic

Yes, Cantonese

Yes, Vietnamese

Yes, Italian

Yes, Greek

Yes, other language (please specify)

Cultural Survival's 3-day virtual language conference:

Restoring and Protecting our native languages and landscapes

From culturalsurvival.org/news, 30 September 2021

On October 5-7, 2021, in light of the upcoming United Nations International Decade of Indigenous Languages, Cultural Survival held its 3-day virtual conference, "Restoring and Protecting Our Native Languages and Landscapes."

This conference equipped individuals working at the community level with tools and best practices for revitalizing and strengthening Indigenous languages and the Traditional Ecological Knowledge carried within them.

Joining the conference were Indigenous educators, practitioners, linguists, activists, and other leaders working in Indigenous language revitalization. Discussions demonstrated why language revitalization and biodiversity protection are inextricably linked, and present methodologies, practical ideas, and solutions for the best ways to carry forward the work revitalizing and protecting language, culture, and land holistically. This virtual event was free and open to the public thanks to the generous support of the Lannan Foundation, Swift Foundation, Vadon Foundation, and Trust for Mutual Understanding. They encouraged language activists and practitioners working in the field of language revitalization to join them.

All the conference content was available in the original languages spoken by featured speakers on the SwapCard platform, which can be accessed both on the web and a mobile application. Registrants received a tech guide to help navigate the platform. There were opportunities to interact with other attendees and speakers and build community and networks. Live panels took place on Zoom with available simultaneous interpretation in Russian, English, and Spanish.

[This event is now over but we publish the announcement as a matter of record.]

The man who 'discovered' 780 Indian languages

By Soutik Biswas, India correspondent, BBC news web-site (bbc.co.uk/news), 27 October 2021

When Ganesh Devy, a former professor of English, embarked on a search for India's languages, he expected to walk into a graveyard, littered with dead and dying mother tongues.

Instead, he says, he walked into a "dense forest of voices", a noisy Tower of Babel in one of the world's most populous nations.

He discovered that some 16 languages spoken in the Himalayan state of Himachal Pradesh have 200 words for snow alone - some of them ornately descriptive like "flakes falling on water", or "falling when the moon is up".

He found that the nomadic communities in the desert state of Rajasthan used a large number of words to describe the barren landscape, including ones for how man and animal separately experience the sandy nothingness. And that nomads - who were once branded "criminal tribes" by British rulers and now hawk maps for a living at Delhi's traffic crossings - spoke a "secret" language because of the stigma attached to their community.

In a dozen villages on the western coast of Maharashtra, not far from the state capital Mumbai, he discovered people speaking an "outdated" form of Portuguese. A group of residents in the far-flung eastern archipelago of Andaman and Nicobar spoke in Karen, an ethnic language of Myanmar. And some Indians living in Gujarat even spoke in Japanese. Indians, he found, spoke some 125 foreign languages as their mother tongue.

Dr Devy, untrained as a linguist, is a soft-spoken and fiercely determined man. He taught English at a university in Gujarat for 16 years before moving to a remote village to start working with local tribespeople. Beyond the linguistic sphere he helped them to access credit for seed banks and healthcare projects. More relevantly for us, he published a journal in 11 tribal languages.

It was around this time Dr Devy had an epiphany about the power of language. To do it justice, in 1998 he carried 700 copies of his journal written in the local language to a dirt-poor tribal village. He left a basket for any villager who wanted to or could afford to pay 10 rupees (£0.11; \$0.15) for a copy. At the end of the day, all the copies were gone. When he checked the basket, he found a large number of currency notes - "grimy, crumpled, soggy" - left behind by the tribal villagers who had paid whatever they could afford from their paltry daily wages. Dr Devy commented to the BBC's India correspondent: "This must have been the first printed material they saw in their life in their own language. These were unlettered daily wage workers who had paid for something they could not even read. I realised this primordial pride and power of the language."

Over the period 2010-2013, he conducted his ambitious People's Linguistic Survey of India (PLSI). This he called a "rights-based movement to carry out a nation-wide survey of Indian languages as people perceive them". As the indefatigable language hunter turned 60, he undertook 300 journeys in 18 months all over India to search for more language, financing his trips with money earned by delivering lectures in universities and colleges. He travelled night and day, revisiting some states nearly 10 times, and was meticulous in keeping a diary. He also forged a voluntary network of some 3,500 scholars, teachers, activists, bus drivers and nomads, who travelled to the remotest parts of the country. Among them was a driver of a bureaucrat's car in the eastern state of Orissa who kept a journal of the new words he heard during his extensive travels. The volunteers interviewed people and chronicled the history and geography of languages.

They also asked locals to "draw their own maps" on the reach of their language. In response, "people drew maps shaped like flowers, triangles, circles. These were maps of their imagination on the reach of their language," says Dr Devy.

By 2011, the PLSI had recorded 780 languages, down from the 1,652 languages counted by the government in 1961. Thirty-nine of a planned 100 books carrying the findings of the organisation's survey have already been published; and some 35,000 pages of typed manuscripts are being vetted for publication.

India has lost a few hundred languages because of lack of government patronage, dwindling number of speakers, poor primary education in local languages, and migration of tribespeople from their native villages. The death of a language is always a cultural tragedy, and marks the withering away of wisdom, fables, stories, games and music.

Dr Devy says there are other pressing anxieties. He worries about the ruling Hindu nationalist BJP's efforts to impose Hindi all over India, which he calls a "direct attack on our linguistic plurality". He wonders how India's melting-pot megacities will deal with linguistic diversity in the face

of chauvinistic politics. "I feel sad every time a language dies. But we have suffered heavier losses in other diversities - like varieties of fish and rice," he says, sitting in his home in Dharwad, a sleepy, historic town in Karnataka state. "Our languages have survived tenaciously. We are truly a linguistic democracy. To keep our democracy alive, we have to keep our languages alive."

Languages of India

The 1961 census counted 1,652 Indian languages

- *The People's Linguistic Survey of India (PLSI) counted 780 Indian languages in 2010*
- *197 of these are endangered, 42 of them critically so, according to UNESCO*
- *Arunachal Pradesh and Assam in the northeast, Maharashtra and Gujarat in the west, Orissa and Bengal in the east, and Rajasthan in the north have the most languages*
- *India has 68 living scripts*
- *The country publishes newspapers in 35 languages*
- *Hindi is India's most used language, spoken by 40% of Indians. This is followed by Bengali (8.0%), Telugu (7.1%), Marathi (6.9%), and Tamil (5.9%)*
- *The state-run All India Radio (AIR) broadcasts programmes in 120 languages*
- *Only 4% of languages are represented in India's parliament*

Sources: Census of India, 2001, 1962, UNESCO, People's Linguistic Survey of India 2010.

As a background to this news story, the BBC Future web-site posted the following [excerpted by Ogmios]:

The race to find India's hidden languages

By Agnee Ghosh, from BBC Future (bbc.co.uk/future) 14 October 2021

Between 1961 and 1971, thousands of languages vanished from Indian census data. One man decided to track them down, before they were lost forever.

It was 2010 and Ganesh N Devy was concerned about the lack of comprehensive data on the languages of India. "The 1961 [Indian] census recognised 1,652 mother tongues," says Devy, "but the 1971 census listed only 109. The discrepancy in numbers frustrated me a lot." So Devy decided to find out what was going on himself.

India is one of the most linguistically diverse countries in the world. K David Harrison, a linguist from Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania, has labelled the country a "language hotspot". This, according to Harrison, is a place with a high level of linguistic diversity and endangerment, as well as a low level of documentation.

As a professor of English at Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda in Gujarat, Devy always had an interest in languages. He founded a number of organisations for their study, documentation

and preservation, including the Bhasha Research and Publication Centre in Baroda, the Adivasi Academy in Tejgadh, the DNT-Rights Action Group, and others.

Since 2013, the PLSI has published 68 volumes, featuring detailed profiles of each language that Devy came across. The remaining 27 volumes are to be published by 2025.

Take the state of Odisha, which has the largest number of tribal communities in India. Devy always knew it would be a linguistic goldmine for him, but he could not find a linguist there who would be able to work on these remote languages. Around this time, he came across a taxi driver who used to work for the district magistrate in Odisha. Whenever the district magistrate used to go for a visit in the villages, the driver preferred talking to the villagers rather than sitting in his car. "Over the years, he had mastered four languages; he had constructed grammars for those four languages and had collected folk songs and stories," says Devy. "It was material that was worthy of giving him a doctorate, maybe two doctorates."

Devy has come across several such people, including a schoolteacher in Gujarat who documented an entire epic from a different language in Rajasthan. It took him 20 years to document the epic and the entire project was funded with his own money.

"What I discovered is that it's not for monetary reasons that people learn and love languages," says Devy. "I always thought that it was only researchers who love languages, who were aware of grants and funds to support their work." Devy explains that he had not expected to find so many language specialists, especially among people who had not had much of a formal education. It was people like this whose knowledge proved invaluable to the linguistic survey.

But despite the layman's love for languages, Devy still estimates that close to 220 languages have been lost over the years.

Andamanese languages

The languages spoken by remote communities in the North East and the Andaman Islands have been identified as the **most vulnerable** by linguists. In 2003, Prof. Anvita Abbi undertook a documentation project, *Vanishing Voices of the Great Andamanese* (Voga).

Abbi's study of the Andamanese tribe led to the identification of a sixth language family in India, namely the Great Andamanese, which is spoken by indigenous people who inhabit the Andaman Islands. She studied the major languages of the Great Andamanese such as Sare, Bo, Khora and Jeru.

In 2010, Boa Senior died in the Andaman Islands. She was the last fluent speaker of Bo – one of the oldest languages in the world, dating back to pre-Neolithic times.

"Boa Senior died and Bo language went extinct, then the last speaker of Sare died as well as the last speaker of Khora," says Abbi. "To be very frank, a feeling of sheer helplessness engulfs us, especially the linguists, because we have been trying to promote these languages," she says, explain-

ing that she had written many letters to politicians, asking them for help, but felt that no one was listening.

In 2013, Abbi won the Padma Shri – an award handed out by the Indian government for civilian contributions to various fields – for her role in studying and documenting the languages of the Great Andamanese.

Wanglung Mossang and the Tangsa language

Sometimes it is left to the communities themselves to preserve their endangered languages. One such endeavour was recently undertaken by Wanglung Mossang, a farmer from the village in Arunachal Pradesh, a state in the Northeast of India.

Mossang speaks the Tangsa language which is a Sino-Tibetan language, or cluster of languages, spoken by the Tangsa people in northeastern India.

The Tangsa tribe of Arunachal Pradesh is divided into 40 subtribes, with each subtribe having its own dialect. The population of the Tangsa community is roughly 100,000 (a unit known as a lakh in India) and with so many different dialects, the danger of extinction of the language family increases.

"When I sat and chatted with elders in the community, I discovered plenty of words and vocabulary which were unknown to me before," says Mossang. "I wanted to write down these words using the English alphabet but it was difficult because of syntactical differences."

This is when he discovered Lakhum Mossang (no relation) who had invented a common script in 1990 that could be used by all the tribes of the Tangsa community. Wanglung Mossang took over the mission to preserve the Tangsa language after Lakhum Mossang passed away in 2020.

The common Tangsa script has 48 vowels and 31 consonants. The script has four different tones and each tone has a separate meaning attached to it.

Earlier this year, Mossang conducted evening classes for two weeks for college students when they were on holiday to teach them the common Tangsa script. But this was just part of Mossang's strategy to preserve the language.

"We created a script development committee in 2019 for the preservation of the common Tangsa script. The committee approached the state government to introduce the common Tangsa script into the primary school curriculum. It was very satisfying when they accepted our proposal," says Mossang.

The chief minister of Arunachal Pradesh launched the book of Tangsa script on Teacher's Day – a national holiday to celebrate the contributions of teachers, which occurs on 5 September in India – this year and it will soon be introduced into the school curriculum. Now the Tangsa writing system has been adopted as a font style by Microsoft Word.

However, many other Indian languages are still at risk.

Mossang says that people from tribal communities often lose their languages when they move out of the state or community to earn or when children aren't taught their mother tongue. Children learn the state languages in the school and parents promote these languages over their mother tongues with the hope that it will mean a better life for their children.

"People don't pay much attention to the beauty of our tradition and culture. We need to conduct awareness campaigns and hold workshops to teach tribal languages to our people. But we cannot do these things on our own. We need financial assistance and government support to promote our language and culture," says Mossang.

Indian Ministry of Education's Protection Scheme, illustrated by Rai-Rokdung community of Sikkim:

The Ministry of Education in India launched the **Scheme for Protection and Preservation of Endangered Languages (SPPEL)** in 2013, where the objective is to document the endangered languages or the languages that are likely to be endangered in the near future.

One such initiative to document endangered languages has been taken by the Centre for Endangered Languages at Sikkim University, which was established in 2016. The Centre promotes the preservation of endangered languages of the Indian state of Sikkim and a region that includes the northwestern part of Bangladesh and the northern part of the Indian state of West Bengal, by digitally documenting the linguistic and cultural diversity.

The **Sikkim-Darjeeling Himalayas Endangered Language Archive (Sidhela)** is a regional archive managed by Sikkim University's Centre for Endangered Languages and the university's central library, to house the documented resources.

Sikkim, like the rest of the eastern Himalayan region, is made up of multi-ethnic villages and people of multi-ethno-linguistic identities. The dominant culture of the state is Nepali or Gorkhali and they have a common set of festivals and foods. The lingua franca is also Nepali, while modern schools and the media have been instrumental in the spread of Hindi and English language as well.

In 2017, the researchers at Sidhela discovered the Rai-Rokdung community (population just 200) completely by chance, when a student at their university informed them about it. Rokdung is one of the pacha (divisions) of the Bantawa clan within the Rai community. The Rokdung clan is mostly located in East Sikkim and the members of the community claim to possess a distinct language of their own separate from the Bantawa. There has been no earlier mention of the language in the linguistic history of the region.

Hima Ktien, a linguist at Sidhela who spearheaded the documentation project of the language of the Rai Rokdung community, spoke about how most Rokdung community members self-identify

as members of the Rai groups, while some say they are Nepali. Only a few members choose to identify themselves as being a part of the RokdungYupacha or as Yaku.

"We found only 20 people who could speak the Rai-Rokdung language," says Ktien. If a language isn't taught in school, then there is no means to get to use the language. So people attempt to assimilate into society by adopting the language of the majority, and because of that the Rai-Rokdung language suffered because people started shifting to other languages.

"Media, like the schools, and other domains chose to use other languages spoken by the majority in the state and people started speaking the languages in the home too. That is when language becomes extinct, because people forget about the spoken informs and it does not get transferred from generation to generation," says Ktien.

In Sikkim, the smaller languages tend to be forgotten because of cultural assimilation of the various ethno-linguistic groups into a unified cultural identity of "Nepali".

"A big reason why languages are transferred [from person to person]," says Ktien, "is because of [a community's] pride in their own identity and language. So, when a language becomes functionally useless for a community in the outside world, they also do not want to be identified as a speaker of a lesser-known language."

This is then compounded by social factors, such as the need to work. "A speaker of a smaller language group will not be able to get employed in jobs if they only speak their own language," says Ktien.

While doing their research about the Rai-Rokdung community, Ktien and their team found that Rokdung is spoken in the home domain only when adults speak with the grandparents. The children of the house do not speak the Rokdung language and are mostly spoken to in Nepali. "Apart from home and religion, Rokdung is not used in any other domains today," says Ktien.

But Ktien tells me that they witnessed something remarkable towards the end of their research. In a hopeful turn of events, during their field visit in January 2020, they noticed that the speakers of the Rokdung language were coming together weekly in an effort to revitalise Rokdung. The older generation, who were mostly grandparents, were trying to pass on the language to the generation below, who were mostly parents. These willing pupils would note down the words they were unfamiliar with and actively try to use them.

"It was very gratifying to witness the change that was brought on by our work in documenting the language," says Ktien.

Scottish Gaelic supporters seek to reverse language's rapid decline

Mure Dickie on the Isle of Skye, from the Financial Times (UK) 26 December 2021

When John Finlayson was growing up, almost everyone in his community on the Isle of Skye was fluent in Gaelic. Now, despite decades of official support for what was once the dominant lan-

guage of most of the Scottish Highlands and Islands, Finlayson can only think of a single neighbour to the family croft on the island who speaks it.

“We’ve been trying to make Gaelic sustainable for many years. So why is it we are failing? That’s the big question,” said Finlayson, 63, a former headteacher who chairs the Highland local council’s education committee.

It is a question of increasing political urgency amid signs that Gaelic’s long linguistic retreat has become a rout. A study of areas where Gaelic is relatively strong published last year found that the ancient Celtic tongue could “soon cease to exist as a community language in any part of Scotland”. “The remaining vernacular networks will not survive anywhere to any appreciable extent, under current circumstances, beyond this decade,” said [the study](#), led by Conchúr Ó Giollagáin, Gaelic research professor at the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI).

The Scottish National party government is now considering emulating Ireland — where Scottish Gaelic’s linguistic sibling Irish is also under pressure — by grouping areas where the language is relatively strong into a “Gàidhealtachd”, a region that would be given special treatment to support the language.

There is cross-party support for Gaelic, which in the 11th century was spoken across much of Scotland (though never in the south-eastern area including Edinburgh). Later it was eclipsed by the Scots language (a dialect of English), and then English itself.

Scotland’s 2011 [census](#) found just over 1 per cent of people could speak Gaelic. On Skye, a historic centre of Gaelic culture, the challenges and complexities of arresting the language’s decline are clear. Young people who have learnt the language at home or through the Gaelic medium school system struggle to find jobs or homes on the island, where houses are often snapped up by southerners eager to try island life.

Remote working allowed Katie Kroll, 30, to return to Skye after a decade away that sharply reduced her Gaelic proficiency. Now a lack of fluent local peers makes brushing it up harder. “I have a lot of friends of my age who are Gaelic speakers that would love to come back to their communities, but they can’t because there’s not much work apart from hospitality and there’s absolutely no accommodation,” Kroll said.

In Staffin on Skye’s jagged-ridged northern coast nearly half of residents reported some proficiency in Gaelic in 2011. But Aonghas Ros, founder member of the local community trust, a grassroots development charity, said maintaining its routine use was a huge challenge. “English is all-powerful, all-pervading, totally dominating. Unless you are assertive, Gaelic simply gets pushed to one side,” Ros said.

Since Scots Gaelic speakers also speak English, increasing numbers of monolingual English speakers in a community have a dramatic impact on the language used in social situations. When only Gaelic-speakers are on the Staffin trust’s board, meetings are conducted in Gaelic — but that changes if even one board member does not understand the language. “You always tend to defer

to the fact that someone is only an English speaker, a monoglot person, otherwise you would exclude that person," Ros said.

Calum Munro, chair of the Gaelic committee on Highland council, said researchers' forecast of vernacular collapse rang true. "It's getting late. We know the situation now, so I think morally we have to face up to that challenge and try to do something," he said.

What to do is contested. The UHI study called for the creation of a new grassroots co-operative that would take some of the responsibilities and resources of Bòrd na Gàidhlig, the body responsible for promoting Gaelic. But Wilson McLeod, professor of Celtic and Scottish studies at Edinburgh university, said the study was unfair in its condemnation of current policy and had failed to provide evidence for its proposals. Much may depend on the judgment of Shirley-Anne Somerville, who as Scotland's education secretary, is responsible for Gaelic policy.

Somerville has promised new legislation to support the language and a review of Bòrd na Gàidhlig. But the cabinet secretary has yet to detail how a Gaelic speakers' Gàidhealtachd might work or say what other new policies could help save the language.

Officials have been holding discussions on the issue in preparation for a more formal consultation. "I go into this with a very open mind," Somerville told the Financial Times in August.

While some anglophone Scots bristle at any extra spending for Gaelic, bold action will be needed to reverse its decline. Mairi MacInnes, Bòrd na Gàidhlig chair, said rights to Gaelic education should be strengthened, almost all policies that affected island communities revised and much greater resources made available.

The UHI study was critical of the official attention put on teaching Gaelic as a second language — suggesting greater focus should be on supporting native speakers — but MacInnes hailed the growing number of people learning the language in Scotland's cities. "The use of the language is equally valuable, whether it is by someone who is learning it, someone who has learned it quite well, or someone who has just always had it," MacInnes said.

Some Skye residents take comfort from the increasing use of Gaelic by younger native speakers and learners alike in daily life and on social media. Anna Pelikan, 28, maintains a Gaelic Instagram page and runs a playgroup that introduces children to the language. Pelikan blamed Gaelic's decline on linguistic oppression and the infamous 18th and 19th-century clearance of Highland and Island populations for more profitable sheep.

But she believes enough young people now care about the language for it to revive. "I'm optimistic," she said. "We are slowly going up the hill ourselves."

Okinawan collaboration with Scottish Gaelic college

Professor Gordon Wells of the University of the Highlands and Islands, and Tomoko Arakaki of the Okinawa Christian University have been initiating a collaborative project for the promotion of their minority languages. The results so far have a promotional video in Okinawan about the Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, the Scottish Gaelic College. The College's blog postings on guthan.wordpress.com explain the multilingual project: (“Nach bruidhinn sinn mu dheidhinn Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, Colaiste Ghàidhlig na h-Alba, ann an Uidsianàguidsidh – cànan Okinawa.”)

At Guthan nan Eilean we centre our Gaelic attention on the Hebridean islands where the language is still most widely spoken, while reaching out to a worldwide community of interest. We believe this provides a firmly grounded platform, rooted in day-to-day vernacular practice, on which to build links and relationships with other linguistic communities who may be facing similar challenges, transcending nationally drawn boundaries of frequently debatable relevance or disputed authority for those who actually speak the languages in question.

So we're delighted now to add Okinawan – another island language at apparent risk of societal desuetude – to our list of Other Tongues in which our films have been re-purposed. Here, Tomoko Arakaki of the Okinawa Christian University has provided a fresh voiceover for our short documentary film about Sabhal Mòr Ostaig. This was first made in Gaelic and English for Series 2 Generations, with a Breton version following more recently. It's a source of pleasure and encouragement to us to make this concrete and practical new link across seas and continents, with a view to sharing news and ideas in a manner as suggested, for example, in the “Two Lands Many Languages” film which was shot mainly in Meghalaya during the International Year of Indigenous Languages.

Q'anjob'al: a Mayan language of Guatemala

The content of this entry is selected from University of Illinois's page “Q'anjob'al – Maya” <http://faculty.las.illinois.edu/rshosted/Qanjobal.html>.

Prepared for OGMIOS by Eda Derhemi

The bell rang and I opened the door. Two high-school boys were standing there. Often students from Central High School, which is less than a km from my home, come for different fundraising purposes. But these two had other reasons. The first one spoke to me. He had obviously started to use English very recently. The second one stayed two steps behind and did not look at me. I had the impression he did not follow the conversation. They wanted to know whether they could mow the lawn of my yard. I said that they could, and the two started speaking in a language I had never heard before, and not only that. I immediately realized the language had no relation whatsoever to any Indo-European language. But its sound was purely fascinating, the consonant clusters so complex, unusual and frequent, and I wasn't sure whether I was hearing glottal stops or clicks. The energy of its phonetic expression gave me an amazing feeling. I was sure it was a Mesoamerican language with some Aztek or Mayan features still living, but could not go further. I was dying to ask about their language, and when they stopped speaking, my curiosity was killing me. I happened to hear the language again, and my ear got more used to it. Its unconventional rhythm

and beauty still fascinate me though. I started to search about the language, Q'anjob'al, which is used much less than Spanish in Guatemala, and with different states of endangerment depending on the region and town where it is spoken. But it is still very strong among the immigrant groups that have immigrated in this university town, Urbana-Champaign. Most of them do not speak Spanish, so Q'anjob'al is their only language. Often the younger people among them, most of whom do not speak English yet, and who have studied Spanish at school in Guatemala, become the translators for their elderly using Spanish as the language that translates English to Q'anjob'al. It is while searching on the language, that I encountered the remarkable work that was being done by professors and students of the university of Illinois at U-C directed with community devotion and professionalism by Ryan Shosted.

And I thought, more people should know about this fascinating academic and community initiative that improves lives through language work, and educates younger students in the best way a university can educate.

Q'anjob'al is spoken by people in Guatemala, Mexico, and the United States. Native speakers tend to hail from the following municipalities of Guatemala: Santa Eulalia (Jolom Konob'), San Pedro Soloma (Tz'uluma'), Santa Cruz Barillas (Yalmotx), San Juan Ixcoy, San Miguel Acatán, and San Rafael la Independencia. A recent news report (Connolly 2017) indicates that there are approximately 550 speakers of Q'anjob'al currently living in Champaign County, Illinois. Immigration of Q'anjob'al speakers to the United States appears to be increasing (Medina 2019).

Beginning in 2007, a group of professors and students at the University of Illinois began collaborating with members of the Q'anjob'al community in Champaign-Urbana. That collaboration has resulted in classes for graduate and undergraduate students at the University, co-taught with a member of the Q'anjob'al community; a variety of Q'anjob'al-language materials; presentations for the general public; academic publications; and media interviews with the national and international press. Some of our work is mentioned on this webpage; some of the materials are made publicly available here, as well.

Ryan Shosted, Professor of Linguistics, has worked extensively with the Maya community since arriving in Champaign in 2007, helping to raise awareness about their native language of Q'anjob'al in the C-U community. The Illinois Maya Initiative plans to connect researchers, community social service professionals, and a growing community of Mayan immigrants and refugees in East Central Illinois.

In Spring 2016, Andrés Juan and Ryan Shosted co-taught a course (LING 490) called "Language Documentation" that focused on health care terminology in Q'anjob'al. Undergraduate students in the course learned the tools and techniques linguists use to document the world's under-resourced languages. The linguistic resources we gathered in the context of this course are intended as one of many possible starting points for conversations in Q'anjob'al regarding health care.

Professor Shosted has also created this power-point to provide some information for people in Illinois about Q'anjob'al. Professor Shosted has given many interviews and has led many groups of students doing community work, language documentation, social work based on language and linguistic communication, that also give back to the community on needed services like translation

and information networks. Below we bring some of this information that Shosted has created for the population of U-C about Q'anjob'al, in the form of simple slides.

Focusing on Q'anjob'al: a Mayan Language

- Q'anjob'al is spoken by 77,000 people (Ethnologue 2005); that's a little less than the population of Champaign, IL.
- There are many immigrant communities of Q'anjob'al speakers in the United States, including Champaign Co., IL; Omaha, NE; Los Angeles, CA; and Atlanta, GA.
- Q'anjob'al is spoken by the populations of several cities in the Department of Huehuetenango in Guatemala. Speakers may come from cities like: Santa Eulalia, Santa Cruz Barillas, San Miguel Acatán, San Juan Ixcoy, and Soloma.
- **Some easy questions**
- Is Q'anjob'al a written language?
Absolutely! Modern Mayan languages are written using the same (Roman) alphabet used in English, Spanish, and many other languages. They use some letters differently, however...
- Is Q'anjob'al different from Spanish?
Very different. Mayan languages are not related to Spanish, English, or any other (Indo-)European language.
- Can speakers of Mayan languages understand each other? It depends on the languages. Q'anjob'al is most closely related to Akatek, then Chuj (cf. Spanish and Portuguese; English and Swedish). Languages like K'iche', Mam, and Ixil are more distantly related to Q'anjob'al (cf. English and German) but still in the same family.
- **Why should I learn a Mayan language?** For a linguist, the answer is pretty much "Learn all the languages" – so go ahead! Maya immigration to the United States is currently strong; communicating with Maya friends and neighbors, especially in their own languages, will benefit the society we share. Non-indigenous Americans should understand the situation of contemporary indigenous Americans, including (but not limited to) the Maya. Studying modern Mayan languages can help us understand old texts, including those written in Classic Maya (Ch'olan) and Classical K'iche'.
- **Some aspects of the Q'anjob'al language**
 - Q'anjob'al has some uncommon speech sounds:
 - A large set of ejectives: [t' k' q' tz' ch' tx'] (Ejectives occur in 18% of world's languages .)
 - Three sibilant fricatives: [s xh x]
 - An implosive stop: [b'] (Implosives occur in 10% of world's languages)
 - Uvulars (contrasting with velars): [q q'] (Uncommon in the Americas)
- Q'anjob'al is among the subset of Mayan languages that retain uvulars from Proto-Mayan... they have merged with velars in other contemporary Mayan languages. [q'] may be produced as a voiceless implosive (though this is very uncommon).

'We feel pride.' An old western gets new life dubbed in Navajo

From The Guardian (UK) 5 November 2021 (Associated Press)

Manuelito Wheeler isn't sure exactly why Navajo elders admire western films.

It could be that decades ago, many of them were treated to the films in boarding schools off the reservation decades ago. Or, like his father, they told stories of growing up gathered around a television to watch gunslingers in a battle against good and evil on familiar-looking landscapes.

Whatever the reason, Navajo elders have been asking Wheeler to dub a western in the Navajo language ever since *Star Wars IV: A New Hope* was translated into Navajo and released in 2013.

The result? "Beeso Dah Yiniljaa" or *A Fistful of Dollars*, an iconic western starring [Clint Eastwood](#) who plays a stranger – known as The Man With No Name – entering a Mexican village in the throes a power struggle between families.

Unlike many other westerns produced in the US, it has no [Native Americans](#) in it. That appealed to Wheeler, the director of the Navajo Nation Museum.

"Usually in westerns, there are inaccurate, if not offensive, depictions of Native people, so this one had no Natives, period," Wheeler said. "That just eliminated that aspect for me."

A premiere for the crew and all-Navajo cast of voice actors is scheduled on 16 November at the movie theater in Window Rock, Arizona, the first showing since the venue shut down in March 2020 because of the coronavirus pandemic. Limited seats are available to members of the public who are vaccinated against Covid-19 and consent to a rapid test on site.

It will be screened for free later this month at other places on or near the Navajo Nation, which extends into Arizona, New Mexico and Utah.

Other popular films dubbed in Indigenous languages include *Bambi* in Arapaho, *Frozen 2* in Sami and *Moana* in Maori. The cartoon series *The Berenstain Bears* was translated into the Dakota and Lakota languages.

At least 20 Indigenous languages are spoken in the films being showcased by the National Museum of the American Indian in November during Native American Heritage Month, said program manager Cindy Benitez. Indigenous people are increasingly producing and directing their own stories, she said, including some entirely in Indigenous languages.

"We have films from all gamuts, from all places", she said. "It really gives me hope that these filmmakers are using that as a tool for language revitalization."

A Fistful of Dollars is the third major film dubbed in Navajo, an effort financed by the tribe to preserve the language. Elbert Jumbo voiced Bruce the shark and another fish in the Navajo version of *Finding Nemo*, released in 2016.

Jumbo, who retired from the US army and lives in Many Farms, voices Ramon in the western film. The character calls the shots, terrorizes the town and believes he's untouchable. Jumbo said he nailed the over-the-top super villainous laugh that is characteristic of spaghetti westerns.

Jumbo speaks, writes and reads Navajo, a result of growing up in a home where that was the only option.

“People feel a little more pride in knowing that we’ve come a long way with our language,” said Jumbo, 47. “It’s sad to say but some of it we’re losing to the younger generation. But at the same time, I think movies like this inspire them to learn, even if it’s just a little word here and there.”

The movie was supposed to release last year, but was delayed due to the pandemic.

The Navajo Nation Museum teamed up with the New York-based Kino Lorber film distribution company and the Indigenous-owned Native Stars Studios in Gallup, New Mexico, for the film.

“I can’t wait for my uncle to see this, for my dad to see this,” Wheeler said. “The other feeling is I wish that those who have gone, would be here to see this.”

4. Obituary

Professor Ken Mackinnon

Like many FEL members, I was deeply saddened to hear the news that Professor Kenneth MacKinnon had passed. I first met Professor MacKinnon at the conference dinner at FEL XIV in Carmarthen, Wales, and I must say, as a young scholar at the time, I was initially intimidated to find myself sitting next such a venerated scholar of Gaelic sociolinguistics and prominent figure in Gaelic language development. However, I soon realised one of Professor MacKinnon’s many admirable qualities: his respect and genuine interest in *people*, regardless of their status as a scholar or in a particular community. He treated everyone as an equal, and he was also renowned for his engaging conversation, with an amusing anecdote always at the ready.

Those of us FEL members who are lucky to have spent time in Professor MacKinnon’s company will remember his undying passion for the revitalisation of languages. In addition to his tireless work for the Gaelic language, he also lent his expertise to other endangered languages, including Cornish, the autochthonous language of the area he was evacuated to during the Second World War. Professor MacKinnon’s many contributions to Gaelic language revitalisation include as an adviser to the ministerial group brought the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 to fruition, as member of Bòrd na Gàidhlig from 2003-2014, and as board member for MG Alba from 2008-2011. His monograph 1977 *Language, Education and Social Processes in a Gaelic Community* (Routledge) is among the most important works documenting the Gaelic language shift. His monographs on the history of the Gaelic language—*The Lion’s Tongue: The Original and Continuing Language of the Scottish People* (1974, Club Leabhar) *Gaelic: A Past and Future Prospect* (1991, Saltire Society)—continue their legacy as touchstones for research on the social history of Gaelic-speaking peoples.

As mentioned in the obituary written by Professor MacKinnon’s son [published in the *Guardian*], Professor MacKinnon was not a first language speaker of Gaelic, but learned it to fluency. He was born in London and held lectureships at the Essex Technical College in Chelmsford, the Barking College of Technology, and held the position of reader in the sociology of language at Hatfield Polytechnic. He tutored at the Open University until his passing.

The loss of Professor MacKinnon will be felt in FEL for many years to come, but his scholarship, quest for social justice, and his kind personality will not be forgotten.

Cassie Smith-Christmas

5. Two Interesting New Games

Komunikado: a game designed for discovering languages

As explained in the Letter below, *Komunikado* is a new game designed to encourage interest in discovering the languages of the world. The aim of the game is to build the Kosmopolis, the City of Knowledge.

Letter from Thibault Brackers de Hugo, France, 20 October 2021 to the Editor:

Komunikado is an educational game created to familiarise the public to the protection and preservation of linguistic diversity and endangered languages. We believe that there is a genuine need for a playful, intuitive and inclusive pedagogical tool to enhance awareness of this great richness of our world. We believe that a common linguistic knowledge will contribute to the respect of endangered languages. We believe that in this education stands the first step to communication and understanding. We believe that local communities deserve the right to nurture, preserve and diffuse their heritage..

After months of development and testing, *Komunikado* is now ready : a forward-thinking project of general interest, it has a positive impact on language education and, beyond, for a better society, thanks to its multiple educative applications. *Komunikado* project wishes to call upon sponsors in order to join global initiatives such as the Decade of the Indigenous Languages launched by UNESCO. A sponsor could support *Komunikado*'s visibility with UNESCO or help, by any co-operation means, to disseminate the project. We should be most honored if you were to help us to share this information

It can be played by up to 6 players, from age 7 upwards. The game presents facts about 130 languages spoken around the world. There are plenty of cards presenting questions, 'memos' and puzzles. Details of the game are available (in French) on this website:

<https://komunikado.jimdosite.com/>

Ulus makes us at home on the Altai Range

By Tim Brookes

The Endangered Alphabets Project

(federal 501c3 non-profit) www.endangeredalphabets.com
and The Atlas of Endangered Alphabets at www.endangeredalphabets.net

Roughly 800 years ago, the Mongols established the largest contiguous land empire the world has ever known. This highpoint in their history is profoundly identified with Chinggis Khan, who is regarded as the founder of Mongolia; the horse and the bow, which were handled so skillfully by the Mongols that they swept all before them; and the unique, vertical classical Mongolian *bichig* script.

Since then, the vast Mongol Empire has dwindled. Most of those who identify ethnically and culturally as Mongols live in three countries: Russia, Mongolia, and China. Those in Russia tend to speak Russian and write in Cyrillic. Those in Mongolia speak Mongolian but, because of historic pressure from the Soviet Union, have written it for the past 80 years in Cyrillic, a script that imperfectly fits the Mongolian language and is a reminder of their recent subjugation rather than their earlier and more glorious history.

The traditional Mongolian script has until now been kept alive in China, in the region the Chinese call the Autonomous Province of Inner Mongolia, which some Mongols call Southern Mongolia. This region is also the home of the graceful, dynamic Mongolian calligraphy, identified by UNESCO in 2013 as a world intangible cultural heritage in urgent need of safeguarding.

This oasis of traditional Mongol culture was breached in August 2020, when the Chinese government announced that, starting that autumn, certain key classes in schools in Inner Mongolia would be taught not in Mongolian but in spoken and written Chinese.

The Orwellian significance of this apparently minor change was perfectly clear to the Mongols, who began protesting in an extraordinary way—in calligraphy. “A foreign language is a tool,” read one hand-lettered banner in *bichig* script, “[but] our mother tongue is our soul.”

Meanwhile, Chinese intentions were being made clear in France, where an exhibition about Chinggis Khan was suspended after the Chinese Bureau of Cultural Heritage demanded editing authority over exhibition brochures, legends and maps, and insisted any reference to Chinggis Khan himself, or the words “Mongol” and “empire” be removed, presumably to erase the fact that the Mongols once conquered China.

In the face of this campaign of cultural genocide, my small U.S.-based non-profit, the Endangered Alphabets Project, decided to support the Mongol people in an indirect and, with luck, non-provocative way--by creating a game that introduces Mongol history and culture to the West. We decided to call it *Ulus*, meaning “nation,” “land,” or “home.”

At the heart of the game, whose full name is *Ulus: Legends of the Nomads*, is a supposedly historical incident. When Chinggis Khan had established the Mongol empire, a debate sprang up among him and his sons: Now what? What do we want to do with this *ulus*, this homeland? What kind of people do we want to be? Do we want to maintain our traditional nomadic culture—or do we want to become something more citified, like the peoples we’ve discovered in the West?

The game is a contest among the Mongol gods, each of which has their *ulus*, or vision for the future of the Mongol lands. (None of them, by the way, involves world conquest.) Following the Greek tradition in which quarrels among the gods were played out on the human chessboard, each god is represented in the game by a human champion, drawn from Mongol history and mythology, such as Khutulun, the noblewoman who challenged her suitors to wrestle her for her hand in marriage (and defeated them all), and Zanabazar, Buddhist sage, sculptor, poet, and creator of an alphabet.

Each champion has to gather the kinds of asset that will enable their god to establish and maintain their *ulus*, the assets being represented by cards—but each asset card is at a sacred site, guarded by a monster from Mongol mythology (Mongolian Death Worm, anyone?), and the champions have to defeat monsters in order to gain assets.

The movement of the game follows the rhythms of nomadic life, with the group of champions moving season by season around the Mongol lands, and the champions' fortunes are dictated by rolling *shagai*—sheep's anklebones used across Asia for divination, and in children's games. The climax comes at the summer festival of Naadam, the world's oldest continuously-celebrated sporting event, where the champions challenge each other at the three traditional Mongol games: wrestling, archery, and horseback riding.

Our hope is that the game will have different kinds of value in different regions.

In the West, it's not only an introduction to Mongolian culture but an effort to overcome the persistent stereotype of the Mongols as bloodthirsty brutes—a role they occupy in electronic games in particular—and to help redress the fact that very few Asian Studies programs have a single course in Mongolian history, culture, or language.

In Mongolia (where we're hoping to find an entrepreneurial publisher for a Mongolian edition in Cyrillic as well as *bichig* script), the game may play a role in the country's historic decision to reintroduce, over the next four years, the traditional script, which is respected, but used by only a fraction of the population. Efforts to revive traditional scripts typically face considerable inertia; a game may be a valuable accessory.

In Inner Mongolia, the game may offer the chance to carry out a kind of under-the-radar resistance: it may represent less of a threat than overt political opposition to the Chinese government's policies, and yet still serve as a way of keeping Mongol history and identity alive at a time when they are being officially written out of official education.

Does the game also teach the Mongolian language and its traditional script? No. Our goal is to open a door and offer a glimpse, hoping those who are interested in languages will follow the links we offer to online lessons in spoken and written Mongolian language. We have calligraphers standing by so that, if the game is a modest success, we can release a more linguistically-advanced deck in which each card presents the name of the god, champion, or monster in *bichig* script, with a pronunciation guide.

More importantly, though, the Endangered Alphabets Project is less about linguistics and more about social justice; or, if you like, an endangered alphabet is a symptom of an endangered culture. If nobody takes up Mongolian calligraphy as a result of playing Ulus, that's merely a missed opportunity; if someone plays Ulus and comes away not caring whether Mongolian culture--or any threatened culture--survives, that's a massive failure on my part.

For more information about the game, or to order it, visit ulusgame.com. For more about the Endangered Alphabets Project, see endangeredalphabets.com and the Atlas of Endangered Alphabets at endangeredalphabets.net.

And finally... two memorable views of Albania

Overleaf

Pictures taken by Nicholas Ostler in the

- 1) Marubi Museum, Shkodra, Albania (Photo)
- 2) Historical Museum, Tirana, Albania (Painting)

The Albanian Alphabet Commission, Monastir, 1908 – which selected Latin script (over Greek, Cyrillic and Persian) and defined the details.



And another way to make a decision...

