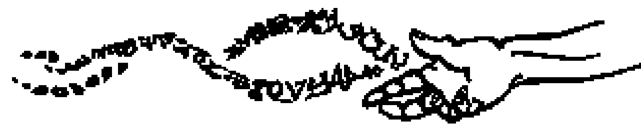
FOUNDATION FOR ENDANGERED LANGUAGES



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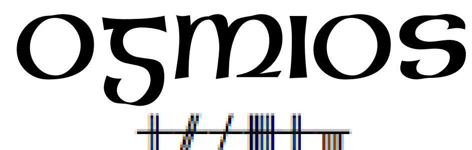

Participants in the 29th annual FEL conference, Vitoria-Gasteiz, Basque Country, 2025

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1. Editorial

Our Foundation now has another feather in its cap. We have just pulled off another successful annual conference – our 29th, in collaboration with University of the Basque Country and the UNESCO Chair there, but we have been able to issue a final proposal for the text of the 18th Sustainable Development Goal for the UN, with the approval of the Government of the Basque Country, for inclusion in the United Nations' Agenda 2030. You can read the text of it later in this issue.

Your Editor was only able to follow the conference remotely on video, due to illness, but it was very apparent that it was very well run by our local organisers at the University in Vitoria-Gasteiz. The languages of the conference were English and Basque, with efficient interpretation from one to the other. The conference is just concluding as I write these lines, and the participants will be saying farewell to their new-found friends in the next day or so. We had a well-distributed international reputation this year, presenting papers of high quality, all related in some way to the other to the felt need to establish an eighteenth Sustainable Development Goal to add to the other 17 that the UN recognises. Sadly, for various reasons the FEL Committee was under-represented at the conference this year, which meant that our Secretary, Salem Mezhoud, had to do a lot of the talking and explaining on our behalf.

Chris Moseley

2. Development of the Foundation

Final Proposal for the 18th Sustainable Development Goal

An important outcome of our FEL conference in the Basque Country was a draft of the terms of the 18th Sustainable Development Goal – the main theme of the conference. The Proposal was released on 23 October 2025, with the approval of the Basque Government. Here is the text of it:

Goal 18: Cultural and linguistic diversity

18.1 Recognise that all languages and cultures are part of the common intangible heritage of humanity, and therefore must be cared for, protected and passed on.

18.2 Guarantee every person's linguistic and cultural rights, as well as their opportunity to access their own language and culture.

18.3 Ensure freedom of cultural expression to safeguard the freedom of individuals and societies.

18.4 Promote the contribution of languages and cultures to the health and development of individuals and communities, strengthening their empowerment.

18.5 Foster inclusion, social integration and citizen participation through culture and language, conveying their value as drivers of social cohesion and development.

18.6 Promote effective management of the linguistic and cultural diversity generated by migration flows, through measures based on interculturality.

18.7 Incorporate the gender perspective and language and cultural policies,

18.8 Integrate local minority languages into the education system to ensure the transmission of local linguistic heritage and guarantee that new generations can live in these languages.
18.9 Highlight the role of culture in developing citizens' creative capacity and critical thinking, and apply this in educational models.
18.10 Ensure decent career paths in the cultural field, at all levels, including education, employment and recognition of the cultural sector.
18.11 Provide resources to promote the use of local minority languages in the workplace.
18.12 Ensure the presence and use of local minority languages in the media, the digital sphere and new creative technologies.
18.13 Value the contribution of local language and cultural topics in international cooperation, especially with developing countries or those in conflict situations.
18.14 Foster cooperation among countries and communities with minoritized languages, to guarantee the right to linguistic and cultural diversity.

3. Endangered Languages in the News

The last isolated groups in Peru-Brazil Amazon under threat

By John Reid & Daniel Biasetto, from The Guardian and O Globo, 5 July 2025

In 1999, the anthropologist Beatriz Huertas ventured into the Peruvian Amazon to investigate reports of uncontacted Indigenous peoples. Along Las Piedras River, residents of Monte Salvado, a Yine village, described how *aislados* – those avoiding sustained contact – would appear across the river each summer. "They were coming into the fields and talking bananas," says Huertas.

Following the trail north into Brazil's Acre state, Huertas gathered evidence – footprints, tools and testimonies. Her 2001 report for the Native Federation of the Madre de Dios River and Tributaries (FENAMAD) recommended protecting 2m. hectares (5m. acres) for the Mashco Piro, the world's largest uncontacted Indigenous group.

Now the Mashco Piro face growing threats from logging, drug trafficking and the climate crisis in the Brazil-Peru borderlands. Recent raids in Brazil highlight their struggle for territory and resources, worsened by environmental changes and criminal activity.

Despite international agreements, cooperation between Brazil and Peru remains inadequate. After Huertas's report, Peru protected 800,000 hectares but 38 logging concessions were soon granted on the other side of the boundary, covering areas used by the Mashco Piro. In 2006, Peru passed a law creating six Indigenous reserves with stronger legal standing, including Madre de Dios. An approved expansion of the reserve by 240,471 hectares was never implemented and logging concession remain in m ore than 176,000 hectares.

This tense cohabitation has resulted in a long-term conflict in Madre de Dios. An investigation by the global investigative journalism network Ojo Público, using ministry of culture data, found 81 instances of evidence of the Mashco Piro in and around the Madre de Dios reserve from 2016 to 2024. Four involved violent encounters.

Israil Aquise, the coordinator of FENAMAD's defence of isolated peoples, notes that violence has changed community behaviour. "The women are not coming out, and the old men and children who used to come out are not appearing," he says. Only able-bodied men and boys are now seen on the riverside.

Lucas Manchineri, the president of the local Indigenous association in Brazil, says the climate crisis is also disrupting seasonal routines, forcing the Mashco Piro closer to villages where the risks increase. "Wherever land isn't protected, there are miners, drug traffickers, loggers, illegal fishers and hunters and those people are pushing the Mashco Piro closer to our community," he says.

Peru's ministry of culture mai9ntains 19 control posts for Indigenous and territorial reserves, but budget cuts have left many understaffed. Romel Ponciano, a Yine man from Monte Salvado, notes the Mashco Piro population appears to be increasing, with sightings of up to 200 at a time, but says protection measures are not following. "Each post needs six staff members, but often we have only two people on duty – or none at all," he says.

Last year, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights found Peru had violated the rights of the Mashco Piro and two other groups. Despite clear evidence, a business group in Loreto recently launches a campaign denying the existence of isolated peoples in north-east Peru.

For two decades, the timber industry has operated under 40-year leases in Mashco Piro territory. Some officials now support a special zone for loggers and uncontacted people to coexist, a move Huertas, now a consultant for the Rainforest Foundation Norway, warns could set a dangerous precedent. Indigenous organisations in Peru's north-east have successfully sued to revoke logging concessions but Huertas fears such suits would fall if legal timber operations were allowed in uncontacted lands.

Carla Cárdenas, an Ecuadorian environmental lawyer and Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) member, says certification rules for logging companies require local consultation, impossible with uncontacted groups. She has drafted a motion to bar certification where there is evidence of Indigenous peoples in voluntary isolation. The FSC's representatives did not respond to the Guardian's request for comment, but released a statement indicating that the certifications for forestry company Maderacre were being reviewed.

Local authorities also often support logging. At a December 2024 meeting, Tahuamanu's mayor, Rubén Darío, called for a new study to verify whether the Mashco Piro truly need the land, citing timber value.

Agents such as Ponciano sometimes communicate briefly across the river to Mashco Piro, since they speak a similar language. Ponciano says the *aislados* don't understand logging. "'Why do they cut down the big trees?' they asked me," he says. "I couldn't explain. For them, the trees are like monuments."

Ponciano has asked if they want to make contact. "They have always told me the same: 'No, because you are bad,'" he says.

Who are 'uncontacted peoples'?

Also known as 'indigenous peoples living in voluntary isolation', they avoid contact with modern society to protect their way of life. They live in remote areas such as rainforests and deserts, maintaining cultures free from outside influence. Governments and organisations often aim to protect their rights to prevent disease, cultural disruption and exploitation.

What constitutes contact?

In anthropology, contact means interaction between cultural or social groups. Contacted individuals have ongoing relations with society. Contact can be direct, such as trade or conflict, or indirect, such as disease transmission. It involves cultural exchange and economic interactions. Brief or accidental interactions don't count as contact.

Where are their territories?

Most uncontacted peoples live in the Amazon basin. Others are in the Gran Chaco in South America, the Andaman Islands in the Indian Ocean, and western New Guinea. Experts estimate the Amazon basin, a vast region spanning several countries, could be home to dozens of such groups living in isolation.

Take away our language and we will forget who we are: Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and the language of conquest

By Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, introduced by Aminatta Forna, from the Guardian (UK), 12 August 2025

In the 1930s, it was common for British missionaries to change the names of African school pupils to biblical names. The change wasn't "just for school" – it was intended to be for ever. So Ngũgĩ became James and my father, Mohamed, became Moses. While many students retained their new names throughout their lives, Ngũgĩ and my father changed theirs back, though you can still find early editions of Ngũgĩ's first book, Weep Not, Child, under the name of "James Ngugi". With the novel, Ngũgĩ established himself as a writer and later, by reclaiming his Kikuyu identity as an activist, began a process of decolonisation that he would explore in one of his most famous nonfiction works, Decolonising the Mind (1986), which challenged the dominance of European languages in African education and literature. Ngũgĩ worked throughout his life to promote the decolonisation of language, writing and publishing his books in Kikuyu and only later translating them himself into English.

Ngũgĩ was a campaigner against the legacy of colonialism, but first and foremost a Marxist. Studying at the University of Leeds in the 1960s, he witnessed first-hand the brutality of the police towards striking white miners and realised that economic exploitation was a class issue and not a purely racial one. He endured exile, imprisonment, physical assault and harassment by the postcolonial Kenyan authorities and yet never stopped writing and publishing, even penning one of his works, Devil on the Cross (originally titled Caitaani mũtharaba-Inĩ), on prison toilet paper. Detained for his involvement with community theatre groups, Ngũgĩ noted that as long as he wrote in English, the authorities ignored him. Only when he began to write politically critical plays in Kikuyu, and ordinary working people could understand them, was he arrested.

Ngũgĩ was one of the grandfathers of African literature, and his courage made him beloved of a generation of writers. At the 2015 Pen World Voices festival, Ngũgĩ opted to stay in the same hotel as the other African writers, while others of his stature chose loftier accommodation. Here, the likes of Lola Shoneyin, Alain Mabanckou, the late Binyavanga Wainaina, Taiye Selasi, Ngũgĩ's son Mukoma wa Ngũgĩ and me fetched the cups of tea he drank all day long, found a pen he needed or hailed a taxi on his behalf. One evening I helped organise an after-dinner party in a local bar. Ngũgĩ went to bed early, set an alarm, rose and joined us in the bar. He wanted tea, but the bar didn't serve it. So someone ran out and fetched him one. In May this year, Ngũgĩ was apparently dancing with some of his students at the University of California, Irvine, to mark the end of the semester on the Friday before his death, at the age of 87. ***Aminatta Forna***

Since the publication of my book Decolonising the Mind in 1986, I have seen, over the years, increasing global interest in issues of decolonisation and the unequal power relationships between languages. In 2018, the same issues took me to Limerick in Munster, Ireland, for a conference celebrating 125 years since the foundation of the Gaelic League (Conradh na Gaeilge), in 1893.

The league was dedicated to the revival of Gaelic, or Irish, which by then, in its own country, had become subordinate to the dominant English. Despite many efforts, including official government support for its revival, Irish is still subordinate to English. More Irish speak and use English than they do Irish. Some of the most iconic Irish writers, such as WB Yeats and James Joyce, wrote in English, and they are studied as part of the canon of English literature. I cannot conceive of an English department anywhere in the world, including Britain itself, which didn't teach courses in these writers of Irish origin. They have become some of the greatest contributors to English literature.

This unequal power relationship between the two languages in favour of the English was not always the case. The early English settlers in Ireland, Munster in particular, gravitated toward Irish because, by all accounts, in the beginnings of English settlement – particularly between the 13th and 16th centuries – the Irish language was the more endowed in classical learning. Naturally, those early settlers were drawn to the more vibrant Irish tongue. Their gravitation made sense: Irish was the majority tongue, spoken by those among whom the English planters had settled.

London acted, and beginning with the 1366 Statutes of Kilkenny, it passed edicts aimed at protecting the English language against the subversive encroachment of Irish or Gaelic, reinforcing by law the use of English while literally criminalising Irish. Among other things, the Kilkenny statutes threatened to confiscate any lands of any English or any Irish living among them who would use "Irish among themselves, contrary to the ordnance". These policies were given a literary and philosophical rationale by none other than the poet Edmund Spenser, author of The Faerie Queene and himself a settler in Munster. In his pamphlet A View of the Present State of Irelande, published in 1596, he argued that language and naming systems were the best means of bringing about the erasure of Irish memory: "It hath ever been the use of the conqueror to despise the language of the conquered, and to force him by all means to learn his."

The marginal status of Irish in its own land did not come about by some kind of natural evolution. The decline of Irish in its

own land was brought about through conscious political acts and educational policies.

Ireland, it has been observed, was England's first settler colony. It became a kind of laboratory for other English settler colonies that followed. And what was true for Ireland and other English colonies was equally so for other colonial systems, whether Spanish, French or Portuguese, or the Japanese occupation of Korea from 1910 to 1945. It is also true in the case of domestic colonialism, such as the Norwegian suppression of the language of Sami people. The suppression of the languages of the dominated and the elevation of the language of conquest and domination were integral to the education system that accompanied conquest and colonial occupation.

Linguistic suppression was not undertaken for the aesthetic joy of doing so. Spenser was clear that the colonisation of the Irish language and naming system would make the Irish forget who they were, weaken their resistance, and therefore make it easier for the English to conquer and subdue them. Language conquest, unlike the military form, is cheaper and more effective: the conqueror has only to invest in capturing the minds of the elite, who will then spread submission to the rest of the population. The elite become part of the linguistic army of the conqueror.

Because of its centrality in the making of modern Britain, India became, even more than Ireland, a social laboratory, whose results were later exported to other colonies in Asia and Africa. Thomas Babington Macaulay, as a member of the Supreme Council of India from 1834 to 1838, helped reform the colony's education system as well as draw up its penal code; both activities have a special significance. In his famous 1835 Minutes on Indian Education, Macaulay advocated the replacement of Sanskrit and Persian with English as the language of education in order to form a class of "interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern, a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect".

In 1879, Capt Richard Henry Pratt founded the infamous Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, where he devised his own variant of the method for Native American children, less than 20 miles across the scenic Susquehanna River from the steps of the state capitol in Harrisburg. In 1892, he summed up the philosophy behind the boarding school: "Kill the Indian in him, and save the man." His education programme followed the same colonial pattern: uproot a few from their mother tongue, which is spoken by most of their people, mould them anew in the language of conquest, and then unleash them on the governed masses.

In his book How Europe Underdeveloped Africa, Walter Rodney quotes Pierre Foncin, a founder of the Alliance Française, an institution specifically created in 1883 for the propagation of the national language in the colonies and abroad, as being very clear about the goal of the mission. It was "necessary to attach the colonies to the metropole by a very solid psychological bond against the day when their progressive emancipation ends in a form of federation, as is probable – that they be and they remain French in language, thought and spirit".

The goal was very clear. Imperial educational policies were meant to create colonies of the mind, among the elite of the colonised. The success of these policies is undeniable. A variation of the Irish situation, where even after independence, the intellectuals express themselves more fluently in the language of imperial conquest than in the languages from their own country, is present in every postcolonial situation. In the case of Africa, you even hear the identity of the continent being described in terms of Europhonity: anglophone, francophone and lusophone, mainly.

Even where the elite are nationalistic and assertive of their independence, they find it easier to express their outrage and hopes in the languages of imperial conquest. Ninety per cent of the moneys allocated for language education goes to pamper imperial languages. Ninety per cent of the population still speaks African languages anyway. Some governments even view African languages as enemies of progress. They believe that imperial languages are really the gateway to global modernity.

Under normal circumstances, it would sound odd to hear that French literature can only be written in Japanese, or English literature in IsiZulu, so that when you meet a French writer who writes in French, you look at them in surprise: why on earth are you writing in French? Or an English writer writing in English: why are you not writing in Zulu? And yet this absurdity is expected of African writers and writers from those formerly colonised.

How did this absurdity come about? It is not that some languages are more "of language" than others. And under any circumstances, to know more languages can only empower the person. But this was not the case in colonial contexts or any context in which there is a dominating and dominated. It was never a case of adding a new language to what one already had. For the colonial conqueror, it was not enough to introduce an additional language to any community. Imperial languages had to be planted on the graveyard of the languages of the dominated. The death of African languages gave life to European languages. In order for the imperial language to be, the language of the colonised had to cease to be. Amnesia for African languages; anamnesis for European languages.

These two conditions are not inherent in the character of the languages involved. They are mental conditions consciously brought about by how the imperial languages were imposed. In Decolonising the Mind, I have talked about the corporal punishment meted out to African children caught speaking an African language at school, children who were then made to carry a placard around the neck proclaiming their stupidity. In some cases, the culprit was made to swallow filth, thus associating African languages with criminality, pain and filth.

This was not just in Africa.

In his 2015 testimony to the Waitangi Tribunal about his experiences of school in New Zealand, Dover Samuels, a Māori politician, tells a similar story. Caught speaking Māori in the school, he said: "You'd be hauled out in front of the rest of the class and told to bend over. You'd bend over and he'd stand back and give you, what they called it then, six of the best. On many occasions, not only did it leave bruises behind on my thighs but drew blood."

The Sami people in Norway went through a similar experience in the period between 1870 and 1970 – what they call the brutal

century – in an attempt to turn them into fluent Norwegian-language speakers. Violence against native languages is the running theme in the spread of English in Ireland, and in Scotland and Wales. In Wales, those who spoke Welsh in the school compound were made to stand in front of the class, with a placard reading WELSH NOT hanging from their neck. Violence was central in creating the psychological bond of language, culture and thought: colonies of the mind. You would think that after liberation and independence, the new nations, at the very least, would dismantle that unequal power relationship. But that is precisely the power of the colonies of the mind: negativity toward self has become internalised as a way of looking at reality. It is a classic case of conditioning you will find in manuals of behavioural psychology. Conditioning is a system of reward and punishment: punishment for undesired behaviour and reward for the desired behaviour. It is often used in various degrees of intensity in bringing up children or taming animals. The undesired behaviour becomes associated with punishment, and hence pain; the desired behaviour with reward, and hence pleasure. The object of conditioning, a child or an animal, comes to automatically avoid the space of pain, the forbidden behaviour, and gravitate toward the space of pleasure, the required behaviour. In the case of learning, one became the recipient of glory for excelling in the language of conquest, but the recipient of a gory mess for uttering even a single word in one's mother tongue. One's mother tongue became the space of pain, to be avoided, and the conquering language became the space of pleasure, to be desired.

The trauma experienced by the first generation of the conditioned can be passed on as normal behaviour that needs no explanation or justification; the later generations may not even understand why they associate pain with native languages and pleasure with foreign languages and cultures. The elite and educational planners of the formerly colonised societies assume that European (imperial) languages are inherently global and best able to carry intelligence and universality. That assumption may also explain why criminalising African languages continues to this day, now administered and enforced by African educationalists who don't see the irony of what they are doing: an African punishing another African for speaking an African language, by order of an African government.

The trauma initially wrought by the colonial education system is thus passed on, inherited. Abnormality becomes normalised. The colony of the mind prevents meaningful, nationally empowering innovations in education. Control by the coloniser of the colonised is inherent in the inequality of the education system. Education may become a process of mystifying the cognitive process and even knowledge.

Here we need to make a distinction between education and knowledge. Knowledge is a question of continuously adding to what we already know in a dialectical play of mutual impact and illumination. The normal cognitive process starts from the known and heads toward the unknown. Every new step makes more of the unknown known and therefore adds to what is already known. The new known enriches the already known, and so on, in a continuous journey of making dialectically related connections. Knowledge of the world begins where one is.

Education, on the other hand, is a mode of conditioning people to make them into, and function in, a given society. It may involve transference of knowledge, but it is conditioned knowledge, branded by the world outlook of the educator and the education system. A careful study of the colonial process, as a particular instance of the dominant and the dominated, the master and the servant, can be useful in thinking about balanced and inclusive education. Colonial education was never balanced or inclusive.

The colonial process was always a negation of the normal cognitive process. Imperial Europe – its names, its geography, its history, its knowledge – was always seen as the starting point of the educational journey of the colonised. In short, colonisation, in the area of education, was always predicated on the negation of the colonised space as the starting point of knowledge. In the area of language, it meant a negation of native languages as valid sources of knowledge or as means of intellectual and artistic inquiry. The lack of roots in our base creates a state of permanent uncertainty about our relationship to where we are, to our abilities, even to our achievements.

Decolonisation must be at the heart of any balanced and inclusive education. Both the formerly colonising and the formerly colonised are affected by a system that has shaped the globe over the last 400 years. Knowledge starts wherever we are. Our languages are valid sources of knowledge. We all love the stars, but we don't have to migrate to Europe, physically or metaphorically, in order to reach them.

In the case of languages, we have to reject the commonly held wisdom that the problem in any one country or the world is the existence of many languages and cultures, and even religions. The problem is their relationship in terms of hierarchy. My language is higher in the hierarchy than yours. My culture is higher than yours. Or my language is global; yours is local. And in order for you to know my language, you must first give up yours. The view that my god is more of a god than your god is very ungodly. This view leads some people to see their own language as inherently more of a language than other languages and therefore to insist that they themselves must be ranked higher in knowledge and power. This is what I call linguistic feudalism.

All languages, large and small, have a lot to contribute to our common humanity if freed from linguistic feudalism. Education policies should be devised on the basis that all languages are treasuries of history, beauty and possibility. They have something to give to one another if their relationship is that of the give-and-take of a network. Even if one of the languages emerges as the language of communication across many languages, it should not be so on the basis of its assumed inherent nationality or globality, but on the basis of need and necessity. And even then, it should not grow on the graveyard of other languages.

Balanced and inclusive education calls for a new slogan: network, not hierarchy. We have to understand that all languages, big and small, have a common language: it is called translation. Education should never lead to linguistic and cultural self-isolation. I want to connect to the world, but that doesn't mean I have to negate my starting base. I want to connect to the world from wherever I am. I believe that the goal of education is knowledge that empowers, that shows our real connections to

the world, but from our base. From our base, we explore the world: from the world, we bring back that which enriches our base.
That, it seems to me, is the real challenge in organising knowledge and transmitting it in an inclusive and balanced education system in the world today. We have to reject the notion that splendour is not splendour unless it springs from squalor. Palaces are not palaces unless erected on prisons. My millions are not millions unless mined from a million poor. For me to be, others must cease to be. Education must convey knowledge that empowers us to imagine more inclusive palaces, where my being enables your being and yours enables mine.

Challenge to legend of 'last true Cornish speaker'

By Steven Morris, from The Guardian (UK), 15 September 2025
The legend that Cornish vanished as a living language with the death of the fish seller Dolly Pentreath in the late 18th century is being challenged by a leading expert on the Celtic culture of the far south-west of Britain.
Pentreath, from the port village of Mousehole on the Cornish south coast, died in 1777 aged 85 and the narrative developed that she was the last true speaker of Kernewek.
But Kensa Broadhurst, of the Institute of Cornish Studies at the University of Exeter, has written a book which argues that the language clung on through the 19th century, spoken by some working-class people, academics and others who saw value in preserving it. Broadhurst said Cornish should be classified as having been critically endangered rather than extinct. "The story of the Cornish language is one of resilience, not disappearance," she said.
Broadhurst, a bard of the Cornish Gorsedh, which promotes Cornish Celtic culture, said Cornish was widely spoken in medieval times. By the time Pentreath was born in 1692, the number of speakers had dramatically declined.
Broadhurst said Pentreath's voice has vanished from history and much of what is known came from the writings of wealthy outsiders, who may have misrepresented her.
"We're talking about rich, educated men with leisure time," Broadhurst said.
Daines Barrington, an English lawyer, antiquary and naturalist, is credited with having 'discovered' Pentreath. He reported that she "was bred up from a child to know no other language; nor could she (if we may believe her) talk a word of English before she was past 30 years of age; that, he father being a fisherman, she was sent with fish to Penzance at 12 years old, and sold them in the Cornish language."
Broadhurst said it was possible Pentreath had been playing with Barrington. "If you're poor and this smart man who's obviously got money is showing an interest, are you going to try and milk that?"
After her death, the idea grew that the language had died with her. In 1860 a monument was set up in a churchyard describing her as "the last person who conversed in the ancient Cornish".

For her book, *The Cornish Language in the Nineteenth Century*, Broadhurst studied experts such as Frederick William Pearce Jago, who published a Cornish dictionary in 1887, and the cultural activist Henry Jenner.
Broadhurst believed Cornish continued to be spoken in the 19th century, albeit in tiny numbers. She said: "There were still people teaching it to their children, there were people doing research on it. It was even being taught in universities in France."
Kernewek has enjoyed a revival, with Cornwall council estimating there are about 500 advanced speakers and more than 2,000 with basic levels. Cornish culture is thriving, with the pop singer Gwenno, who performs in languages including Cornish, among those promoting Kernewek.

Do you speak Sylheti?

By Etan Smallman, from the Guardian (UK), 24 September 2025
In his studio, Sam Winston appears less artist, more linguistic alchemist. He is experimenting with manufacturing inks out of tobacco from Marlboro cigarettes, the juice of Belarusian chokeberries and a strange brew of kohl eyeliner from the Middle East and galena – the mineral form of lead sulfide – from Wales.
The coloured substances are used to conjure words onto giant canvas flags that will soon hang from the ceiling of London's Barbican Centre – connecting a group of poets' native languages with materials from their native landscapes. The quintet speak marginal or at-risk languages covering five continents, and their newly commissioned poems all speak to their sense of home.
The kohl concoction will spell out "How are you?" in Arablish, a melding of Arabic and English, taken from a poem by Hanan Issa, the half-Iraqi National Poet of Wales. Quebec-born writer Norma Dunning's flag will bear the word "veins" in Canadian syllabics, made out of wild blueberries foraged from her home terrain. The piece, Seed Syllable, will welcome visitors to *Voiced*, Britain's first arts festival celebrating minority and endangered languages, or what the Barbican calls an "explosion of creative multilingualism". Winston has been playing with language in his art for more than 20 years, including using cuneiform and Egyptian hieroglyphs in his celebrated picture book *One and Everything*. His co-curator, poet Chris McCabe, is editor of *Poems from the Edge of Extinction* and founder of the Endangered Poetry Project. Based at London's Southbank Centre, it invites the public to submit poems in threatened languages, collating them for future generations.
Winstons acknowledges the "sense of urgency and loss" – every two weeks, another language falls silent and by the end of this century, half of the world's 7,000 tongues are expected to become extinct. But he was determined for this to be much more than a mournful symposium: "It is a festival and you want to have that playful and joyful element."
After an opening event featuring *Trainspotting* author Irvine Welsh, there will be workshops including interactive sessions on the 94 languages spoken across the London borough of Hackney, and how to create your own alphabet. The live literature programme will showcase dialect poetry (from Scouse to Sylheti) and invented languages (from Klingon to Polari).
Throughout next month, there will also be the free-to-access Creative Voice Exhibition – and immersive area where you can contribute to a collaborative artwork by drawing, writing or

rhyming your response to your favourite piece of language – and a family-friendly listening trail in which you can discover hidden languages using a map that will take you to quiet corners of the Barbican's brutalist complex. "You'll walk to different stations and you can hear all of these different communities," says Winston. "It's not really about language, it's about how people get married and how people go fishing."

Winston grew up in Devon, Wales and Yorkshire as a dyslexic boy "suspicious of all these tiny black marks… It felt like language was something that was quite authoritarian," he says. It was only at Camberwell College of Art that he made a breakthrough, learning about typography and letter form.

"That experience of not being able to communicate what's important to me, even in the English language, made me very sympathetic to a situation where Hawad" – one of the five poets, a Tamajaght-speaking artist from the Aïr region of Niger – "cannot share his language and his culture in a way that is supported by anyone beyond this small community. That made me an ally. It's really important that we create spaces, and say these voices are valid."

At the heart of the 'audio treasure hunt' by sonic artist Jamie Perera is a piece titled *Babel Reclaimed*, in which a cacophony of hundreds of voices come together in perfect harmony. It was made in collaboration with linguist Mandana Seyfeddinipur, director of the Endangered Languages Archive (a Berlin-based digital repository for "unique records of local knowledge systems encoded in their languages"), and came from her rejection of the Tower of Babel parable, about humanity speaking in a unified tongue.

Some still regard the prospect of a single universal language – such as the 19th-century attempt to get the world to speak Esperanto – as a utopian ideal. Not Winston. "If we only have one paintbrush to paint in, and only one colour to paint with, that, from an artistic perspective, is a disaster," he says.

"Language is an expression of being human, and that's at the core of the festival. You can turn up and learn about a lot of diverse cultures. But really what I would like is that you turn up and you learn a lot about yourself: "What is my past? Why don't I know Ogham or Old Irish? What is my relationship to Yiddish? That would make me very happy."

Voice: The Festival of Endangered Languages is at the Barbican, London, 1 to 31 October. [See also Coming Events in this issue.]

Cademia Siciliana and the Sicilian language movement

By Nick Panzarella and Giancarlo Antonino Antonucci, Cademia Siciliana

Of the regional and minority languages of the world, few are better poised for normalization and revitalization than Sicilian. It has more speakers than state-backed languages like Lithuanian, Belorussian, or Bosnian. It has some media representation with multiple films and TV series that feature the language. It has a relatively high rate of usage among many of its speakers. It has a long literary history, being used in the court of the Norman kings, being used heavily in one of Italy's most popular detective novel series, and still used today in theater. And most strikingly, it even has its own state-funded university department dedicated to the study of the language.

For many language movements, this would be the successful end result of normalization. Yet despite this richness, Sicilian remains at risk. An increasing number of speakers can no longer use the language with ease, especially in large urban centers. Data from the Italian National Statistics Institute shows a loss of 4% in the speaker population every five years. Many speakers are now shifting to a regional variety of Italian in place of Sicilian. Even among Sicilian activists, we see people not consciously choosing to speak the language to their children. Proposals for bilingual Sicilian-Italian schooling are often met with resistance: many Sicilians (academics and activists alike) will turn their nose up at the idea of subjects such as mathematics being taught in Sicilian to their children. Sicily continues to face very strong linguistic stigma and, up until recently, showed little ambition for the language.

So, what is to be done?

Cademia Siciliana was founded in 2016 to act as a focus point for the language, combining features of an academic body such as the Accademia della Crusca for Italian with those of an activist movement like Plataforma per la Llengua for Catalan. Its aim was to be an academically grounded organization to help Sicilians write their language and to jumpstart the normalization process by bringing the language into new domains.

Initially the work took place mostly online, with a strong emphasis on social media. From the beginning the organization made a large splash by concentrating on developing digital tools for using Sicilian in new media settings. These included adding Sicilian as a language option on Facebook and YouTube, creating translations of the Telegram app and the game Minecraft, and supporting the integration of Sicilian into Google Translate. Together, these initiatives helped show that Cademia had a vision for Sicilian that wasn't just focused on the past.

In 2017, the organization published a proposal for a Sicilian orthography. Although Sicilian has been written on and off since the 1200s, there is currently not a set of norms that are followed across the island. This lack of norms comes from a lack of any media market, since written Sicilian is used mainly in local poetry and in "dialect theater" produced for the audiences of individual towns. The proposal from Cademia Siciliana is not too dissimilar from the various writing systems that were currently used by poets. It draws from Sicilian literary traditions and follows most Italian orthographic norms, while incorporating systematic ways to represent distinctive Sicilian features. These include some consistent sound changes and the adoption of diacritics already found in many literary and academic works. Some examples are the use of ḍḍ to represent the retroflex geminated voiced stop (i.e., the retroflex dd sound), and the circumflex accent to mark vowel contraction (dâ, dî, dû, nnô, nnê, etc.).

Cademia Siciliana began applying its proposed orthography in social media posts on Facebook and Instagram as well as in translations of excerpts from literary works and comic books. Some Sicilians who were unaccustomed to writing or seeing any form of Sicilian written have proven to be very outspoken. A small number protested forms that appeared to be merely Italian words with sound changes; others objected to Sicilian words unfamiliar to them or absent from their regional variety. In addition, some of the early learning materials were so simple

that they would mostly be useful to non-native learners, and the proposal itself was not intended as a textbook for Sicilians wanting to learn how to write.

Nevertheless, a small coterie of passionate Sicilians took this smattering of Facebook posts and translations as a basis for teaching themselves to write Sicilian following the Cademia norms, and in turn have helped shape those norms.

As previously mentioned, there is a state-funded body dedicated to the study of Sicilian. The obvious question is why hasn't this body proposed a standard orthography? Why even start Cademia Siciliana? The Centro di Studi Filologici e Linguistici Siciliani (CSFLS) is the main academic institution for Sicilian language scholarship. However, most of its members regard Sicilian as a "dialect", a view common within Italian academia. More precisely, they play on the subtle difference between dialetto in the Italian tradition and dialect as understood in English-speaking countries. In Italian usage, dialetto can denote a language subordinate to the national language (in this case Italian), regardless of any genealogical relationship, which may in fact be absent. In English usage, by contrast, dialect normally refers to a variety of a larger language. This ambiguity is often exploited to blur the distinction between a macrolanguage such as Sicilian and its local varieties. The Center cites the need to protect local varieties as a reason to avoid normalization. This stance has led to issues when lawmakers have proposed legislation to introduce Sicilian into schools or the public administration, with the CSFLS often opposing such measures. The CSFLS has successfully aided in the passage of a law promoting the teaching of "Sicilian linguistic patrimony", which has allowed for some Italian texts that focus on the etymology of Sicilian words to enter into classrooms. But this has not led to the production of full textbooks in Sicilian, nor to its use as a medium of instruction.

Another complicating factor is Sicily's political status. It is one of five autonomous regions in Italy, yet it is the only one without protection or recognition of its own language. In 1999, the Italian national parliament passed Law 482 recognising 12 minority and regional languages in Italy, but Sicilian was not one of them. While the other four autonomous regions had their languages recognized in their founding charters or later laws, Law 482 makes it seem that it might be unconstitutional for Sicily to grant co-official status to Sicilian without receiving approval from the Italian State.

As in many language movements, Sicilian activism has historically been split into various competing factions. Some Cademia Siciliana members took the approach that the survival of Sicilian is the primary goal, so there must be a way to unite the energies of those working with the language to make a real impact - not just as Cademia Siciliana. Momentum grew in 2024 with the first Simana dû sicilianu. Modeled on the Basque Euskaraldia, it's an entire week to encourage people to use Sicilian in new contexts, to study the language, and to create content in the language. This gave Sicilian activists across organizations an excuse to reach out to those that had been deemed uncooperative in the past. Debating over orthographies can be draining, but those participating saw a lot of real delight in the faces and voices of activists that finally were pushed to speak in Sicilian and not just about Sicilian.

This event started as an online initiative, and one can find many of the posts from the last two years under the hashtag #simandadûsicilianu. From the outset, the goal has always been for the project to take place on the ground in Sicily, and there have been several in-person events in both 2024 and 2025. The 2025 edition included a large demonstration in the streets of Palermo followed by a symposium of minority-language activists in the Sicilian Parliament, where most Sicilian presenters spoke in Sicilian. This has been key, since even within Cademia Siciliana, some volunteers had previously been a little shy about using Sicilian at public events. The event helped normalise the public use of Sicilian among activists, across many organisations.

In 2023, Member of the European Parliament Ignazio Corrao hosted a conference in Brussels that brought together approximately 150 Sicilians involved with the language in some way. In an effort to push the participants towards stronger linguistic policies, some members of Cademia Siciliana drafted a manifesto calling for the co-official status of Sicilian in Sicily, the introduction of bilingual schooling, and a request to parents to speak it to their children. Although broad in scope and maybe ambitious in its demands, the manifesto was designed to stimulate debate. So, Cademia Siciliana, together with the social movement Trinacria, launched a campaign to send the manifesto to every town in the island for them to pass a municipal resolution agreeing to the content of the manifesto, and to submit it to the Sicilian Parliament for their consideration. To date, over 20 towns in Sicily have issued formal letters to the Sicilian Parliament in support of co-official status and bilingual Sicilian–Italian education in Sicily!

In this last Simana dû sicilianu, two political parties proposed laws calling for the recognition of the language. One was a sweeping bill along the lines of the Manifesto for the Sicilian Language, making Sicilian co-official in Sicily and bringing it into the schools. The other sought to add Sicilian to the list of recognized languages under Law 482, through the mechanism that allows autonomous regions to pass laws requiring national approval. Neither bill has passed, but their introduction shows that momentum is growing.

For a while, the Sicilian movement was stuck in the trap that a lot of language movements find themselves: self-contained projects that appealed only to those most passionate about the language itself. Since Cademia Siciliana has switched to an approach informed by other movements and their best practices, they have been able to significantly broaden their reach and attract collaborators beyond linguistics, like those interested in politics, improving the material conditions of Sicily, the arts, the Church, and civil society. Cademia Siciliana has been accepted as a member of the European Language Equality Network (ELEN), so they can listen in on the best practices and understand what legal protections and funding are available from the European Union. Cademia Siciliana has also sent volunteers to participate in training events such as HIGA in the Basque Country to learn best practices with youth from around the world.

Cademia Siciliana maintains a large global volunteer network, with representatives in many towns across the island, but its local base in Sicily is comparatively lacking. This reflects a common pattern in language activism: Sicilians who live in towns where the language is strongest are less concerned about the

fate of the language, whereas diaspora communities show stronger commitment to the language. The volunteers aim to create a network of Sicilian-language clubs throughout the island, similar to those that exist in the Basque Country, or alternatively to mobilize existing cultural organizations like the Pro Loco's and local theater troupes and help them join the effort of language normalization and revitalization.
For example, one of the newest projects is an effort to see Sicilian be accepted as an official language of the Catholic liturgy. This is not something that volunteers in the diaspora can tackle on their own, like translating Wikipedia articles. A project like this requires understanding the Church Hierarchy and procedure, and an extended campaign of networking. Specifically networking with a much older and pious demographic - very different from the young and online group of language activists one might find on Discord, Telegram, and Instagram.
For those that think there would be no interest in the kind of work that Sicilian language activists do, every year Cademia Siciliana receives messages from around the world and across Sicily from those that love the language and want to do what they can to assist in its flourishing. There are those that say that there aren't people who want to volunteer their time to fight for the language, but every project that Cademia launches they find even more interest than before. Let that be a reminder to any language without a movement - don't wait for the energy to arise around your language, go out there and build that momentum yourself and people will join you!
Jorna e saluti ô sicilianu!

The Script Keepers Network

Alana Brown, of the Script Keepers Network, part of the Endangered Alphabets Project, is in charge of the Script Keepers Network, which is made up of people all around the world who work with minority scripts in various ways. The main goals of the Network are to raise global awareness about minority scripts, and to support the people working with them. Below, you can find a link to a blog post from the Script Keepers Network, which contains information on some of the ongoing projects as well as updates from some of their members.
blog post is from when they were first starting the Script Keepers Network and discusses the ideas behind it a little more: https://www.endangeredalphabets.com/2025/02/26/launching-the-script-keepers-network/.

Tasmania: Aboriginal and dual place names

From the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre web-site
There are 16 state gazetted Aboriginal or dual names in *palawa kani*, the language of Tasmanian Aborigines.
Fifteen of these names were assigned under the Aboriginal and Dual Naming Policy, which was adopted by the State Government in 2012 after many years of lobbying by Aborigines.
The names were proposed in separate submissions, with each list reviewed and put out for public comment by the Nomenclature Board (now renamed Placenames Tasmania). The first six names were gazetted in 2014, and another seven were gazetted in 2016. Another two names were gazetted in 2021 and then 2023. The names are to be shown on all official signage, maps and all official documents and publications (which is slowly but steadily occurring).
Truwana / Cape Barren Island (2014)
Yingina / Great Lake (2016)
Taypalaka / Green Point (2016)
Kunanyi / Mount Wellington (2014)
Wukalina / Mount William (2016)
Kanamaluka / River Tamar (2014)
Pinmatik / Rocky Cape (2016)
Laraturunawn / Sundown Point (2016)
Titima / Trefoil Island (2016)
Takayna / The Tarkine (2014)
Nungu / West Point (2016)
Tulampanga / Gog Range (2023)
Tinamirakuna / Macquarie River (2021)
Two Aboriginal names for unbounded localities appear as standalone (without an English name attached).
Larapuna, in the Bay of Fires (2014)
Putalina, Oyster Cove (2014)

4. Events and announcements

Voiced: the festival for endangered languages

This event occurred before we went to press, and so we announce it as a matter of record. Let's hope it won't be the last of its kind.
Weds. 1 – Fri. 31 October 2025, The Barbican, London
Hear new voices at this festival celebrating artists making work in endangered languages and dialects.
Through poetry, performance, talks, live events and visual art, the festival brings together a remarkable line-up of artists whose work marks the vast impact art has on language and language has on art.
This is the first UK creative festival to celebrate the linguistic vitality of countries around the world, as well as the endangered languages and dialects that continue to thrive within the UK.
Co-curated by **Sam Winston**, an artist whose interdisciplinary practice explores language not only as a carrier of messages but also as a visual form in and of itself, and **Chris McCabe**, a poet, novelist, artist and librarian at the National Poetry Library, the festival promises to introduce audiences to new ways of thinking about and engaging with language.
Workshops programme
Seed syllables workshop with Sam Winston
Sat. 11 Oct., 11.00 a.m., Fountain Room
Join renowned artist **Sam Winston** for a participatory workshop exploring language as both a visual and poetic medium. Seed Syllables invites you to experiment with text, mark-making and sound, drawing on Winston's distinctive approach at the intersection of visual art, literature and performance. This session is ideal for writers, artists and curious creatives interested in new ways of engaging with language, form and meaning. No prior experience necessary.
Winston's projects look to introduce audiences to new ways of thinking about and engaging with language. His practice is concerned with language not only as a carrier of messages but

also as a visual form in and of itself. Known for his typography, artist's books and installations, Winston's work is held in major collections including Tate Britain and the Library of Congress.

Macaronic poetry workshop with Chris McCabe

Sat. 11 Oct., 13.30, Fountain Room

Explore the rich possibilities of macaronic poetry - poetry that blends multiple languages - in this inventive workshop led by poet and editor **Chris McCabe**. Drawing on examples such as the seven languages in TS Eliot's The Waste Land to the polyphonic river song in James Joyce's Finnegans Wake, you'll use creative translation and collage techniques to create your own multilingual piece. Bring a poem of your own or choose from the selection of texts provided and develop an original work.

Chris McCabe is the author of Dreamt by Ghosts and The Triumph of Cancer, and editor of Poems from the Edge of Extinction. His work spans artforms and genres including poetry, fiction, non-fiction, drama and visual art, with a deep interest in language, hybridity and form.

Translation Circle with the British Bilingual Poetry Collective

Sat. 11 Oct., 16.00, Fountain Room

Led by poet **Shamim Azad** and editor-translator **Mike Raggett** of the **British Bilingual Poetry Collective (BBPC)**, this workshop invites participants of all ages and backgrounds to explore poetry across languages. Using accessible English, the session focuses on collective translation as a way to share perspectives, celebrate cultural heritage and foster community. No knowledge of other languages is required – just a curiosity about poetry, language and connection.

Based in East London, BBPC's work champions multilingual expression as a path to wellbeing, creativity and community building. They use poetry as a tool to expand on intergenerational connections and celebrate the multicultural heritage of the London-wide community. Their work centres on performance, writing, translation and publication.

Appeal for contributions from communities

As your editor I'm always on the lookout for original article that draw on the unique expertise of our members across the world. You who are reading this probably have a story that only you can tell, and your fellow members would love to read it – especially if you represent an endangered-language speech community yourself. Your story can be illustrated or not, as you wish, and as long or as short as you like, but preferably up to 2,000 words. We're specially interested in those of you who have received FEL grants in the past, or are currently using one for your research. Your research is unique, and of interest to us all.

And if you are member of an endangered language community, you may wish to represent them as an FEL member, on the terms set out on our Ogmios website:

5. Application for FEL Community Membership

Endangered Language Community Membership is a special group membership. It is primarily intended for endangered language communities in countries that are eligible for Solidarity Membership. Communities in the remaining countries (USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, Israel, Saudi Arabia or Arab Emirates, Iceland, Norway, United Kingdom, Switzerland or European Union) can also apply if their financial conditions do not allow them to opt for one of the paid membership types.

Before we can process your application we kindly request you to provide us with some information about your community, such as:

- Which is the endangered language community that you represent?
- Where is it located?
- How many speakers does it have?
- How is it organised?
- Where can we find more information about the community (e.g. links to a website, publications, other documents)?
- What is your own role in this community?
- You have to confirm your willingness to write contributions for our website and our newsletter Ogmios about your community

As soon as you have completed the subscription form. you will receive another form where you can provide the requested information.

Please note that Endangered Language Community Membership is **not** an individual membership but a group membership and that it comes with the responsibility for you to act as the liaison between the Foundation for Endangered Languages and your community. We may want to ask you to report on what is happening in your community for publication on our website and to make contributions to our 4-monthly newsletter Ogmios and FEL the website.

Being a researcher or a native speaker of the language is not enough: you need to be actively involved in the community, in a role that makes you the right person to act as a representative.

We will process your application as soon as we have received the requested information. If your present membership type is Solidarity or if your country of residence is eligible for Solidarity Membership (see above) you will be registered as Solidarity Member for the time being.

6. Recent publications

Celebrating Australia's First Nations languages

Jasmin McGaughey and The Poet's Voice (eds.): **Words to sing the world alive: Celebrating First Nations Languages.** St. Lucia**:** University of Queensland Press, 2024. 270 pages. ISBN 978 0 7022 6839 7.

It's rare for members of Australia's many First Nations linguistic communities to come together for a joint literary venture, so this 'celebration' really is to be welcomed. The co-editor from the Poet's Voice, Ellen Koshland, writes in her Introduction that the book came about as the result of some spoken-word events.

The articles in the book are mostly quite short, and the approximately forty contributors are not academics, but rather representatives of their language communities, both Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. It's certainly the most wide-ranging set of viewpoints of native Australians that I have come across, and much of it is lyrical, personal and inspiring, and mostly free of ideological claptrap or pseudo-academic jargon, while maintaining a defiantly First Nations stance throughout, and covering the geographical length and breadth of Australia.
One of the strengths of this collection, which might have been taken as a weakness, is that several of the contributors are not fluent active users of the languages they champion, but only proud custodians of their ethnic identity – the languages themselves are in quite a few cases dormant or inactive. Such is the state of Australia's linguistic patrimony today. All the more urgent is the need for a book like this.
Some of the contributors are no longer resident in Australia. The author of one outstanding article ('Decolonising the Shelf'), Tara June Winch, is a native Wiradjuri author currently resident in France. Each of the contributors is speaking on behalf of their own people, but the cumulative effect is overwhelming and the editors are to be congratulated for casting their net so wide and so thoughtfully.
Chris Moseley