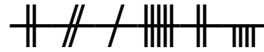


# OGMIOS



*Two members of the Mahmeri tribe from Pulau Carey in Selangor, Peninsular Malaysia, singing and weaving. According to the Malaysian Department of Aboriginal Affairs (Jabatan Hal Ehwal Orang Asli – JHEOA) and the Centre for Orang Asli Concerns (COAC), there were 3503 speakers of their language in 1999. Mah Meri (alias Besis or Cellate) is a Southern Aslian language in the Mon-Khmer family (Austroasiatic).*

*This special display by Mahmeri artists, at the Museum of Asian Art (Muzium Seni Asia), was arranged for participants at the 2007 FEL Conference in Kuala Lumpur.*

*Photograph: Tseard de Graaf*

# OGMIOS Newsletter of the Foundation for Endangered Languages: issue 34: 31 December 2007

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## Poster for the newly released Syriac-language film 'A Letter for Tomorrow':

**Words will fly away, but "the written" will remain even if it is "a letter for tomorrow". Even though it is only a wish... – details p. 5**



## 1. Editorial

The Foundation can now look back on another successful annual conference, our eleventh, held this year at the University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur. We received wonderful co-operation and support from our hosts at the University, ably chaired by Professor Maya David. One highlight of the conference was the gala dinner at which Prof. David was awarded the annual Linguapax award by Dr. Felix Marti from the UNESCO office in Barcelona.

Another first for our foundation was the passing of a resolution on the parlous situation of the Aramaic language at our annual general meeting. It indicated that we are not merely a preserving organisation but also a campaigning one. The text of the resolution is reproduced on these pages, and you will also find in this issue an article on the current situation of Aramaic, to follow the examples of Aramaic calligraphy featured on the cover of the previous issue.

As always, staging the Conference represented the biggest cost outlay for the Foundation in the year, but we did receive generous support from our hosts this year to defray some of the costs. And the net gain in membership from the conference will more than make up for the cost and help our charity to survive for another year. Next year our hosts will be the Frisian Academy in Ljouwert/Leeuwarden, and plans are well advanced for that event, as you will see from the circular to members printed in this issue.

Please remember that **subscriptions for 2008 are now due** – payable either with the form at the end of this Ogmios, or via our website [www.ogmios.org](http://www.ogmios.org) and the secure page linked from there.

*Chris Moseley*

## 2. Development of the Foundation

### .Resolution on the Aramaic Language

The following resolution was passed at the Foundation's Annual General Meeting in Kuala Lumpur on 27 October 2007:

Whereas ..

- Aramaic is one of the very oldest continuously written and spoken languages of the world
- Aramaic has historically contributed greatly to the civilizations of the Near and Middle East,
- Aramaic is still a living language in several countries but now seriously endangered,
- Conditions in the present and recent past make international support necessary for the future vitality of Aramaic,

It is hereby resolved that Aramaic be recommended as a World Heritage Language.

### XIIth FEL Conference: Call for Proposals

The Foundation for Endangered Languages exists to support, enable and assist the documentation, protection and promotion of endangered languages. One of our means to achieve this has been to bring specialists together for conferences, which have been held every year since 1996, most recently in Barcelona, Spain (2004), Stellenbosch, South Africa (2005), Mysore, India (2006) and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (2007).

In 2008 the Foundation will organise its Twelfth Conference in association with the Mercator European Research Centre on Multilingualism and Language Learning and the Fryske Akademy. The conference will be organised and sponsored in the framework of the jubilee program KNAW 200, the bicentenary celebration of the foundation of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1808.

### Place and Time

Conference Centre 'It Aljemint'  
Fryske Akademy  
Doelestrjitte 2-4  
Ljouwert/Leeuwarden  
The Netherlands

### Dates: 25-27 September 2008

The United Nations' Year of the Languages will be celebrated in 2008. On the 26<sup>th</sup> of September 2008 it is the annual European Language Day and these two facts will be taken into account during the conference.

### Theme of the conference: Endangered Languages and Language Learning

This theme is related to the profile of the Mercator European Research Centre, which gathers and mobilises expertise in the field of language learning at school, at home and through cultural participation in favour of linguistic diversity of Europe.

### Possible topics to be discussed:

- 1) Language learning in general:
    - Successful multilingual regions with endangered languages
    - Language learning processes and language transmission in small communities
    - Language transmission outside formal educational settings (pre-school facilities, cultural settings, distant learning facilities)
  - 2) Language learning in an educational context:
    - Promoting linguistic diversity through multilingual education and teacher training programs
    - Language teaching in small indigenous or migrant communities
    - Potential of teaching methods for language revitalisation
    - Innovation in language learning and teaching strategies
    - Case studies on language immersion in endangered language communities
    - The use of electronic tools for language teaching and maintenance
- Papers presented at the conference should make reference to actual language situations, and ideally should draw on personal experience. The aim of the conference is to pool experience, to discuss and to learn from it. Possible expected outcomes could be:
- Suggestions for further action and research for the revitalisation of endangered languages;
  - Proposals for action programmes aimed at language learning and language transmission;
  - Recommendations for a common European approach towards the strengthening of endangered languages to the European Union, the Council of Europe and UNESCO;

### Submission of Proposals and Full Papers

In order to present a paper at the conference, authors must submit in advance a proposal of not more than 500 words. They may be submitted in two ways: by electronic submission, or alternatively on paper. They should be written in English.

- 1) Electronic submission (by March 1 2008): For this we use the

EasyChair system. The submission URL is

<http://www.easychair.org/conferences/?conf=felxii2008>

Proposals for papers (max. 500 words, in English) can be submitted in PDF, Microsoft Word or plain text format. Your proposal should be uploaded as a separate file, viz as a "PAPER". Please follow the instructions on the site carefully.

The "ABSTRACT" box on the web form should be used for something different, viz a very short (3-4 English sentences) summary of your proposal that will help us in assigning papers to reviewers; they will then review the full proposal you have uploaded.

Authors of proposals accepted will receive instructions on format and submission of their final paper in the acceptance letter.

**N.B. This text replaces an earlier version stating that the proposal should go in the "ABSTRACT" box.**

2) **Paper abstracts:** In case you are not able to use the electronic submission system, one single printed copy (or an e-mail) should be sent (to arrive by 1 March 2008) at:

FEL XII Conference Administration  
Foundation for Endangered Languages  
172 Bailbrook Lane  
Bath BA1 7AA United Kingdom  
nostler<at>chibcha.demon.co.uk

Besides the text (500 words in English, max.), please include the following information:

NAME : Names of the author(s)  
TITLE: Title of the paper  
SHORT SUMMARY: 3-4 sentences  
EMAIL: Email address of the first author, if any  
ADDRESS: Postal address of the first author  
TEL: Telephone number of the first author, if any  
FAX: Fax number of the first author, if any

The name of the first author will be used in all correspondence.

Oral presentations will last twenty minutes each, with a further ten minutes for discussion. Plenary lectures (if invited) will last forty-five minutes each. Authors will be expected to submit a written paper with the full version of the lecture for publication in the proceedings well in advance of the conference.

Authors (and other attendees) from outside the European Union who need a visa will also be required to inform the organizers in advance of the following details:

Passport Number, Citizenship, Date and Place of Issue

**See general details at:**

<http://www.minbuza.nl/en/welcome/comingtoNL>

### Important Dates

Abstract arrival deadlines: 1 March 2008  
Committee's decision: 1 April 2008  
In case of acceptance, the full paper should be sent by 30 June 2008  
Conference: 25-27 September 2008

### Web sites

From 1 January 2008 further information about the FEL XII conference will be available on the following web sites:  
[www.ogmios.org](http://www.ogmios.org) (Foundation for Endangered Languages)  
[www.mercator-research.eu](http://www.mercator-research.eu) (Mercator Research Centre)

Further information about the conference site can be found at [www.fa.knaw.nl](http://www.fa.knaw.nl) (Fryske Akademy)

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## 3. Endangered Languages in the News

### On the Edge: the Oldest Living Language of the Middle East

by Eden Naby Frye. Harvard University

Is Aramaic dying out? Even with the publicity gained through Mel Gibson's film of 2005?

The last bastion of living Aramaic, Iraq, lies prostrate, helpless to help itself. Ancient Mesopotamia, known to its native Aramaic speakers as *Bet Nahrain* (the land between two rivers), became a recognized Arab country since it developed out of the British Mandate in 1921 and gained independence in 1932. But currently, this mantle of Arabic language and culture, and Muslim religious affiliation, is shattered. The existence of religious and ethnic groupings within the country is nowhere more poignantly recognized than in the threat to the substantial Christian population of Iraq, mainly vernacular Aramaic speakers.

Divided into several Oriental orthodox church communities (rather than Eastern Orthodox), many with exotic and ancient names – Chaldean, Syriac, Syrian and Assyrian Church of the East (with an "Ancient" splinter group) – the Aramaic speaking population is often referred to as Assyrian.

Aramaic was the most widely used language of the ancient Assyrian empire (ended 610 BCE). Its advantage over Akkadian, the royal language, lay in its use of an alphabet rather than cuneiform system of writing.

Through the Assyrian empire and its widespread conquests, Aramaic became the *lingua franca* of the eastern Mediterranean, and continued in use during the next important ancient empire, the Persian-based Achaemenids (550-331 CBE). Thus, although it never again became a major state-sponsored language, it has survived as the oldest continuously spoken and written language of the Middle East. (The Greek alphabet written Demotic of the Copts, while old, is no longer a vernacular.)

Today, about two dozen schools teach a vernacular Aramaic language in Iraq, based in some part on classical Syriac, the ecclesiastical dead western Aramaic. The revival of education in Aramaic comes mainly through the dedication of the politically organized Assyrians within Iraq, and the large Assyrian diaspora in Australia, Russia, Europe and the USA and Canada. Despite the Anfal campaign (1988) aimed to destroy all opposition to Saddam Hussein, including Assyrians, Kurds, and Shi'ites, many Christians continued to carry on their lives - and language - in the villages in the north, whenever they were not forcibly removed.

But since August 1, 2004 when six churches were blown up in Baghdad and Mosul, another nearly thirty churches have met the same fate. Aramaic speakers have been driven out of Basra by Shi'ite militias, and elsewhere through beheadings, kidnappings, rapes, threats and now the insistence that Assyrian families give a daughter or a sister to a Muslim in marriage prior to quitting their homes.

Endangered as Aramaic speakers are in Iraq, many are loath to leave their indigenous land if an alternative is available. For this reason, many among them are reaching for a solution that may save Aramaic and possibly provide a solution for other endangered linguistic and ethnic communities: they propose that Assyrians be given the option of grouping on the Nineveh Plain, an area east by northeast of Mosul, where about thirty-five small and large villages contain native Aramaic speakers.

Is this territoriality a solution to ethnic and linguistic survival? Will the formation of a compact community, hated by Islamist extremists, simply allow for an easy target to wipe out this community? How can these Christians, regarded as allies of western Christians, defend themselves from Kurdish incursions from the east and Arab Sunni tribes from the west?

The schools continue, now including two high schools. Not only are all subjects taught from Aramaic textbooks for the first time since the genocide of WWI, but also the schools are helping to standardize Aramaic from the several dialects in which it is still spoken. As welcome as this educational endeavor is for the preservation of Aramaic as a spoken and written language, it raises problems for dialect preservation. Few dialects have been documented. The choices are few and the situation for Aramaic is as desperate as it has been during the 3000 + history of the language.

(Editor: And while we are on the subject of Aramaic, here is some publicity for the subject on the cover of this issue:)

## On Behalf of Perpetuating the Syriac Language ...

Today about 6,700 languages are spoken in the world. If the prediction of the specialists comes true ; approximately 5000 languages will be wiped out from their historic place.

This danger is also valid for Syriac (a form of Aramaic), one of the three oldest continuously written languages still spoken in the world. It is rooted in the North of Mesopotamia and Southeast Anatolia. The language, being one of the 78 literary languages in the world, continues to be written by calligraphers as a tradition.

Sponsored by the European Union, a documentary film has come out: "A Letter For Tomorrow" (in Turkish: *Yarına Bir Harf*), emphasizing the historical background of the Syriac language and the calligraphy tradition of this culture by introducing a priest, Gabriel Aktas , one (perhaps the last) of the calligraphers in the Southeast of Turkey. Giving some sections from the daily life of Syriac society , the film reflects the importance of catching onto the native language in terms of culture. The documentary film has a layered structure which can enable viewers to find different readings.

The film establishes a parallelism between the life cycle of the Syriac language and the birth-death notion, the basic dynamics of life and

culture. Having 22 letters in the alphabet, the film carries over its message in 22 parts with reference to the letters.

The film is produced in the Syriac language as a whole. It gives this documentary a uniqueness in the world, providing a direct concept of this language. The versions of the film with subtitles in Turkish, English, German, French, Swedish and Dutch try to emphasize the hardness of the reading and writing ability of contemporary Syriac society spread across the world. (Most of the Syriacs could not follow the film in their native language without the help of subtitles ) .

The film project lasted for nine months, and then, without using any fiction, was produced in May-June 2007. The editing and translating to the other language version phases finished in September 2007.

The team of the documentary describes Syriac not only as a language but also as an archive of history. The ancient manuscripts, which are still being used in various scientific disciplines, have a pivotal role. They want to draw attention to the expression of the traditional calligraphers of Syriac.

*"A calligrapher forgets everything in the last line*

*Because they know and hope that the things they wrote will not be forgotten - for they were written.*

*Words will fly away, but "the written" will remain even if it is "a letter for tomorrow".*

*Even though it is only a wish...*

Name of The Film: "Yarına Bir Harf" (A Letter for Tomorrow)

Original Language : Syriac

Subtitles : Turkish, English, German, French, Swedish and Dutch

Produced in 2007

Duration : 47 minutes

Director and Script : **HAKAN AYTEKİN**

Production : **SODEV**

Project Technical Coordinator : **BERRİN DAĞÇINAR**

Director of Photography : **TURHAN YAVUZ**

Research : **ÖZCAN GEÇER**

Music : **GABRIEL AYDIN**

Syriac Translation : **FERİT ALTINSU**

## A language, not quite Spanish, with African echoes

*From the New York Times, 30 October 2007*

SAN BASILIO DE PALENQUE, [Colombia](#) — The residents of this village, founded centuries ago by runaway slaves in the jungle of northern Colombia, eke out their survival from plots of manioc. Pigs wander through dirt roads. The occasional soldier on patrol peeks into houses made of straw, mud and cow dung.

On the surface it resembles any other impoverished Colombian village. But when adults here speak with one another, their language draws inspiration from as far away as the Congo River Basin in Africa. This peculiar speech has astonished linguists since they began studying it several decades ago.

The language is known up and down Colombia's Caribbean coast as Palenquero and here simply as "lengua" — tongue.

Theories about its origins vary, but one thing is certain: it survived for centuries in this small community, which is now struggling to keep it from perishing.

Today, fewer than half of the community's 3,000 residents actively speak Palenquero, though many children and young adults can understand it and pronounce some phrases.

"Palenge a senda tielan ngombe ri nduse i betuaya," Sebastián Salgado, 37, a teacher at the public school here, said before a classroom of teenage students on a recent Tuesday morning. (The sentence roughly translates as, "Palenque is the land of cattle, sweets and basic staples.")

Palenquero is thought to be the only Spanish-based Creole language in Latin America. But its grammar is so different that Spanish speakers can understand almost nothing of it. Its closest relative may be Papiamentu, spoken on the Caribbean islands of Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao, which draws largely from Portuguese, Spanish and Dutch, linguists say. It is spoken only in this village and a handful of neighborhoods in cities where workers have migrated.

The survival of Palenquero points to the extraordinary resilience of San Basilio de Palenque, part of whose very name — Palenque — is the Spanish word for a fortified village of runaway slaves. Different from dozens of other palenques that were vanquished, this community has successfully fended off threats to its existence to this day.

Colonial references to its origins are scarce, but historians say that San Basilio de Palenque was probably settled sometime after revolts led by Benkos Biohó, a 17th-century African resistance leader who organized guerrilla attacks on the nearby port of Cartagena with fighters armed with stolen blunderbusses.

And while English-, French- and Dutch-based Creole languages are found in the Caribbean, the survival of one in the interior of Colombia has led some scholars to theorize that Palenquero may be the last remnant of a Spanish-based lingua franca once used widely by slaves throughout Latin America.

Palenquero was strongly influenced by the Kikongo language of Congo and Angola, and by Portuguese, the language of traders who brought African slaves to Cartagena in the 17th century. Kikongo-derived words like ngombe (cattle) and ngubá (peanut) remain in use here today.

Advocates for keeping Palenquero alive face an uphill struggle. The isolation that once shielded the language from the outside world has come to an end. Once three days by mule to the coast, the journey to Cartagena now takes two hours by bus on a bumpy dirt road.

Electricity arrived in the 1970s as a government gift in recognition of Antonio Cervantes, better known as Kid Pambelé, a Colombian world boxing titleholder who was born here. With electricity came radio and television. The schoolhouse, named in honor of Biohó, has an Internet connection now.

But Palenqueros, as the community's

residents call themselves, say the biggest threat to their language's survival comes from direct contact with outsiders. Many here have had to venture to nearby banana plantations or cities for work, and then found themselves ostracized because of the way they spoke.

"We were subject to scorn because of our tongue," said Concepción Hernández Navarro, 72, who survives by farming yams, peanuts and corn.

Only two of Ms. Hernández's eight children live here; five are in Cartagena and one moved as far away as Caracas, drawn by Venezuela's oil boom. "We have always been poor here," she said in an interview in front of her modest house, "but our poverty has grown worse."

If there is one blessing to this impoverishment, it may be that Colombia's long internal war has largely been fought over spoils in

other places, allowing teachers here to toil uninterrupted at reviving Palenquero since classes were introduced in the late 1980s.

Undaunted by the prospect of Palenquero's disappearing after centuries of use, Rutsely Simarra Obeso, a linguist who was born here and lives in Cartagena, is compiling a lexicon. Others are assembling a dictionary of Palenquero to be used in the school.

The defenders of Palenquero view their struggle as a continuation of other battles. "Our ancestors survived capture in Africa, the passage by ship to Cartagena and were strong enough to escape and live on their own for centuries," said Mr. Salgado, the schoolteacher.

"We are the strongest of the strongest," he continued. "No matter what happens, our language will live on within us."

## Endangered Numerals

*Bernard Comrie*

*Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology and University of California Santa Barbara*

Numeral systems, because of their close links to other aspects of society (commerce, education), are particularly subject to influence from more dominant languages, with the result that the phenomenon of endangered numerals comprises not only numeral systems of endangered languages but also many instances of endangered numeral systems in languages that are themselves not endangered. Linguists are thus in a much weaker position with numerals than with most other parts of language in trying to extrapolate the extension and boundaries of the human language potential from attested systems. Nonetheless, the numeral systems currently in use and attested in the past provide a fascinating range of variation. This lectures concentrates on two particular aspects. First, attention is paid to unusual arithmetic bases of numeral systems and their areal distribution. Second, a number of universals that have been proposed concerning numeral systems are investigated, with crucial evidence often coming from endangered numeral systems, suggesting that indeed in many instances the accidental absence of numeral systems, perhaps used formerly but never documented, may hinder our attempts to construct a general theory of numeral systems in natural languages.

*Below is an excerpt from the introduction to the web-site "Endangered Numeral Systems of the World" kindly supplied by Eugene Chan.*

The existing 6,800 or so languages in the world are a common cultural treasure of humanity. In order to preserve global linguistic diversity, the United Nations set 1992 as "the Year of Endangered Languages". Urgent actions to rescue and document endangered languages have been undertaken by some countries in recent years.

The surviving thousands of the world's ethnic groups use a variety of different numeral systems: duodecimal systems, decimal systems, quinary systems, quaternary systems, ternary systems, binary systems, incomplete decimal systems, mixed systems, body-part tally systems and so on. Certain South American indigenous languages even only distinguish the numbers "one" and "many". These fascinating phenomena, like a kaleidoscope, reflect the different evolutionary steps of human counting concepts.

Needless to say, these invaluable linguistic data should also be documented as soon as possible, as the indigenous numeral systems of minority ethnic groups are particularly prone to be replaced by neighboring politically and economically predominant languages. The younger generations tend to give up the traditional numeral systems and adopt the borrowed ones; this phenomenon is especially

prevalent in Melanesia, South and South-East Asia, Central and South America and certain areas of Africa.

An indigenous numeral system is even more endangered than the other systems even if the language is not itself endangered. The numeral system of a language is most susceptible to change and often replaced by that of a dominant language, e.g. the Japanese and Thai numerals have been largely replaced by Chinese (Comrie 2005)

“Numeral systems are even more endangered than languages,” Prof. Comrie concluded. Numerals interact with the rest of grammar and may have unique morphosyntactic rules. Nevertheless, numerals are often neglected or completely ignored in many grammars.

The principal purpose of this web site is to document the various numeral systems adopted by the currently existing 6,000 to 7,000 human languages, focusing especially on those little-known, undescribed and endangered languages, to record and preserve the traditional counting systems before they indeed pass into history.

Research on numeral systems is not only a very interesting topic but also an academically valuable reference resource for those involved in the academic disciplines of Linguistics, Anthropology, Ethnology, History and Philosophy of Mathematics.

The author of this project is especially interested in the genetic classification, phonological systems and counting concepts of human languages, and has spent over twenty years recording and analyzing the numeral systems of the world's languages, and so far has successfully collected basic numeral systems and data from about 4,000 languages in the world. Most of the data were kindly provided by linguists including members of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, the Bible translators of New Tribes Mission and other missionary organizations, and linguists, anthropologists and related scholars working in their respective fields. The majority of the data were written in standard IPA symbols or phonemic transcriptions.

As the traditional numeral systems of small languages have been rapidly replaced by those of dominant languages, it is an urgent task to document these important linguistic data before they are completely forgotten. However, more complete data for the remaining 3,000 or so languages are still not yet available, so we need further generous support from fellow linguists in providing numeral systems from languages they have been working on.

## Russia: Efforts Under Way To Prevent Extinction Of Shor Language

*By Charles Carlson (from Radio Free Europe web-site 17 November 2007)*

Shor is a Turkic language spoken by less than 10,000 people in the Kemerovo Oblast of the Russian Federation. The Shor language and culture are on the verge of extinction, although efforts are being made to keep them from disappearing altogether.

Prague, 5 June 2003 (RFE/RL) -- According to the Foundation for Endangered Languages, the majority of the world's languages are being spoken by fewer and fewer people, with many of them on the verge of extinction.

Recent estimates place the number of languages in the world at around 6,000, of which 52 percent are spoken by fewer than 10,000 people. Twenty-eight percent of these languages are spoken by fewer than 1,000 people.

On the other hand, the 10 major languages of the world are each spoken by more than 100 million people and are the mother tongues of almost half of the world's population.

David Crystal is one of the world's foremost authorities on languages and the author of "Language Death." He has been a staunch supporter of preserving endangered languages, particularly his native Welsh.

In an interview with RFE/RL, Crystal spoke of three factors that must be taken into account when speaking of preserving dying languages.

"For a language to be preserved, three things need to happen, and they have to work together," he said. "There has to be, first and foremost, bottom-up interest. That is, the people themselves must want the languages preserved. Secondly, there has to be a top-down interest. Somebody in power, whether it's a local government, or a national government, or a reflex of some international organization such as UNESCO, or the United Nations, or the Council of Europe. The third factor is there has to be cash: somehow, somebody has got to pay for this."

One of the languages whose survival is currently under threat is Shor, a Turkic language spoken by the Shor people, whose historic homeland is the Kemerovo Oblast in south-central Russia.

Gennady Kostochakov teaches the Shor language and its literature at the Kuzbass State Pedagogical Academy in Novokuznetsk, Russia. Kostochakov wrote the following poem in Shor:

"The first spring flower makes its way through the snow,

"Its whiteness and freshness pierce and conquer my heart.

"You are the creation of God.

"My hand does not deserve to pluck you."

Historians believe the Shors may be Turkicized descendants of Samoyedic, Ugric, and Ketic people who lived in the area thousands of years ago. In the first few centuries A.D., these tribes were displaced by Turks. Although they are considered a Turkic people today, the Shors display numerous cultural and linguistic traits that relate them to the Samoyedic and even the Khanty-Mansi people of northwestern Siberia.

Before the 1917 Revolution, the Russians called the Shors by various ethnonyms, depending on the location of a given tribe or clan. By the end of the 20th century, all of these tribes had merged, to the extent that they became a single ethnic unit.

In 1926, the Soviet government created the Shor Ethno-Cultural Region. In 1926, a new Shor alphabet was created under the Soviet regime based on Cyrillic, and in 1927 the first language primer was published. Then, in 1929, a new Latin alphabet was introduced, and books and textbooks were published in the Shor language. By 1935, the Shors had their own written language, 32 schools, and 64 native teachers.

In 1938, however, it was decided to revert to the Cyrillic alphabet. And as a result of the influx of workers during the 1930s from other regions of Russia to develop the region's coal, iron, and gold deposits, the Shors' share of the region's population dropped from about 39 percent in 1931 to 13 percent in 1938.

After this, the Shor language and culture rapidly declined through assimilation. Under Stalin, the area became the home of labor camps.

At the time of the last Soviet census in 1989, there were some 16,000 Shors in the Soviet Union, of whom some 12,500 lived in Kemerovo Oblast. Although 9,800 of them said they considered Shor their native language, only about 900 of them could actually speak it.

The "Red Book of Peoples of the Russian Empire," published in Tallinn in 1993, notes that the Shors have "failed to preserve their identity. Their traditions only survive in remote places and their language can only have a domestic use. The Shors have no national theater, publications, radio. The masters of the Shors' land are industry, aliens, and the Russian language."

The late 1980s and early 1990s saw a revival of Shor culture and traditions. The Association of Shor People was created, and in 1993



the Shor people became members of the Association of Indigenous Small-Numbered Peoples of the North, Siberia, and the Far East of the Russian Federation.

Most importantly, a chair of Shor language and literature was established at the Kuzbass Pedagogical Institute in Novokuznetsk, the capital of Kemerovo Oblast. Sixty students have already graduated from the faculty, which has four teaching staff. Sixty-seven more undergraduates are currently studying the language. Shor is also being taught at some village schools.

Irene Shentsova, a Shor professor at the Pedagogical Institute, describes the school and the efforts they are making to teach Shor.

"The chair of the Shor language and literature is one of the chairs of the Kuzbass State Pedagogical Academy," Shentsova says. "It is situated in Novokuznetsk, Russia. There are only four lecturers, members of the chair. At the present moment, 67 students study their native language and culture. On the whole, there are about 60 graduates, specialists in Shor. The graduates work as teachers of Russian and Shor, and as journalists. They work in museums and at the local administration."

Of efforts now being made to write literature in the Shor language, Kostochakov says, "Nowadays, Shor literature is being created by a group of writers. During the 1990s and currently a Shor language periodical 'Tugan Cher' ['Native Land'] is being issued, and nine booklets containing selections of Shor poetry have been published. Among them are 'Onzas Cherim' by Lyubvo Arbachakova and 'Tang Atcha' by Nikolai Bel'chegeshev. Eight Shor authors have entered the All-Russian Union of Writers. Members of the Shor Department of the Union conduct seminars. Young people attending them study their native language and discuss their own poetic creations."

These efforts may reverse the decline in the number of Shor speakers. And the gloomy title of Kostochakov's recent book of poetry, "I Am the Last Shor Poet," may prove to be wrong.

Asked whether a language like Shor -- with less than 10,000 speakers -- has reached the point of no return, language scholar David Crystal says, "It is possible for a language to survive, to regenerate -- to 'revitalize' is the usual term -- regardless of the number of speakers it has. There are cases on record of peoples with just a few hundred speakers who have, with appropriate support, managed to maintain their language presence and to build upon it."

One further factor that could help the Shors is the fascination many Russians have with shamanism. The Shors have their own unique form of shamanism. The Shor term for a shaman is "kam." A male "kam" beats a tambourine gently and drinks a weak alcoholic beverage to induce a shamanistic trance, during which he visits the spirit world to rescue the lost souls of persons who have fallen sick.

Both male and female "kams" are also accomplished in alternative healing practices, such as laying hands on people. These "kams" frequently perform such rites for visiting ethnographers.

## Split imperils Mexican language

*From BBC News web-site 16 November 2007*

An indigenous language in southern Mexico is in danger of disappearing because its last two speakers have stopped talking to one another.

The two elderly men in the village of Ayapan, Tabasco, have drifted apart, said Fernando Nava, head of the Mexican Institute for Indigenous Languages.

He used the example to draw attention to the threat to indigenous languages across Mexico.

More than 20 of these are under threat of extinction.

'Little in common'

Dr Nava played down reports of an argument between the two Ayapan residents, both in their 70s.

"We know they are not to say enemies, but we know they are apart. We know they are two people with little in common," he told the BBC News website.

"They are really personal reasons that they don't speak to each other. We don't have to think of a war."

The men are the only fluent speakers of their local version of the "Zoque" language.

Other languages from the same root are spoken in the Mexican states of Veracruz, Oaxaca and Chiapas.

The Zoque tribe is thought to descend from the Olmecas and its members are spread around the south of Mexico.

The indigenous languages institute is trying to encourage more local people to speak Ayapan Zoque, and hopes the two men will pass the language on to their families.

It is also being recorded.

"We hope in a few years to be talking about new speakers of the language," Dr Nava said.

Mexico is one of the countries in the world with the richest diversity of languages.

More than 350 indigenous languages are spoken within its territory.

According to the UN, one language disappears across the world every two weeks.

## Estonian minister announces language beauty contest

TALLINN (AFP) [20 November]— Estonia is planning a beauty contest with a difference to mark its 90th birthday, according to a report Monday: the winner will be the world's prettiest language. Education Minister Tonis Lukas wants his counterparts from around the world to get school pupils to enter recordings of sentences of up to seven words for the contest, the Baltic News Service (BNS) agency reported.

"There's a story that a world championship of beautiful languages was once held in which Estonian took second place after Italian with the sentence 'soida tasa üle silla', or 'go slowly over the bridge,'" Lukas said Monday.

"As part of the events for the anniversary of the republic, we're pleased to turn to other nations with a friendly call to check how our language sounds to others now," he added. Estonian is a member of the Finno-Ugric group of languages and unrelated to most other European tongues. It is spoken by only about 1.1 million people worldwide. Around 950,000 of them live in Estonia itself and many of the rest in neighbouring Finland and Russia, as well as Sweden, Germany, North America and Australia.

Preserving their language was a crucial part of Estonian opposition to foreign rule from the 19th century onwards, and remains an important plank of government policy. Estonia is due to celebrate the 90th anniversary of its first period of independence from Russia on February 24 next year. The country was taken over again by the Soviet Union during World War II, and became independent once more as the Moscow-ruled bloc crumbled in 1991.

Estonian is now an official language of the 27-nation European Union, which the country joined in 2004.



## Finnish Swedes demand action from the Swedish Government

Monday, 10 September 2007

by Katriina Kilpi. [www.eurolang.net](http://www.eurolang.net)

Finnish Swedes have demanded that the Swedish Government present the Council of Europe with practical measures to improve the conditions of the Sweden's Finnish national minority. A Finnish delegation as well as other national minority representatives negotiated last week with the Government about Sweden's next periodical report on the implementation of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. "Sweden has received such a strong critique that it is now obliged to move from words to actions" said researcher Leena Huss, a member of the delegation.

Last September, the Council of Europe criticized Sweden over the report it handed in. The report urged Sweden to quickly broaden the rights of the Finns so that they are able to use their language not only in the five northern provinces but across Sweden. It also highlighted that Sweden has yet to sign the Indigenous and Tribal People's convention (ILO 169) and it is failing to obey its own laws when it neglects the teaching of national minority languages.

After a year Sweden has to explain to the Council how proposals from year ago have progressed. "The representatives of the Finnish national minority are no longer happy with just guarantees of new investigations", said Leena Huss. Sweden is to hand in its report about the state of its national minorities at the end of this month.

## Inuit language at the crossroads

by Ian Smith, *Blogotariat*

29 October, 2007: The Canadian territory of Nunavut, created in 1999, has a population of 26,665, of whom 85% claim Inuit identity (2001 Census data). Of these approximately 85% claim to speak the Inuit language at home. (ibid. "Inuit Language" subsumes two major dialect groupings: Inuinnaqtun in the west and Inuktitut in the East.) With their huge political majority and their geographical isolation, the Inuit ought to have no trouble maintaining their language, but the challenges they face demonstrate that minority language maintenance is a difficult process, even when the odds appear to be extremely favourable.

The government of Nunavut has recently introduced two language-related bills, which have now progressed to second reading in the legislative assembly. The first, Bill 6, is an official languages act which establishes Inuit Language, French and English as official languages of the territory. The second, Bill 7, is an Inuit language protection act that seeks to promote the maintenance of the Inuit Language.

Prof. Ian Martin, language policy consultant to the Nunavut government and to the Inuit organization, NTI (Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated), presented his assessment of the situation in a talk at Glendon College of York University this past week.

Prof. Martin was cautiously optimistic, while pointing out that the endangerment of the Inuit language is at a crucial juncture. Of great concern is the school system, in which currently pupils are offered instruction in Inuit language up to grade 3; grade 4 is a transition year, and subsequently instruction is in English only, provided overwhelmingly by monolingual anglophone teachers with no background in ESL issues and, as temporary residents from the south, no prior knowledge of Inuit culture. This system has produced two language-impaired generations. The generation of elders, who retain the

cultural and linguistic competence of the past, is passing on. Thus, despite the apparent vitality of Inuktitut in many communities (less so, Inuinnaqtun), the tipping point is now.

Bill 7 proclaims the right of all Nunavut residents to "Inuit language instruction" and provides for the gradual introduction of Inuit language instruction through to the end of secondary school. There is some concern, however, that this provision may be interpreted as referring to language classes, while only the use of the Inuit language as a medium of instruction will provide the basis for language revitalization. Even with the more beneficial interpretation, it is by no means clear where the necessary teaching personnel will come from. The bill also provides for the use of the Inuit languages as a [sic!] language of work in the public sector. Private sector compliance is voluntary, but supported.

The bill is not as strong as the famous Bill 101 that has reversed the erosion in the use of French in Quebec, and the main Inuit organizations, NTI and QIA (Qikiqtani Inuit Association), feel that the proposed laws are not strong enough to prevent further decline of the Inuit language.

Prof. Martin pointed out, however, that there are political constraints on the territorial assembly's actions: since Nunavut is a territory, rather than a province, all the assembly's legislation must pass through the federal parliament in Ottawa, which would be unlikely to support legislation as strong as Bill 101, given that parts of the

latter have been judged by Canada's supreme court to be in violation of the country's Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Canadian Encyclopedia).

Much is at stake. If the local political will can overcome the many practical obstacles, Nunavut may provide a model for language revitalization in other territorially-concentrated communities. Should it fail, the prospects for the world's minority languages will be all the bleaker.

## Learning The Lakota Language

*Keoland Television*

Kelli Grant, [www.keloland.com](http://www.keloland.com)

Less than 70% of Native American students who attend South Dakota public schools, graduate from high school. But the Sioux Falls School District is working to turn those numbers around by introducing the Native American culture and language into the classroom.

High school students in the Sioux Falls School District can take world languages like Spanish or German, but a new dialect is also making its way into the classroom.

Native American students at Washington High school are enrolled in the district's new Lakota Language class. Here they're learning much more than vowels and consonants.

"What it really provides for them is appreciation of who they are and where they come from," Lakota Language Teacher Jim Thunder Hawk.

Thunder Hawk says the students are showing a great sense of respect for the language that's the backbone of where they come from.

"I'm excited that they did this, Sophomore Korrie Thomas said.

Thomas says she signed up for the class to learn more about her people and herself.

"Most native kids that I know hardly know any Lakota unless they're in the class, and I'm pretty sure if they get signed up for next semester, they'll start learning and they'll start wanting to come back to learn some more," Thomas said.

With low graduation rates among Native American students, the district hopes this class will get them excited about furthering their education. Thunder Hawk says it's a lesson not only Native American students can learn from, but all students.

"It's important for the cultures of South Dakota to get to know their neighbors who've been here before statehood is the Lakota people," Thunder Hawk said.

The class is open to every student in the district. It is part of a 5 year pilot program and will be offered again next year.

## Cultural Sensitivity & Endangered Languages: Saami

*Bruce Moren (from the Linguist List web-site)*

### An issue and two questions

Background: Many people (including some linguists) do not realize that here have been two distinct cultures and two distinct language groups on the Scandinavian Peninsula since prehistoric times - the North Germanic and the Sami. A part of this lack of awareness is due to the longstanding power imbalance in Scandinavia that has left the Sami virtually invisible. The North Germanic peoples are the majority (particularly in the south) and have held control over the entire peninsula for centuries. This control was reinforced during the past 150 years by official policies aimed at assimilating the Sami into the North Germanic cultures (called Swedishisation and Norwegianisation). Similar programs for Sami assimilation were also found in Finland and Russia. The purpose and nature of these assimilation attempts are comparable to those found in other parts of the world, such as New Zealand, Australia, and Canada. Although both Sweden and Norway have now abandoned their assimilation policies and have allowed for the formation of Sami Parliaments to support Sami language and cultural issues, there are still several lingering scars that will take many years to overcome. In the words of Beate Hårstad Jensen, "If it has taken 100 years to Norwegianise the Coast Samis, then it will perhaps take another 100 years to make us Samis again?" (Dagbladet 28 July 2001 - quoted in Minde 2005). It is also important to mention that the general impression given in the media, history books, travel books, etc. that the Sami are a small, primitive and exotic group of semi-nomadic reindeer herders is a lingering misrepresentation from the assimilation policy days. They are a rather large population, they come from all walks of life and have all sorts of professions, and only about 10% have been actively involved in reindeer herding in the past several centuries.

Why is this relevant to linguists? There are at least three reasons. First, one of the ways in which the marginalization of the Sami is continued and reinforced today is in the use of the term "Scandinavian" to refer only to the North Germanic languages. Despite having inhabited the Scandinavian Peninsula for several thousand years, the Sami essentially disappear (almost as effectively as if the assimilation policies of the 19th and 20th centuries had been successful) when one thinks of "Scandinavian" and associates that with only North Germanic. One way that we, as linguists, can help support the Sami community is to ensure that they are not made invisible by our own language use. This means using the term "North Germanic", not "Scandinavian", when we mean the North Germanic languages of Scandinavia.

The second reason why recognition and support of the Sami is relevant to linguists is the fact that the current situation for all the Sami languages is dire according to the UNESCO list of endangered languages. Most people do not realize that Sami is arguably the most

endangered language family in Europe. (I call it a "family" because it is a group of usually mutually unintelligible languages that separated from its nearest relatives, the Balto-Finnic languages (e.g. Finnish and Estonian), at least 3,000 years ago.) Akkala Sami died in 2003. Three out of seven nearly extinct European languages are Sami - Ter (<10 speakers), Pite (<20) and Ume (<20). Five out of 27 seriously endangered European languages are Sami - Skolt (<400), Inari (<500), South (<500), Kildin (<650) and Lule (<1,500). One way that we, as linguists, can help support these languages is to ensure that they are not made invisible by our use of "Scandinavian" when we really mean "North Germanic".

The third reason linguists should do what they can to support the Sami is the uniquely complex grammar of the Sami languages. In the words of one of the foremost researchers on these languages, "Sámi phonetics, phonology and morphophonology are amongst the most complicated in Europe if not in the whole world" (Sammallahti 1990:441). This includes what looks like a preference for simple onsets and complex codas, three linguistically significant degrees of consonant duration, quasi-harmonizing "glide vowels", laryngeal contrasts only in post-stressed medial position, an extensive and pervasive consonant gradation system, productive morphological paradigms including literally hundreds of forms, etc. Each one of these phenomena is interesting and perhaps problematic for some linguistic theories, but taken in concert, they are astoundingly complex and form a perfect testing ground for many theoretical claims. These languages are important sources of unique linguistic data, and they should not be allowed to simply vanish. One way to help them is awareness of their fragility and sensitive use of the term "Scandinavian".

To summarize the issue and extend it slightly, there are at least four reasons to question the use of "Scandinavian" to refer exclusively to the North Germanic languages. First, from a geographical perspective, there are two language groups spoken on the Scandinavian Peninsula since prehistoric times - North Germanic and Sami. In fact, the traditional Sami areas of Scandinavia make up the majority of the peninsula. Thus, it is misleading and biased to refer to only the North Germanic languages as "Scandinavian". Second, the power imbalance and assimilation pressures in Scandinavia are reinforced today by the use of "Scandinavian" to refer only to North Germanic languages. Third, the Sami languages are interesting from a linguistic perspective and are extremely endangered. Therefore, they require every support they can get from linguists. Cultural and historical sensitivity regarding "Scandinavian" is needed in order not to further marginalize the Sami and render them invisible as a people or as a language group. Fourth, from a traditional language-family classification perspective, there is Germanic, North Germanic, and the East-Scandinavian and West-Scandinavian branches of North Germanic. The latter two are sometimes bundled differently as the Continental Scandinavian and Insular Scandinavian branches of North Germanic. Importantly, there is no single language or language-group called "Scandinavian". Since "North Germanic" is well established and unbiased, it should be the preferred term for referring to the North Germanic languages. "Scandinavian" is neither accurate nor neutral.

Finally, I have a couple of questions that I hope will elicit some discussion among linguists on the LinguistList.

1) Other than individuals choosing not to refer to the North Germanic languages as "Scandinavian" and/or choosing to report on the socio-political problems with using the term "Scandinavian", does anyone have suggestions for how linguists might help to bring about awareness of this important word-use issue in the non-linguist community?

2) Is there something that we can do as a group (e.g. via the LSA, MLA and other such organizations) to help reduce the continuation of historical injustices experienced by minority/indigenous groups -

perhaps by adopting policies against biased labels for languages and language groups?

I am sure there are many different opinions with regard to both the use of “Scandinavian” and how the linguistics community should or should not play a role in language-politics. I hope that some of these opinions make their way to the LinguistList.

## 4. Appeals, News and Views from Endangered Communities

### Hurricane damage to Miskitu and Mayangna communities in Nicaragua

Dear FEL members in the UK

You will have heard about Hurricane Felix which hit Nicaragua earlier in September. This is a good cause which is not primarily linguistic, but which may touch you because it affects a community which we have been following for some years. They are the Mayangna people, whose languages (Tuahka, Paramahka, Ulwa) Elena Benedicto has been telling us about (FEL VIII, FEL X and indeed this year, at the FEL XI). Also affected are the Mayangna's neighbours the Miskitu. Jane Freeland, another FEL member and in the UK, is also very active with the linguists in this region.

Aid is evidently being co-ordinated on the ground through URACCAN, Universidad de las Regiones Autónomas de la Costa Caribe Nicaragüense, the grass-roots university in Bluefields with which Elena and Jane have been working. (See, e.g. <http://www.uraccan.edu.ni/mision.php>.) It will be wonderful if FEL members can make a difference in this way to help these friends of ours in Nicaragua in their hour of particular need. I encourage you to donate as I shall, through NSC.

Their address is: NSC, 129 Seven Sisters Rd, London N7 7QG  
tel. 020 7272 9619 nsc<at>nicaraguasc.org.uk  
[www.nicaraguasc.org.uk](http://www.nicaraguasc.org.uk) Charity no. 1106881

Yours ever Nicholas Ostler

### Saving an Endangered Language of Southern Brazil: Laklãñö

Greg Urban, Prof. of Anthropology, University of Pennsylvania

Nanblá Gakran, Sociologist/Linguist, Terra Indígena Laklãñö Ibirama January 23, 2007

This project seeks to aid the preservation of an endangered language in the southern Brazilian state of Santa Catarina. The language, today known as Laklãñö (formerly Xokleng, Shokleng, Kaingang of Santa Catarina, or Botocudo), is spoken by no more than a few hundred individuals living on the Terra Indígena Laklãñö Ibirama reserve. The project involves the audio and video digitization of the speech of elder members of the community, as well as the further

training of a native speaker of the language who has been producing instructional materials for use in schools, and who also seeks to assemble a dictionary.

The Laklãñö community first established peaceful contact with a Brazilian government attraction team in 1914. Professor Greg Urban, a linguistic anthropologist, now at the University of Pennsylvania, conducted field research in the community from 1974 to 1976 and then again in 1981 and 1982. He was able to make audio recordings of a considerable portion of the mythology and historical narratives of the community from speakers who had grown up prior to contact with Brazilian national society. Unfortunately, all of those speakers are now dead.

During his 1981-82 research, he trained a young native research assistant, Nanblá Gakran, to write the language and to transcribe audio recordings. After Urban's departure in 1982, missionaries of the Summer Institute of Linguistics enlisted Gakran's aid in translating the New Testament into the native language.

Subsequently, Gakran pursued his own education. Despite personal hardships, in 2005 he became the first Brazilian Indian to be awarded an M.A. degree in linguistics, having researched his own language. His thesis, entitled Aspectos morfosintáticos da língua Laklãñö (Xokleng) - Jê (“Morphosyntactic Aspects of the Laklãñö (Xokleng) Language — Jê [linguistic family]”), was awarded a pass with “distinction.” A brief write-up on Gakran in Portuguese can be found at <http://listerv.linguistlist.org/cgi-bin/wa?A2=ind0508e&L=etnolingustica&D=1&P=95>. His accomplishments have also been reported in major national newspapers.

When Urban began research in 1974, the Laklãñö language was almost universally spoken in the community. By 1981, there was a marked shift in the community, as families were emphasizing Portuguese inside the household. That trend accelerated in the 1980s and 1990s. A 2004 report, prepared by the Summer Institute of Linguistics, noted that people “over 35 usually spoke to each other in Xokleng [Laklãñö] and people under 35 usually spoke to each other in Portuguese” (Anonby and Anonby 2004:10). The report concluded that “the possibility of language maintenance among the Xokleng [Laklãñö] is low.”

From 1992 on, Gakran has been involved in projects aimed at revitalizing the Laklãñö language (see the brief write-up at <http://www.socioambiental.org/pib/epienglish/xokleng/lingua.shtm>). While it may not prove possible to maintain a critical mass of fluent native speakers, if the language is to survive, Gakran is the one who has the talent and is positioned to make this happen. And if the language is on the road to extinction, then it is all the more imperative that it be adequately documented now.

The project we propose has two parts. The first is to make digital video recordings of native speakers. The recordings would be archived and preserved for future generations who might be interested in learning or studying the language, but they could also be actively used in the school system in the community — where Gakran serves as teacher. This project requires funding for equipment and materials, as well as for support of the project leader (Gakran) and any community participants.

The second aspect of this project is further training of Gakran as a linguist and social researcher. To this end, he wishes to return to graduate school to complete a PhD on the Laklãñö language, with the aim of producing a comprehensive dictionary, perhaps along with a set of texts. This will go a long way towards preserving the Laklãñö language — creating a set of materials that would allow future generations access to it.

Gakran is also endeavoring to establish a Casa de Memória or "House of Memories" for the Laklānō community — a local museum that would preserve the language and culture of the community for the future, simultaneously as it would help to valorize the language and culture in the present. Materials produced in the course of the present project would contribute to this museum.

There are presently more than 6.5 billion people on earth, and of that population the community of Laklānō speakers makes up an almost infinitesimally small fraction. However, Laklānō is a fully distinct language, one of at most 7,200 or so remaining on the planet. If it dies, a significant portion of the earth's cultural patrimony will die with it. However, it is possible to take steps now that would prevent the latter eventuality. The projects described herein are designed to maintain and preserve this precious part of our linguistic and cultural diversity.

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## 5. Allied Societies and Activities

### Documenting Endangered Languages: NSF's 2007 Awards

On October 12, The US National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and the National Science Foundation (NSF) announced the award of 18 institutional grants and nine fellowships in their Documenting Endangered Languages (DEL) partnership. A workshop on language recording techniques also will be supported. This is the third round of their multiyear campaign to preserve records of languages threatened with extinction. Experts estimate that more than half of the approximately 7,000 currently used human languages will stop being spoken in this century. These new DEL awards, totaling more than \$4 million, will support direct documentation work on more than 30 such languages and improvements in computer use that will help all language work.

Further recognition came to awardee Sven Haakanson last month in the form of a MacArthur Fellowship. Combining language work, funded by NSF, with revival of cultural traditions, "Haakanson is preserving and reviving

ancient traditions and heritage, celebrating the rich past of Alutiiq communities, and providing the larger world with a valuable window into a little-known culture," according to the MacArthur Web site. The interaction of communities and their environment via language is a common theme in DEL grants. It is particularly relevant in the Arctic region during the current International Polar Year (IPY).

Work by indigenous groups continues to play a prominent role in documentation. Native groups have an automatic interest in preserving their languages, often after decades of neglect and active suppression. Projects funded at the Salish Kootenai College in Montana, the Choctaw Nation in Oklahoma, the Navajo Language Academy in Arizona, the Koasati Tribe in Louisiana (together with McNeese State University), the Alutiiq Museum in Alaska (discussed above) and the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin demonstrate an active and successful surge in preservation of Native American languages by the speakers and their descendants.

As part of the U. S. IPY research agenda, NSF is supporting the documentation and preservation of endangered Arctic languages. Most Arctic indigenous languages are highly endangered. One project headed by Sharon Hargus of the University of Washington will focus on obtaining personal narratives of climate change in three Native communities in Alaska and Canada. Not only will the narratives provide important linguistic material, they will provide a Native perspective on changes to an environment that, while harsh, is extremely sensitive to change. Other Arctic languages to be recorded are Alutiiq, Klallam, Deg Xinag and Tlingit. A grant supplement will extend the work in Siberia under the direction of Alexander Nakhimovsky of Colgate University.

Several DEL grants extend work in the realm of computer support, allowing a more efficient processing of language data and greater access for a wide range of users. Andrew Garrett, at the University of California, Berkeley, will begin the enormous task of making the extensive holdings in the Berkeley Indigenous Language Archive available electronically. Jason Baldridge, at the University of Texas, Austin, will work on an automatic annotation technique that, if successful, will save countless hours on the part of transcribers of endangered language material. And Susan Penfield, at the University of Arizona, will explore the ways in which a community as a whole can work collaboratively on language projects. An innovative workshop strategy, led by Carol Genetti at the University of California at Santa Barbara, will train a cadre of linguists and Native community members in the techniques of digital archiving. The workshop will allow for an increased use of hands-on experience with the opportunity for the attendees to take away a suite of open-source products to continue their language work at their home institutions.

Work in the Pacific will involve Cemaun Arapesh, Rotokas, and Bahinemo (Papua New Guinea), Kimaragang (Malaysia), and Bardi (Australia). Africa will be represented by Bikya, Bishuo, and Busuu (Cameroon), Krim and Bom (Sierra Leone), and Nyangbo (Ghana). Further afield are studies of Albanian and Razihi (Yemen). Central America is represented by work on Mayan: Chorti, Yocotán and Tumbalá Chol in one project and Tojolabal in another.

For a complete listing of the awards, see [http://www.nsf.gov/news/news\\_summ.jsp?cntn\\_id=109583](http://www.nsf.gov/news/news_summ.jsp?cntn_id=109583)

(NSF Press Release 07-142).

### NSF workshop for Endangered Language support: *Documenting Endangered Languages* – Durham, New Hampshire – 14-17 October 2007

Report by Nicholas Ostler

The meeting began with the announcement (by David Lightfoot, the senior US government representative) that the National Science Foundation had replaced its 'special initiative' in favour of endangered language documentation with a 'program': effectively the funding stream for this activity has become permanent. The meeting had been called, at this moment of hope, to deliberate with others who, like the NSF, were committed to funding the support of endangered languages.



There were representatives from US government agencies:

National Endowment for the Humanities, National Museum of the American Indian, National Science Foundation, Smithsonian Institution – National Anthropological Archives),

from a number of other governments:

Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, Digital Repository Infrastructure Vision for European Research, European Research Council, European Science Foundation – Collaborative Research Programmes' Scheme (EUROCORES)

some archives:

Archive for the Indigenous Languages of Latin America (AILLA), Hans Rausing Endangered Languages Programme (HRELP), Japan's Endangered Languages of the Pacific Rim (ELPR), Open Language Archives Community (OLAC), Open Society Archives, Pacific and Regional Archive for Digital Sources in Endangered Cultures (PARADISEC)

and many other NGOs with an interest in the field:

Cultural Survival, Endangered Language Fund (ELF), Indigenous Language Institute (ILI), Linguist List, Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), Volkswagen Stiftung: Dokumentation bedrohter Sprachen. (Among these, FEL was represented by its chairman, Nicholas Ostler.)

There were also a couple of American Indian organizations:

Bug-O-Nay-Ge-shig School, Sac & Fox Language Program

There were four questions – focused on funders – which began the discussions:

What has been a success in funding EL to date? What is needed now? What opportunities are there for cooperation in future? How should communications be networked?

As befitted a workshop, the answering discussions were open-ended, and in this short report I shall simply pick on items which struck me as interesting. The presentations themselves are visible at <http://www.nsf.gov/sbe/bcs/DEL/WebPageOutline.htm>

The longest experience among funding operations represented came from Vera Szöllösi-Brenig of Volkswagen: she saw it as important to find ways of making electronic data accessible to their home community beyond a decade: a possible solution lay in actively involving members of the language community studied in making films, CDs, DVDs etc., and training them as assistants. Open source tools (such as ELAN, LEXUS, IMDI and ANNEX) might assist this process.

Peter Austin of HRELP noted that total funding for HRELP (he mentioned a guideline figure of US\$ 40M) was now internalized within the Arcadia Foundation. The rate of spend had been slower than expected, and therefore the lifetime of the funding had effectively been extended by 50% - so that it was now expected to run from 2002 until 2017. There were already 110 teams of researchers in the field; they were now thinking more actively about public outreach activities. There was a tendency to concentrate less on very large projects of the \$ 1M level, and more on smaller enabling grants (~ \$ 40K) which might enable younger researchers to get their projects established. Real gaps felt at the moment included funding for MA student scholarships, archiving of legacy data and revitalization projects.

Rüdiger Klein of the European Science Foundation, since 1974 a "membership organization of European funding agencies", had funded a programme on the Origins of Man, Language and Languages, and hoped in the near future (2008) to initiate BABEL ("Better Analyses Based on Endangered Languages"). At this David

Lightfoot pointed out how crucial linguistics had been (and specifically, the documentation of endangered languages) in the International Polar Year (in fact, a biennium) in ensuring that humanities were represented in what was otherwise a hard-science effort.

Doug Whalen announced that ELF would be managing and distributing a new \$1.6 million grant program, the Native Voices Endowment. This money comes from the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial Council, which received the revenues from the U.S. Mint's sale of the Lewis and Clark 2004 Commemorative Coin. Grants through this program will be available to the Native American tribes that came in contact with the Lewis and Clark Expedition between 1803-1806.

He also noted that endangered languages have grown to be a significant component of linguistics activity academically: 14% of presentations at LSA now concern an endangered language, and 10% of the papers published in *Language*. US dissertations in the field have increased over 1995 to 2006 from 15 to 28 p.a., now making up about 25% of the total.

Toshi Nakayama of ELPR passed some candid comments on the slowdown in EL activities in Japan since the completion of the ELPR programme ca 2005: despite the library of written materials that had been produced, the Linguistic Society of Japan remained unconvinced of their importance, and there was no effective community of scholars still working in the field: there was a need now for a new research methodology, an infrastructure and a public relations offensive.

Stephanie Fielding gave some examples of her own work in providing teaching materials through podcasts for the language Mohegan of Connecticut, whose living tradition has been cut. (They can be viewed at [www.mohegan-language.uconn.edu](http://www.mohegan-language.uconn.edu).)

Paul Lewis of SIL talked of revisions underway for the next issue of *Ethnologue*. There had been a major revision of coverage of the languages of Kenya; Philippines would be next. In general, there was a new effort to give insight into the population dynamics of languages, including Joshua Fishman's GIDS 'graded inter-generational disruption scale'.

Heidi Johnson of AILLA gave the advice that, for groups that cannot operate a large modern software system, a solution might be to get adopted by a larger institution.

Peter Austin, on behalf of David Nathan, gave some interesting insight into outcomes of language documentation projects. The HRELP programme had been running for just five years now, so it was beginning to be possible to see the results of projects. In such projects, only 60% of grantee material had yet been submitted. Of that, on 50% was graded as Open Access. Access restrictions – as Heidi Johnson pointed out – are usually imposed because the depositor is playing safe: having not got around to vetting all the material, they choose to deny access as an 'insurance policy'.

\* \* \*

A persistent theme/problem in discussions was the potential gap between scientific interest in documentation, and community interest in language revitalization. Some suggested putting more science ('high tech') into the revitalization programmes; others (conversely) that parallel production of pedagogical materials should be a requirement on documentation work; others still that something more sociable should be attempted – like a 'Facebook for Linguists', a 'LinguistSpace' or some such. In general, it was felt that involvement of the speaker community was the essential component in bridging this gap, not least – as Jacob Manetowa-Bailey of the Sac & Fox pointed out – because this was a kind of investment which should result in the creation of new fluent speakers, the raw material for documentation! Doug Whalen suggested the whole issue should be viewed in a more dynamic and social light: not just are we studying the right aspects of language (for future use) but are we connecting to the right members of the community?

Paul Lewis of SIL suggested stepping back, and focusing on the knowledge space: how does a language-community, as a group that recognizes its own identity, distinctively frame and organize its view of the world? This would give both a more fully integrated documentation of the language in question, but also put it in a form that would be interesting and instructive for future community members. When such high-level knowledge is in the background, all sorts of specific items can be focused – as when community experts could advise an MIT graduate researcher, set on formal analysis of aspects of the grammar, to seek her data through a plant description study. In such a perspective, as Helen Dry suggested, the problem of ‘interoperability’ – i.e. recording past data in such a form that it remained accessible for new purposes – received a new importance, since the aim of research must be seen not just as focusing and answering outsiders’ questions, but building up, or perhaps revealing, a pattern of the knowledge space as a whole for the community. (An ambitious example of these interconnected studies was quoted: NSF projects on revival of indigenous techniques of navigation in the Marshall Islands, ancient plant uses in Hawaii, and the law and transformation of water rights there.)

In general, from a PR perspective, there was an urgent need for stories of the above kind, where ‘the boot was on the other foot’ – i.e. where community experts had been able to sort out the problems of linguists and other outside experts.

## 6. Letter to the Editor

### From Alan G. James

Nice calligraphy on the cover, but - unless East Aramaic orthography is very eccentric - surely 'khila d-mella' is the first line, not the third? (followed by the others in the order given).

Lots of interesting stuff in this issue, Ogmios gets better every time!

Alan G. James

## 7. Overheard on the Web

### Educational Linguistics List

<https://lists.sis.utsa.edu/mailman/listinfo/edling>

The purpose of Edling-L is to provide an international forum for students, faculty, and practitioners to discuss research, current issues, and trends in educational linguistics. Edling-L serves as a venue for open discussion among all scholars studying language issues in both formal and informal education. Edling-L members are encouraged to engage in lively conversation on research ideas and concerns in addition to sharing information about upcoming conferences and research meetings, calls for papers, publication releases, research resources, bibliographic information, stories of language in education from popular media, and other matters of interest.

### Researchers say many languages are dying

*By Randolph E. Schmid, Associated Press Writer*

When every known speaker of the language Amurtag gets together, there's still no one to talk to. Native Australian Charlie Mangulda is the only person alive known to speak that language, one of thousands around the world on the brink of extinction. From rural Australia to

Siberia to Oklahoma, languages that embody the history and traditions of people are dying, researchers said Tuesday. While there are an estimated 7,000 languages spoken around the world today, one of them dies out about every two weeks, according to linguistic experts struggling to save at least some of them.

Five hotspots where languages are most endangered were listed Tuesday [18 September] the Living Tongues Institute for Endangered Languages and the National Geographic Society. In addition to northern Australia, eastern Siberia and Oklahoma and the U.S. Southwest, many native languages are endangered in South America — Ecuador, Colombia, Peru, Brazil and Bolivia — as well as the area including British Columbia, and the states of Washington and Oregon. Losing languages means losing knowledge, says K. David Harrison, an assistant professor of linguistics at Swarthmore College.

"When we lose a language, we lose centuries of human thinking about time, seasons, sea creatures, reindeer, edible flowers, mathematics, landscapes, myths, music, the unknown and the everyday." As many as half of the current languages have never been written down, he estimated. That means, if the last speaker of many of these vanished tomorrow, the language would be lost because there is no dictionary, no literature, no text of any kind, he said.

Harrison is associate director of the Living Tongues Institute based in Salem, Ore. He and institute director Gregory D.S. Anderson analyzed the top regions for disappearing languages. Anderson said languages become endangered when a community decides that its language is an impediment. The children may be first to do this, he explained, realizing that other more widely spoken languages are more useful. The key to getting a language revitalized, he said, is getting a new generation of speakers. He said the institute worked with local communities and tries to help by developing teaching materials and by recording the endangered language.

Harrison said that the 83 most widely spoken languages account for about 80 percent of the world's population while the 3,500 smallest languages account for just 0.2 percent of the world's people. Languages are more endangered than plant and animal species, he said.

The hot spots listed at Tuesday's briefing:

- Northern Australia, 153 languages. The researchers said aboriginal Australia holds some of the world's most endangered languages, in part because aboriginal groups splintered during conflicts with white settlers. Researchers have documented such small language communities as the three known speakers of Magati Ke, the three Yawuru speakers and the lone speaker of Amurtag.
- Central South America including Ecuador, Colombia, Peru, Brazil and Bolivia — 113 languages. The area has extremely high diversity, very little documentation and several immediate threats. Small and socially less-valued indigenous languages are being knocked out by Spanish or more dominant indigenous languages in most of the region, and by Portuguese in Brazil.
- Northwest Pacific Plateau, including British Columbia in Canada and the states of Washington and Oregon in the U.S., 54 languages. Every language in the American part of this hotspot is endangered or moribund, meaning the youngest speaker is over age 60. An extremely endangered language, with just one speaker, is Siletz Dee-ni, the last of 27 languages once spoken on the Siletz reservation in Oregon.
- Eastern Siberian Russia, China, Japan — 23 languages. Government policies in the region have forced speakers of minority languages to use the national and regional languages and, as a result, some have only a few elderly speakers.
- Oklahoma, Texas and New Mexico — 40 languages. Oklahoma has one of the highest densities of indigenous languages in the United States. A moribund language of the area is Yuchi, which may be unrelated to any other language in the world. As of 2005, only five elderly members of the Yuchi tribe were fluent.

The research is funded by the Australian government, U.S. National Science Foundation, National Geographic Society and grants from foundations.

## Minority Languages and Cultures Program at Indiana University

<http://www.iub.edu/~mlcp/>

Greetings,

We are the Minority Languages and Cultures Program (ML&CP), within the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies at Indiana University. Our program brings together scholars who share the aims of revitalizing subordinate languages in Latin America, documenting the cultures of the communities that speak them, and monitoring the play of language and culture in the ethnic and regional politics of this zone.

Because we think it is important to have a connection with people and institutions sharing our interests, we cordially invite you to visit our new website at <http://www.iub.edu/~mlcp/>. We welcome any comments and suggestions you might wish to pass along to us, either about the website or about other aspects of our program. Please feel free to share word of our program with other persons and institutions.

Best Regards,

Minority Languages and Cultures of Latin America Program, Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies

Indiana University, Bloomington

## New wiki on Australian Indigenous languages

by Jane Simpson, 5 October, 2007

A new wiki has been set up: Sharing Aboriginal language. Longterm it's for general discussion "for all Aboriginal language people to work together, share ideas, develop exchanges programmes, discuss language matters and be able to contact each other quickly".

But most immediately the current discussion is on recommendations for Australian government policy on Indigenous Languages (you can find information on the main Australian language policy resources up to late June at David Nash's site). The recommendations arise from the successful Indigenous Languages Conference held last month at the University of Adelaide (See Matjijn-nehen, Anggarrgoon and Langgij gel for discussion of ideas arising in the conference.)

[http://blogs.usyd.edu.au/elac/2007/10/new\\_wiki\\_on\\_australian\\_indigenous.html](http://blogs.usyd.edu.au/elac/2007/10/new_wiki_on_australian_indigenous.html) (source)

## 8. Review

Lars Johanson, Éva Csató, ed.: *The Turkic Languages* (Routledge Language Family Descriptions) London: Routledge 1998 (paperback reprint 2006). £39.99. 474 pp.

Reviewed by Nicholas Ostler

This work is a sound overview of scholarship on the Turkic family of languages, something that was not previously available in a convenient format in English, if at all. As such it is a very welcome publication. Each chapter ends with half a page or so of bibliographic references, and it is notable that most of them are in German or Russian. Although the price of the volume is still rather high, it is a relief after the hardback edition which retailed at £210 – even in 1998! And it comes as number 15 in a series of such family overviews, all of which have been produced on a comparable lagged, but high, financial timescale.

The Turkic languages are remarkably consistent and stable, yet far-flung across Asia. The book begins with six general chapters, treating different aspects of the family as a whole – Speakers (i.e. population statistics), History of migrations, Common linguistic structures, Historical reconstruction, Linguistic History (i.e. in terms of phonology and morphology) and Writing Systems – and then treats each major branch separately, pointing out its distinctive features against the previously set pattern of common Turkic. There are in fact 21 such specific chapters, and they include linguistic treatments of Chaghatay, Ottoman Turkish, Yakut and Chuvash – again, highly desirable because representing knowledge that is rarely set out so clearly, directly and plainly. The treatments are not easy introductory reading, however, but terse statements of linguistic structure, without any geographical, historical or social background. The book has 18 authors in all, but in general the plan is observed consistently.

There is very little discussion of influence on Turkic languages from their non-Turkic neighbours. (The chapters on Ottoman, and the Turkic languages of Iran, are exceptions to this.) This could be thought a shortcoming, since the Turks by being so mobile across Asia came into active linguistic contact with Slavic, Armenian, Iranian, Arabic and Greek, as well as originally having been close to Mongol and Tungus. One of the earliest known Turkic proverbs, (from Mahmud Kashgari's *Diwan-i-Lugat-it-Türk*: A Dictionary of Turkic Dialects (1072) written in Chaghatay), even makes this point:

Tatsız Türk bolmas, başsız börk bolmas

No Turk without a Tat (i.e. Persian); without a head no hat.



**Map from Kashgari's *Diwan*, showing the distribution of Turkic tribes.**

Of all the languages, most attention is given – unsurprisingly – to the language of modern Turkey, which besides its regular chapter, is discussed in chapters on Ottoman Turkish, Turkish Dialects and the Turkish Language Reform. In a way this is a pity, since from a purely linguistic point of view, the position (and name) of Turkey is misleading: the heartland (and original home) of Turkic is far to the east and north of Iran, not to its west. But in fact, the extended coverage of Turkish is defensible, not merely on political, but also on modern sociolinguistic grounds: Turkish language policy has had resonance throughout the Turkic-language world in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, since the romanization introduced by Atatürk in 1928 has

become a touchstone of language reform in ex-Soviet republics – and indeed an impossible dream for language communities like Tatar still ensconced within Russia.

All in all, if you are interested in Turkic, this book is indispensable. But it is aimed at the historical linguist, not the sociolinguist.

## 9. Forthcoming events

### World indigenous TV conference

*From Vanessa Horan, Maori Television, New Zealand*

Internationally renowned speakers who are industry experts in the fields of broadcasting, media and indigenous languages will play a leading role in the inaugural World Indigenous Television Broadcasting Conference to be held in Auckland in March 2008.

Leaders, producers and planners involved in indigenous and public television must register online at [www.witbc.org](http://www.witbc.org) before November 30 to receive a special early bird rate to the three-day event. New Zealand's national indigenous broadcaster, Maori Television, is hosting the first ever gathering of indigenous television leaders from throughout the world.

"Maori Television has secured highly accomplished and internationally renowned leaders and industry experts as featured guest speakers who – from their own experiences – can speak about the development of indigenous peoples and the future for indigenous broadcasting," says Maori Television chief executive Jim Mather. "These speakers will set the tone for the conference and provide the encouragement for indigenous broadcasters to respond to the conference theme of reclaiming the future of indigenous identities, cultures and languages."

The conference sessions include:

**LEADING THE PACK – John Walter Jones, Chairman, S4C, Wales :** Welsh indigenous broadcaster S4C celebrates its 25th anniversary in November 2007. Chairman John Walter Jones gives us an insight into the model that has ensured the success and longevity of one of the world's oldest indigenous broadcasters, and how that model has ensured the advancement of Welsh language, culture and people. Mr Jones will outline the key challenges facing S4C and how it is addressing those challenges to ensure future development in this digital world of progressively fragmenting audiences.

**A NATIONAL BROADCASTER IN ITS OWN RIGHT – Jean LaRose, Chief Executive, Aboriginal Peoples Television Network, Canada :** Canadian indigenous broadcaster APTN may be only eight years old but chief executive Jean LaRose is targeting the kind of growth that will see APTN recognised as Canada's fourth national broadcaster by its 10th anniversary. Join Mr LaRose as he outlines the strategies APTN is employing to ensure this remarkable goal is met.

**STRIVING FOR SUCCESS – Jim Mather, Chief Executive, Maori Television, Aotearoa-New Zealand :** Maori Television will celebrate four years on air in 2008 with the launch of a second channel that will broadcast in the Maori language only. Once a political football, Maori Television has achieved the kind of start that has earned it increasing public support and headlines such as 'Maori TV is a major success story' and 'The little channel that could' – these from hardened mainstream media. Mr Mather provides insight into the strategies and critical success factors behind the channel's success to date, and his aspirations for its future.

**INDEPENDENCE AT LAST – Pol O Gallchoir, Chief Executive, TG4, Ireland :** Irish indigenous broadcaster TG4 began life 10 years ago under the guardianship of the country's public broadcaster RTE.

Hail January 2007, the date that marked the start of TG4's life as an independent broadcaster responsible for its own destiny. But what does independence hold for TG4 and what strategy is it pursuing to ensure it thrives as an independent operation?

**INDIGENOUS TV COMES TO AUSTRALIA – Patricia Turner, Chief Executive, National Indigenous Television, Australia :** The plight of Australia's indigenous peoples over many years is well documented. But earlier this year Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders had cause to celebrate when they launched their own indigenous channel, NITV. Chief executive Patricia Turner outlines the journey of NITV to establishment and the pathway it will take to grow into Australia's newest 'national' broadcaster with a reputation for delivering the best programmes the country has seen.

**PUBLIC BROADCASTER MEETS INDIGENOUS BROADCASTER – COLLABORATION OR COMPETITION? – Shaun Brown, Chief Executive, SBS, Australia :** Indigenous broadcasting is an emerging industry worldwide. Publicly funded, both indigenous and public broadcasting are closely aligned. Formerly head of television at TVNZ and now chief executive at Australian ethnic broadcaster SBS, Shaun Brown shares his views on the role of mainstream public broadcasters in supporting indigenous broadcasting, and tackles the argument for the commercial imperative in public service television.

**GETTING IT RIGHT – Yuan-hui Hu, President/Chief Executive, Public Television Service, Taiwan :** ITV, Taiwan's indigenous broadcaster, became a member of Taiwan's public broadcasting group, Taiwan Broadcasting System (TBS), on January 1 2007. This may not have been a development favoured by some of Taiwan's indigenous community. How has TBS gone about structuring ITV to ensure the formerly independent indigenous broadcaster retains its independence, identity and voice?

Leaders, producers and planners involved in indigenous and public television can register their interest to attend the World Indigenous Television Broadcasting Conference at [www.witbc.org](http://www.witbc.org).

Ends

For images and media information, register with the Maori Television media centre at <http://media.maoritelevision.com> or for interviews, review tapes or further information, contact:

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Kaiwhakaputa (Publicist)

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## International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences

### 16th World Congress (ICAES 2008)

#### Call for Abstracts for the Academic Session on "Issues of Language Endangerment"

The 16th World Congress of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (ICAES 2008) will be convened in Kunming City, Yunnan Province, China from 15th to 23rd July, 2008 (see [www.icaes2008.org](http://www.icaes2008.org)). There will be an academic session on "Issues of Language Endangerment", to which you are cordially invited.

Language endangerment is a global issue that is becoming increasingly widespread. As the embodiment and expression of culture, language is a very important part of our non-material cultural heritage. When languages become extinct, there are adverse effects on linguistic and cultural diversity, resulting in irreplaceable losses for



the whole of mankind. Therefore, the problem of language endangerment is a contemporary issue faced not only by linguists and anthropologists, but which also affects the public at large. Documentation and preservation of data from endangered languages have now become the special responsibility of and an urgent task for linguists and anthropologists. Development of field research and data recording of endangered languages has led to numerous theoretical discussions and practical investigations, involving linguists and anthropologists from all over the world. Studies of language decline and extinction, as well as the recording and archiving of data from endangered languages, have therefore led to the gradual formation of new theories in both principles and methodology.

This academic session aims to facilitate communication and exchange of both information and experience. It is hoped that this will further promote the recording and preservation of data from endangered languages, as well as fostering the development of theoretical and methodological research. This will enable the formulation of effective strategies to ameliorate the loss that language extinction will bring to the whole of human civilization.

If you would like to attend the academic session entitled "Issues of Language Endangerment", please provide the following information:

(1) Name, Gender, Nationality/Ethnicity, Occupation/Professional Title, Academic Qualifications, Address for Correspondence, Contact Telephone Number and the title of the paper you would like to present during the session.

(2) Please submit an electronic copy of the abstract of your paper to both contact persons before the 30th of December, 2007. The abstract should contain no more than 350 words in English or around 500 characters in Chinese. Key words should be provided. A formal invitation will be sent to you after the abstract has been checked and accepted.

Contact persons:

Tjeerd de Graaf (tdegraaf@fa.knaw.nl) and Shixuan Xu (xushixuan@gmail.com)

**Mercator : European Research Centre on Multilingualism and Language Learning**

c/o Fryske Akademy, P.O.Box 54

NL-8900 AB, Ljouwert / Leeuwarden, The Netherlands w:  
www.mercator-research.eu

## Sustaining biological and cultural diversity

**TELL US YOUR STORIES!** The American Museum of Natural History's Center for Biodiversity and Conservation is launching an innovative outreach project called "Voices from the Field"--a collection of experiences and insights, sounds and images that explore the links between Nature and Culture.

Next spring, the American Museum of Natural History will host a symposium on "Sustaining Cultural and Biological Diversity in a Rapidly Changing World: Lessons for Global Policy" (April 2-5, 2008). The conference will examine the connections between culture, language, and biological diversity--each a manifestation of the richness of life on earth, and all under threat by some of the same forces. The organizers are the Museum's Center for Biodiversity and Conservation, IUCN-The World Conservation Union/Theme on Culture and Conservation, and Terralingua (an international nonprofit concerned with the future of the world's biological, cultural, and linguistic diversity).

The "Voices from the Field" project asks participants to pose a series of questions within communities around the world (from Inuvik to Tierra del Fuego to the Bronx). Respondents might be community

elders, artisans, hunters, fishers, farmers, performers, educators, students--anyone willing to share their insights. Interviewers are encouraged to capture voices and, if possible, faces and a sense of place, via audio and video recordings, or with still photos to accompany text. An interactive "Voices" website will link individual vignettes to a world map highlighting the locations from which each originated. In addition, a selection of "Voices" submissions will be incorporated into a multi-media presentation to be shown at the April conference. (It is not necessary to attend the conference in order to participate in the "Voices" project.)

To learn more about "Voices from the Field" and other opportunities to participate in our April symposium, please visit <http://symposia.cbc.amnh.org/biocultural/> and click on "Call for Participation."

Please note: Participants are responsible for funding their own involvement (materials, travel costs, etc.). No funding is available from the Symposium's organizers.

We look forward to hearing from you, and hope to welcome you to the Museum in April 2008.

Fiona Brady, Outreach Program Coordinator  
Center for Biodiversity and Conservation  
American Museum of Natural History  
Central Park West at 79th Street  
New York, NY 10024 USA

## Conference on Endangered Languages and Cultures of Native America

Full Title: Conference on Endangered Languages and Cultures of Native America

Short Title: CELCNA

Date: 28-Mar-2008 - 30-Mar-2008

Location: Salt Lake City, UT, USA

Contact Person: Tamrika Khvtisashvili

Meeting Email: [tamrikah@hotmail.com](mailto:tamrikah@hotmail.com)

Linguistic Field(s): Language Documentation

Call Deadline: 18-Jan-2008

### Meeting Description

Conference on Endangered Languages and Cultures of Native America (CELCNA)

Papers or posters on any aspect of American Indian languages, in particular on documentation or revitalization. Conference on Endangered Languages and Cultures of Native America (4th annual CELCNA) First Announcement

Dates & Place: March 28-30, 2008, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah.

Sponsors: Smithsonian Institution, American Philosophical Society, and CAIL

(Center for American Indian Languages, University of Utah)

Keynote speakers: MaryAnn Willie (University of Arizona, Navajo Nation)

Call for papers: Papers or posters are invited on any aspect of American Indian languages, in particular on documentation or revitalization. American Indian participants are especially invited. Papers are 20 minutes each in length, with an additional 10 minutes for discussion.

Deadline: for Abstracts: Jan. 18, 2008. The Program Committee will announce results about Feb. 1.

Workshop on teaching American Indian languages (and language revitalization), Thursday, March 27; all interested are warmly invited - no cost (just registration for CELCNA)  
Registration: \$25 (students \$15) (tribal elders, no cost) [to cover cost of conference rooms, refreshments]

## Second International Conference on Language Development, Language Revitalization and Multilingual Education in Ethnic Minority Communities

1-3 and 4 July, 2008  
Bangkok, Thailand

### Background

Over the past decade, ethnolinguistic communities, supported by governments and NGOs in several countries of Asia and the Pacific, have begun implementing mother tongue-based multilingual education programs. Also during that time, a number of NGOs and universities have begun supporting ethnolinguistic communities in their efforts to develop, revitalize and maintain their heritage languages.

In spite of these efforts, the purposes and benefits of language development, language revitalization and multilingual education are still not widely understood or accepted. Many efforts remain weak and do not build on what has been learned through research and experiences elsewhere. More information is needed about what is involved in planning, implementing and sustaining strong language development and multilingual education programs.

### Purposes

This conference is meant to address those information needs. Its purposes are to:

Raise awareness about the purposes and benefits of mother tongue-based multilingual education (MT-Based MLE) programs,

Share information about good practices in language development, language revitalization and MT-Based MLE in ethnolinguistic communities, especially from the people who are actively engaged in such programs,

Develop and expand networks of individuals and organizations engaged in these efforts.

### Tracks

The conference will include the following tracks (all focusing on languages in multilingual settings):

#### 1. Language development and language revitalization of non-dominant languages

*Topics include indigenous people's efforts to revitalize and sustain their heritage languages and cultures; linguistic and sociolinguistic research; orthography development and orthography testing; preservation of oral literature and development of written literature in previously unwritten languages.*

#### Language and language-in-education policy and policy implementation

*Topics include the role of ethnic or indigenous (non-dominant) languages in society and education; language and language-in-education policies and their implementation in multilingual contexts; comparisons of policies across nations; the ways that languages are promoted by written and unwritten policies and practices and the factors that support or hinder the use of local languages in society and education.*

#### Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual education (MT-Based MLE)

*Topics include planning, implementing, evaluating and sustaining MT-Based MLE for children and adults in formal and non-formal education systems, including case studies and good practices in preliminary research, advocacy and mobilization for MT-Based MLE at local, district, national and international levels; developing teaching and learning materials; teacher recruitment and training; research and evaluation.*

#### Community efforts to preserve their intangible cultural heritage

*Topics include community-centered efforts to analyze and maintain oral literature, traditional dance and music and traditional medicines. Theoretical links between folk and traditional arts revitalization and language development are especially relevant. This topic also will include ethnographic studies of informal music education practices, as well as case studies demonstrating the integration of traditional music and arts into formal educational settings.*

#### Information and communication technology that support MT-Based MLE

*Topics include using appropriate ICT tools to develop, produce and communicate information and relevant materials in the Mother Tongue.*

### Types of sessions

#### Plenary sessions

#### Parallel sessions

#### Policy sessions (specifically for policy makers)

#### General overview

The international conference will be 3 days from 1-3 July 2008.

Following the 3-day conference, 4 July 2008; there will be a one day symposium on *Planning Research and Evaluation Studies of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education Programs*.

The purpose of this symposium will be to produce clear principles and guidelines for developing longitudinal evaluation studies of MLE programs that can be adapted to a variety of country situations.

Venue: Royal River Hotel, Bangkok

Supporting agencies: SIL International, UNESCO, UNICEF, SEAMEO, Mahidol University, CARE International and Save children UK.

For more information, please contact [langdevelbkk\\_info@sil.org](mailto:langdevelbkk_info@sil.org)

# FEL Manifesto

## 1. Preamble 1.1. The Present Situation

At this point in human history, most human languages are spoken by exceedingly few people. And that majority, the majority of languages, is about to vanish.

The most authoritative source on the languages of the world (Ethnologue, Gordon 2005) lists just over 6,900 living languages. Population figures are available for just over 6,600 of them (or 94.5%). Of these 6,600, it may be noted that:

56% are spoken by fewer than 10,000 people; 28% by fewer than 1,000; and 83% are restricted to single countries, and so are particularly exposed to the policies of a single government. At the other end of the scale, 10 major languages, each spoken by over 100 million people, are the mother tongues of almost half (49%) of the world's population.

More important than this snapshot of proportions and populations is the outlook for survival of the languages we have. Hard comparable data here are scarce or absent, often because of the sheer variety of the human condition: a small community, isolated or bilingual, may continue for centuries to speak a unique language, while in another place a populous language may for social or political reasons die out in little more than a generation. Another reason is that the period in which records have been kept is too short to document a trend: e.g. the *Ethnologue* has been issued only since 1951. However, it is difficult to imagine many communities sustaining serious daily use of a language for even a generation with fewer than 100 speakers: yet at least 10% of the world's living languages are now in this position.

Some of the forces which make for language loss are clear: the impacts of urbanization, Westernization and global communications grow daily, all serving to diminish the self-sufficiency and self-confidence of small and traditional communities. Discriminatory policies, and population movements also take their toll of languages.

In our era, the preponderance of tiny language communities means that the majority of the world's languages are vulnerable not just to decline but to extinction.

## 1.2. The Likely Prospect

There is agreement among linguists who have considered the situation that over half of the world's languages are moribund, i.e. not effectively being passed on to the next generation. We and our children, then, are living at the point in human history where, within perhaps two generations, most languages in the world will die out.

This mass extinction of languages may not appear immediately life-threatening. Some will feel that a reduction in numbers of languages will ease communication, and perhaps help build nations, even global solidarity. But it has been well pointed out that the success of humanity in colonizing the planet has been due to our ability to develop cultures suited for survival in a variety of environments. These cultures have everywhere been transmitted by languages, in oral traditions and latterly in written literatures. So when language transmission itself breaks down, especially before the advent of literacy in a culture, there is always a large loss of inherited knowledge.

Valued or not, that knowledge is lost, and humanity is the poorer. Along with it may go a large part of the pride and self-identity of the community of former speakers. And there is another kind of loss, of a different type of knowledge. As each language dies, science, in linguistics, anthropology, prehistory and psychology, loses one more precious source of data, one more of the diverse and unique ways that the human mind can express itself through a language's structure and vocabulary.

We cannot now assess the full effect of the massive simplification of the world's linguistic diversity now occurring. But language loss, when it occurs, is sheer loss, irreversible and not in itself creative. Speakers of an endangered language may well resist the extinction of their traditions, and of their linguis-

tic identity. They have every right to do so. And we, as scientists, or concerned human beings, will applaud them in trying to preserve part of the diversity which is one of our greatest strengths and treasures.

## 1.3. The Need for an Organization

We cannot stem the global forces which are at the root of language decline and loss.

But we can work to lessen the ignorance which sees language loss as inevitable when it is not, and does not properly value all that will go when a language itself vanishes.

We can work to see technological developments, such as computing and telecommunications, used to support small communities and their traditions rather than to supplant them. And we can work to lessen the damage:

- by recording as much as possible of the languages of communities which seem to be in terminal decline;
- by emphasizing particular benefits of the diversity still remaining; and
- by promoting literacy and language maintenance programmes, to increase the strength and morale of the users of languages in danger.

In order to further these aims, there is a need for an autonomous international organization which is not constrained or influenced by matters of race, politics, gender or religion. This organization will recognise in language issues the principles of self-determination, and group and individual rights. It will pay due regard to economic, social, cultural, community and humanitarian considerations. Although it may work with any international, regional or local Authority, it will retain its independence throughout. Membership will be open to those in all walks of life.

## 2. Aims and Objectives

The Foundation for Endangered Languages exists to support, enable and assist the documentation, protection and promotion of endangered languages. In order to do this, it aims:

To raise awareness of endangered languages, both inside and outside the communities where they are spoken, through all media;

To support the use of endangered languages in all contexts: at home, in education, in the media, and in social, cultural and economic life;

To monitor linguistic policies and practices, and to seek to influence the appropriate authorities where necessary;

To support the documentation of endangered languages, by offering financial assistance, training, or facilities for the publication of results;

To collect together and make available information of use in the preservation of endangered languages;

To disseminate information on all of the above activities as widely as possible.





Any special expertise or interest:



