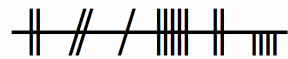


FOUNDATION FOR ENDANGERED LANGUAGES

OGMIOS



OGMIOS Newsletter 43: — 31 December 2010

ISSN 1471-0382 Editor: Christopher Moseley



Participants in the fourteenth FEL conference at Trinity Saint David, Carmarthen, September 2010

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Assistant Editor: Adriano Truscott

Contributing Editors: Roger Blench, Joseph Blythe, Serena D'Agostino, Christopher Hadfield, Francis M Hult, Nicholas Ostler, Andrea Ritter

Contact the Editor at:
Christopher Moseley,
9 Westdene Crescent,
Caversham Heights,
Reading RG4 7HD, England
chrismoseley50@yahoo.com

Published by:
Foundation for Endangered Languages,
172 Bailbrook Lane,
Bath BA1 7AA, England
nostler@chibcha.demon.co.uk
<http://www.ogmios.org>

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1. Editorial

At our annual conference in Carmarthen, Wales, in September, FEL held its Annual General Meeting, at which some important changes were made to the Committee by way of an election of office-bearers. In previous years an election has not really been necessary, because the number of candidates was equal to, or smaller than, the number of posts on the committee. Perhaps it is a sign of the increasing maturity of our worldwide organisation that we have reached a stage where an election became necessary because there were more candidates than posts; on the other hand, the election was effectively open only to those present at the meeting, and our far-flung membership cannot get to know the individual committee members personally.

Other important decisions were taken at the AGM, and the conference itself was a great success in other ways. You can see an interview with our local organiser, Dr. Hywel Glyn Lewis, under 'Development of the Foundation' below.

Endangered languages have been in the world's news media more than usual since this journal last went to press. The discovery of Koro, allegedly a previously unknown language of Arunachal Pradesh, India, was given very wide publicity by the Living Tongues Institute in September and October 2010, and the regional editors of the UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger, whose post-publication monitoring work is associated with FEL, were at pains to clarify the real nature of this discovery. UNESCO went to the trouble of issuing a press release on the future inclusion of this language in the Atlas (along with another newly-recognised language, Jeju in South Korea). The recognition of Koro is indeed an exciting development, but the story is not quite as simple and clear-cut as was presented in some of the media. On these pages we reproduce a typical news report on it (in this case from the National Public Radio web-site in the USA) alongside the statement from the Atlas editorial team responsible for South Asia.

Chris Moseley

2. Development of the Foundation

After the fourteenth annual FEL conference in Carmarthen, Wales, on the theme of 'Reversing Language Shift', the Editor took the opportunity to interview our local organiser, Dr. Hywel Glyn Lewis (seen on the far left of the group on our cover), about his reflections on the conference and the issues it raised.

This was the first FEL conference on British soil for many years. Although the theme of Reversing Language Shift was of world-wide interest, many people would say Wales is a shining example of RLS. Was that the reason why we chose this topic?

I chose the topic because the Welsh Assembly Government currently has a strategy for reversing the language shift which we experienced in Wales during the last century as shown in the decline in census figures over successive decades. The 2001 census showed a small increase to 20.8% which reflects the current promotion of the language in the education system, resulting in greater proficiency amongst children from 3-15 years of age, although there is certainly no room for complacency. A

Welsh-medium Education Strategy has also recently been formulated, shortly due to be implemented, which will strengthen the current level of Welsh-medium education provision. Furthermore, additional legislation is being passed which will give further legal rights to Welsh-speakers in the every-day use of the language. Wales, therefore, certainly could be perceived as offering a model for reversing language shift. However, there are various domains where the more cynical amongst us would still consider the attitude to be subtractive, indicating a reluctance amongst the non-Welsh-speaking population to accept change, especially in the private sector. Nevertheless, the Welsh Assembly, in the wake of devolved government, seems determined to promote the language generally as indicated in a 2003 policy-document entitled "Iaith Pawb" (Everyone's Language).

Were you pleased with the variety of speakers who came to Trinity Saint David? Did you feel any particular part of the world was underrepresented?

I was satisfied and encouraged by the range of attendees representing various parts of the world generally, which indicates that the support for endangered languages is a world-wide phenomenon. Nevertheless, the challenge is to get the message across to the wider public in respective countries and not leave the battle to academics. We must remember that it is ordinary people who kill languages, whether or not we consider the death to be 'murder' or 'suicide'. The speakers provided a penetrating insight into a range of situations from which we can all learn since the sociolinguistic variables affecting language vitality can often be very common as well as unique.

Our excursion to two Welsh-medium schools in the Carmarthen area gave us some insights into what can be achieved in bilingual education in Wales. What emerged from the discussions between our conference participants and the school staff?

Participants seemed to be very impressed with the Welsh-medium education provision at both primary (years 3-11) and secondary (years 11-18) levels. Welsh-medium schools are often perceived as providing a superior level of education both academically and from cultural and cross-curricular aspects. Academic results certainly support this view which is why so many non-Welsh-speaking parents send their children to these schools. This, obviously, makes a major contribution to the reversal of language shift. Nevertheless, it also acknowledged that the majority do not attend these schools and are only provided with a statutory second-language curriculum within English-medium schools which, partly for methodological reasons, does not bear fruit in terms of creating bilingual speakers. It well recognised that successful language acquisition depends on the use of a language as a medium in other areas of the curriculum. Immersion education at an early age, which is what a high percentage of children from English-speaking homes experience, creates balanced bilingual speakers in a relatively short time. This a message which we try to get across to parents generally, although as in most countries, some still consider this to be a risk due to ignorance of the educational process. It has been said that what we do not understand we fear, and what we fear we reject!

What advice would you pass on to organisers of future FEL conferences?

To consult various contributors as early as possible. Those chosen as key-note speakers should be checked for availability at a very early stage. I emphasise that this should also apply to publishers with regard to organising a book exhibition for example, since they can be inundated it seems with requests to attend competing events. Allow adequate time for responses from prospective speakers also within your overall time-scale and be prepared for sudden changes (and sometimes insurmountable problems) which can affect their attendance.

I should, however, mention that I received huge support from members of the FEL committee during the preparation for last year's conference including those who volunteered to assess the abstracts which had been submitted. I also pay tribute to individuals who gave me invaluable assistance, especially Nicholas Ostler with whom I was in constant contact and who gave me the benefit of his huge experience of years of planning. Christopher Moseley was also very instrumental in ensuring that the complications of registration and accommodation were dealt with smoothly and efficiently as well as David Nathan who provided essential information to participants on the website. I also thank them for their patience in dealing with the inevitable constant changes.

This is where I apologise to others for not having mentioned them individually, but I am sure that they will forgive me. My grateful thanks to you all anyway.

I send Marleen Haboud my best wishes with the preparations for the annual conference in Quito, Ecuador in 2011 and offer the assistance of my limited experience if needed. [7-11 September 2011 – details to be announced soon – Ed.]

May I finally thank all those who contributed to the conference's success, albeit by means of the smallest contribution, and especially those who made the effort to attend. I was glad of the opportunity to see old friends as well as to establish new friendships and professional relationships.

I look forward to seeing you all in Quito.

Hywel Glyn Lewis

3. Endangered Languages in the News

Niue and Cook Island Māori Languages Threatened

From the web-site www.voxy.co.nz

Niue and Cook Island Māori languages will disappear from New Zealand within a generation unless urgent action is taken say researchers from The University of Auckland.

The research by Faculty of Education Senior Lecturer John McCaffery and Postgraduate research student Judy Taligalu McFall-McCaffery was released today.

"Our research indicates that Pacific Island languages in New Zealand show significant signs of language shift and loss, with several languages, especially Cook Island Māori and Niue lan-

guage unlikely to survive unless we do something now," says Mr McCaffery.

"There are no plans at present for Niue or Cook Island bilingual education so prospects for the survival of these indigenous languages within the realm of New Zealand seem very unlikely."

The research paper, *O tatou ō aga'i i fea? 'Oku tau ō ki fe? Where are we heading?: Pacific languages in Aotearoa/New Zealand*, examines the current state of Samoan, Tongan, Niue and the dialects of Cook Island Māori - the four largest Pacific Island languages in New Zealand.

The research draws together statistics, research, public data and community information from New Zealand and the Pacific Islands. This includes information collected during visits to the four Pacific Island nations, 2006 Census data and The Pasifika Languages of Manukau Project - a major sociolinguistic study which examined Samoan, Tongan, Niue and Cook Island dialects in Auckland between 2000 and 2008.

Mr McCaffery says fewer than five percent of the New Zealand-born population can speak Cook Island Māori and less than 11 percent of the Niue population can speak the Niue language. "These figures are lower than New Zealand Māori was before the start of Kohanga Reo and Kura Kaupapa Māori immersion schools," he says.

Mrs McFall-McCaffery says that even in Samoan and Tongan communities only about 44 percent of the New Zealand-born population can speak their own language and this is predicted to drop rapidly in the next generation. "This implies that fewer than 25 percent will be able to speak their own languages in the next generation as international research by Joshua Fishman and historical trends of decline of Pacific languages in New Zealand indicate around half of the New Zealand-born Samoan and Tongan parents are likely to raise their children in their first languages," she says.

"Data from other groups show that as the percentage of the New Zealand-born population increases, the migration of new speakers from the islands has less and less of an impact until, as in the case of the Cooks and Niue, there is virtually no new migration," says Mrs McFall-McCaffery.

Mr McCaffery says in the islands themselves the effects of decades of New Zealand's colonial administration have left the languages without status, value or perceived uses.

"This started in the early 1900s when New Zealand, Australian and UK educators working in the Pacific Islands would punish students for speaking their own languages at school."

"It was reinforced by the colonial rule that only English was allowed to be taught above year four - the result was this left many Pacific peoples feeling their languages were of little value in education and academic learning," he says.

"This lack of pride, self confidence and the belief that family languages are only for private use and English only must be used for education and public occasions, which emerged in the Pacific, was an attitude carried by migrants who came to New Zealand. It was supported by New Zealand's monolingual education policies and has subsequently become deeply entrenched in New Zealand society," he says.

Mr McCaffery says the only research-based strategy that is likely to provide for future survival of all Pacific Island languages is expanding the role of Pacific Island languages in education and into the public domain through bilingual and immersion education. "Unless this changes soon, the future looks very grim indeed for all Pacific languages," he says.

More comprehensive research looking at the future of the four Pacific Island languages is needed to back-up the study's findings - what the research paper does, however, is provide a platform for further research, says Mr McCaffery.

The research paper is published in the Pasifika Special Edition of *Alternative - an International Journal of Indigenous Scholarship* published by Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga based at The University of Auckland.

The Journal is being launched at a special function celebrating the outcomes of the 2009 Critiquing Pasifika Education conference at AUT University's Manukau Campus.

Tribute to Cochin Portuguese Creole

From The Hindu newspaper, Kochi, 26 September 2010

Like people, languages also die. With the death of William Rozario this August in Vypeen died Cochin Creole Portuguese. Rozario was the last fluent speaker of this language, which resulted from contact between Malayalam, Portuguese and probably a host of languages spoken by the various communities in ancient Cochin, which was a melting pot of so many cultures, so many languages. Rozario's death brought to an end a language, a rich culture.

Minority languages are going extinct at an alarming rate. Linguists believe that an indigenous language disappears every two weeks. Therefore language endangerment is of serious concern, says Dr. Hugo Canelas Cardoso, a post-doctoral research fellow at the Research Centre for Luso-Asian Studies, Department of Portuguese of the University of Macau. He was recently involved in the documentation and description of the Indo-Portuguese Creole of Diu as part of his PhD in General Linguistics from the University of Amsterdam. During one of his many visits to Diu, Cardoso came to Kochi where he contacted Rozario. It was the beginning of a friendship that extended beyond language.

Cardoso remembers his kind friend Rozario, mourns his death and that of the language. With composed factuality he realises that the language, which was the mother tongue many families for five centuries is gone forever. In an e-mail interview Cardoso shares his thoughts on Rozario, the languages, and the impact of their death. Excerpts:

On William Rozario

William Rozario grew up at an estate in Wayanad but his family was partly from Cochin and partly from Cannanore, and therefore his mother tongue was the Creole. He told me that, in his childhood, this was the only language spoken in his house and within his extended family. In 2007, while I was in

Diu, I made a short side-trip to Kerala. At the time, several members of the Indo-Portuguese community in Fort Cochin directed me to Rozario as being the last fluent speaker of the Creole in the whole of Cochin, so I visited him in his Vypeen home. He was an extremely generous and affable man, and seemed delighted to be able to speak his mother tongue again, because the second last speaker, his friend Mr. Paynter, had passed away a few years earlier. Rozario and his family always welcomed me so warmly to their home, I was touched. The last time I visited them was in January this year, and Rozario agreed to spend some time teaching me his language.

Why the language was not passed on to his family

In the specific case of Rozario's family, it may have had to do with the fact that his wife does not speak it, but I guess at that time, the use of the language in general was already in decline. The process of abandonment of the language, on a community level, must have started long ago. Languages are central to the identity of every community, but they will only survive long-term if there are domains of daily life in which they can be used, such as, for instance, education, work or religion. I believe the use of Cochin Creole among the Catholic community was gradually encroached on by other languages, and that broke the transmission of language from the parents to children.

On Creole Portuguese

When the Portuguese language arrived in Asia in the late 15th century, it came into contact with the local languages, and that gave rise to a string of new languages which once dotted the coasts of India, Sri Lanka and beyond. Such languages, born from intense contact between two or more languages, are what linguists call creoles. In Cochin, the equation involved Malayalam, Portuguese and probably a host of languages spoken by various communities there. Since this was the first place where the Portuguese established a stable presence in South Asia, it is usually accepted that Cochin Creole may have been the earliest of all Indo-Portuguese Creoles to be formed, and, if so, probably determined to some extent the development of the other varieties. This language developed hand-in-hand with the formation of Catholic and Indo-Portuguese households, and it was so vital by the time the Dutch took over that it managed to thrive under the new rulers.

In very broad terms, many of the words in the Creole of Cochin are of Portuguese origin but the grammar is very different, and a number of these differences reflect the influence of Malayalam. For instance, where Portuguese (like English) has prepositions, Cochin Creole has postpositions, which appear after the noun. And there is also a strong tendency to place the verb at the end of the clause, which is contrary to the grammar of Portuguese but not to that of Malayalam. The verb system works very differently and there are also striking differences in the shape of the words and even the sounds of the two languages. Even though the Creole is known locally simply as 'Portuguese' or 'Cochin Portuguese', it is in fact a new autonomous language which owes as much

to Portuguese as it does to the languages of India. This was the language of a good part of the Cochin population for five centuries, and a monument to a crucial period of the city's history

Has death of languages become common?

Languages have appeared and disappeared throughout history, these are natural processes; but there is something in the modern world which is making languages die at an unprecedented rate. As for India, since it is home to such immense linguistic diversity, it has also witnessed a number of these cases. Earlier this year, for example, the death of a woman in her eighties in the Andaman Islands marked the end of the Bo language.

Have we become insensitive to history, to the invaluable heritage?

I wouldn't say we have become completely insensitive; in fact, if you walk around Cochin, you will come across many exemplary cases of heritage preservation. But I do feel that we don't pay the same amount of attention to all types of heritage. Language and other kinds of intangible cultural heritage are too often neglected in comparison with, for example, built-up heritage. The other real danger, of course, is that we preserve selectively based on political or ideological convictions. And there, I would argue, anything perceived to have a colonial ring to it may be at a disadvantage in modern-day India. The country has definitely awakened to the problem of language extinction, as shown by some government initiatives to document indigenous languages. And that is very positive. But it would be important for the public and the authorities to realise that the Indo-Portuguese Creoles – still spoken in places like Diu, Daman, Korlai or Cannanore – are not foreign languages. On the contrary, they are, by any definition, languages of India, and exclusive to India.

See also the Obituaries section (10) in this issue.

Stunned Native American Linguist gets "genius grant"

From aol news web-site, 28 September 2010

The man on the phone asked if she was sitting down. When she couldn't stop sobbing, he told her to write down what he was saying.

Jessie Little Doe Baird, a Native American linguist, was the recipient of a "genius grant" from The MacArthur Foundation. And she would receive \$500,000.

"He might have said it a couple of times," Baird told AOL News today. "I was crying through most of it all. I'm glad he told me to get a pencil."

Baird, 46, is one of 23 grant winners announced today by the nonprofit foundation. For the past 17 years, outside the media spotlight shining on her today, she has resurrected the long-

silent language of her Wampanoag tribe, once spoken by tens of thousands in southeastern New England.

"It's just such an honor for my nation, for my tribe. It's just such an honor for all of us," Baird said from her home in Mashpee, Mass., where her phone rang nonstop today. "It's pretty crazy around here," said the still-stunned linguist and teacher.

She is the program director of the Wôpanâak Language Reclamation Project, which has produced a 10,000-plus-word dictionary of the lapsed language spoken by her Algonquin ancestors until the mid-1800s, when it was overrun by English speakers. As far as she knows, her 6-year-old daughter is the only child since then raised from birth to speak Wampanoag (or Wôpanâak, as it is written in that language).

"Through painstaking research, dedicated teaching and contributions to other groups struggling with language preservation, Baird is reclaiming the rich linguistic traditions of indigenous peoples and preserving precious links to our nation's complex past," The MacArthur Foundation noted in announcing her grant.

Baird was sworn to secrecy after being notified by an out-of-the-blue phone call two weeks ago. "You can tell one person. I told my husband," she said. He didn't seem that surprised.

"He said, 'I've been telling you for years you're a genius,'" Baird recalled today. Then she told him how much money came with the award. "I thought he was going to die," she said, laughing. Her program will use the funds to buy long-needed audio equipment, hire artists and complete other work put off for lack of money, she said. Baird plans to treat herself with a home improvement project.

"Now I can put insulation in my ceiling and have a warm house this winter," she said.

To revive the spoken version of her native language, Baird studied linguistics and language pedagogy at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where she worked with the late Kenneth Hale, a scholar of indigenous languages. Together, they deciphered grammatical patterns and compiled vocabulary lists from archived Wampanoag documents.

She used similar Algonquin languages for help in pronunciation. Wampanoag is the first Native American language to develop an alphabetic writing system, according to her program's [website](#).

"We didn't have any speakers of our language for 150 years," Baird said today. "I believe it's people's birthright to have their language. My tribe's been on the same land for 10,000 years."

In search for 'last speakers', a great discovery

From the web-site of National Public Radio, USA, 5 October 2010

In 2008, K. David Harrison traveled to Arunachal Pradesh, India, a northeast region so remote even Indians need permits to travel there — and he made an incredible discovery.

The Swarthmore College linguist and his colleague Greg Anderson were searching for speakers of two little-known languages — Aka and Miji. And as they went door to door, they were surprised to find speakers of a third, hidden language: Koro.

"It hadn't previously been noticed in the Indian census or in any study of the languages of India," Harrison tells NPR's Mary Louise Kelly. "It wasn't listed in any listing of the world's languages. It had basically been completely unnoticed by outsiders and by scientists."

A few hundred people speak Koro, Harrison says, and those who speak it didn't notice how distinct it was.

"They tended to think of it as merely a dialect of another local language," Harrison says. "But when we sat down to make recordings, we realized that they sounded as different from each other as English and Japanese."

So Harrison took the first known set of recordings of the language. He documents these and other dying languages — and his attempts to revitalize them — in his new book, *The Last Speakers*.

There are more than 7,000 languages in the world, and nearly half of them are in danger — likely to die out within our lifetime. In fact, one disappears about every two weeks. When languages die, they take with them a vast amount of human knowledge, Harrison says, from how to make medicines out of plants, how to survive in harsh environments, and creation myths and personal histories. The languages aren't written down — they're transmitted orally.

"So it's very fragile, and [the knowledge base] is being forgotten as these languages fade away," he says.

In researching the book, Harrison says he realized how important it was to help some of the communities revitalize their languages.

"People really do value their languages," he says. "And ... the decision to give up one language or to abandon a language is not usually a free decision. It's often coerced by politics, by market forces, by the educational system in a country, by a larger, more dominant group telling them that their language is backwards and obsolete and worthless."

The key players in language revitalization are the 5- and 6-year-olds in the communities, Harrison says.

"They're like little barometers of social prestige, and they understand that if two languages are spoken in their environment, and one of them is more highly valued, they will gravitate toward that more highly valued language," he says. "So the key to saving a language is to create prestige of the language in the eyes of the very youngest speakers. The way you do that is to put it in a high-tech medium — we create, for example, talking dictionaries. People can do creative things like producing hip-hop or poetry in the language."

Koro is closely intermixed by marriage and household with Aka, which has 1,200 speakers. Both are positively widespread compared with Chulyim — a Siberian language that only eight people still speak. Chulyim is not a candidate for revitalization because so few people speak it that "it's not likely new speakers will emerge."

Sometimes a hidden language, like Koro, survives on its own. But Harrison doesn't know its secret to survival.

"Koro is really an enigma," he says. "There's no obvious reason why a language spoken by just a few hundred people and completely culturally assimilated to a larger, more dominant group should persist at all."

The rate of language extinction, however, is greatly outpacing the rate of new languages, Harrison says. "I would say this is going to be one of the most consequential social trends of the next couple of decades — is people keeping and preserving and revitalizing some of the world's smallest languages."

The following is the statement prepared by the UNESCO Atlas editorial team responsible for the South Asian region :

It has come to our attention that the National Geographic Enduring Voices Project led by Drs. Gregory Anderson and David Harrison announced the 'discovery' of Koro, a new language within the larger Aka group. The editorial team of the UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger is delighted that the report on Koro received good global news coverage, and we think it a good thing that more attention is given to endangered language and language discoveries .

Even though Koro had been known to linguists for some time, few people were aware of the exact distinctness and relatedness between it and Aka.

Until now, Koro was classified it as a variety of Aka. Aka (Hrusish) is a group of Tibeto-Burman languages (including Aka proper, Miji and Bongro) spoken in West and East Kameng districts of the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh.

According to the Ethnologue database by SIL International, a 2005 survey already identified a group of Aka in East Kameng District called 'Koro Aka', which was distinct from 'Hruso Aka' in West Kameng. The Enduring Voices Project now asserts that Koro is best considered a language and not a dialect of Aka proper. Once more data on Koro become publicly available, the correct identification of its phylogenetic position within the Tibeto-Burman language family will be possible.

On the basis of the information that has become recently available, the editorial team has decided to update the Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger by including what has become known as Koro. Koro is an unwritten language that is spoken by about 800 to 1000 people, most of them older than 20 years. The Enduring Voices Project has also revealed that the speakers of Koro are culturally submerged within the dominant Aka ethnic group. Only language differentiates the Koro as a separate but similar group within the Aka community.

Wannabe rock star keeping Okinawan language alive

By Philippa Fogarty, BBC news Asia-Pacific web-site, 9 October 2010

Byron Fija found his direction in life after an identity crisis. His father was thought to be a US soldier, but he was never told anything about him. His mother, who was Okinawan, left him to his aunt and uncle to raise. Growing up in Okinawa, his first language was Japanese. Then at the age of 22 he went to the US, where he wanted to make it as a rock star.

"I was denying my background and I hated Japan, so I tried being American."

But that did not work out either and so, dejected, he went back to Okinawa, where one evening, aged 24, he went to an old-style inn. There he heard old Okinawan folk songs, in Okinawan language. "It was like a lightning bolt," he said. "From then I changed completely. It was like - I am Okinawan!"

Until then he had always thought that being Okinawan was bad. "For the last 10 years there has been an Okinawa boom - an 'Okinawa is great' kind of feeling - but back then it was different." In the inn he heard the *sanshin*, a lute-like instrument. "I knew this kind of music existed but still actually hearing it stopped me cold."

Now Byron Fija, 40, plays the *sanshin* and speaks Okinawan language. He works to prevent it becoming extinct. In the days of the Ryukyu kingdom, which ended in the 19th Century, Okinawans spoke multiple languages.

Unesco, in its 2009 Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger, has identified six specific languages across the archipelago. But

once the kingdom became part of Japan, the languages were marginalised. They were not taught in schools and children were not allowed to speak them there. In the pre-war years, says Dr Richard Siddle, co-editor of *Japan and Okinawa: Structure and Subjectivity*, there was also a drive among some Okinawans to adopt Japanese.

"During that period Okinawans were looked at with suspicion, as not being fully Japanese," he said.

Using local languages was "seen as one of the markers of inferior status and of foreignness. So there was a strong movement by the Okinawan elite to speak Japanese."

Despite this, by 1945 there were still many people speaking local languages. But another push to become more Japanese occurred during the 1950s and 1960s, as a reaction to post-war US control. Parents stopped using Okinawan languages with their children, thinking that if they focused on learning Japanese, it would help them get jobs. Since then, says Dr Siddle, the languages have faced the same challenges as many other endangered languages - globalisation and the spread of mass communications, plus the depopulation of rural communities where they used to thrive.

Now Okinawan languages are spoken only among the very elderly.

"People in their sixties can't speak them. It's sad. Some people over the age of 70 do, but for the rest, it is Japanese," Byron Fija says.

They are still not taught and almost no effort is being made to preserve them, he says. After his inn revelation, he learned the language that used to be used in southern parts of Okinawa island from pensioners. His main teacher was a famous stage actor, Makishi Kochu, a native speaker who is now in his 90s. He visited him every week to learn. Now Byron Fija is well-known in Okinawa. For five years, he has had a radio show which he conducts entirely in local language. Residents - almost all elderly - call in to request songs and to chat. He appears on TV shows and is also being paid by the Naha city government to teach local residents.

On Monday evening, a group of about 20 gather at a local hall. The youngest is a teenager, the oldest in her sixties. They introduce themselves in Okinawan. Some make impressive-sounding speeches while other stumble over the words.

The language sounds very different from Japanese, although occasional words are identifiable. The students have also been practising folk songs for a show, accompanied by Byron Fija on his *sanshin*.

One class member is Yoko Ikehara. She says she is here because although she lives in Okinawa, she does not know any of the language and she thinks it is sad.

"We need to put more effort into the language and get more people involved," she says. Children should be taught using fairytales, she says, but that is not happening now.

Byron Fija is not particularly optimistic about the future. He wants to go to the UK to Wales, to learn how the linguistic revival there came about and to see if it could be replicated in Okinawa. But he doubts anyone would fund such a visit. There is no push from the government which, he says, prefers to describe the languages as dialects of Japanese. Nor is a re-emergence of Okinawan languages in Tokyo's interests.

"There are US bases here and so if people start looking at Okinawa's independent culture, it could affect Japan-US ties," Byron Fija says.

"If things continue this way, then Okinawan languages will die out. There is no compulsory language education - so in 10 years no one may speak Okinawan."

Time takes its toll on old Swiss language

By Julia Slater, from swissinfo.ch web-site, 20 October 2010

French is today Switzerland's second language, but until about 200 years ago people in Western Switzerland spoke something quite different.

They used dialects of the language group now known as Franco-Provençal, which today have all but disappeared. Scholars are working against the clock to gather information about them, while enthusiasts are doing their best to keep the flame alive.

Traditionally there has been something of the idea that these dialects, commonly referred to as patois, are "bad French" – a notion which Andres Kristol, director of the dialectology centre at Neuchâtel University, describes as "evidently absurd".

"Our old language is as interesting and as well formed as Romansh in Graubünden, for example," he told swissinfo.ch - adding that it is also as different from French as Romansh is.

Although, like modern French, Franco-Provençal derives ultimately from Latin, it belongs to a different sub-family. The only French-related dialect spoken in Switzerland is that of canton Jura (see box).

The first attempts to ban dialect speaking were made in Jura – at that time part of the bishopric of Basel - in the second half of the 18th century, and other cantons forbade its use in schools during the course of the 19th century. But the rate at which it declined varied considerably.

"People became ashamed of speaking patois. It was a kind of sub-language," Jean-François Gottraux, who helps edit the Patois Vaudois website, told swissinfo.ch. In his canton, the language has died out almost completely.

Placide Meyer, who lives in the Gruyère region of canton Fribourg, a dialect stronghold, downplays the ban.

"Sixty years ago, when I was at school, everyone, without exception, spoke patois," he said. "People didn't have complexes about it."

It is no coincidence that the Roman Catholic cantons - Fribourg and Valais – kept their patois for an extra two generations, he says. They remained agricultural for much longer, with people isolated in the mountains from outside influences.

Industrialisation in the Protestant cantons – Vaud, Neuchâtel and Geneva – brought in outsiders.

Kristol explained just how the massive influx of Swiss German speakers from about 1815 boosted the French takeover.

"The idea was that to assimilate them better, it was desirable to switch to French. And it seems that these Swiss Germans wanted to learn French, because at the time French was an international language."

Another economic factor was at play too, as many young people started going abroad as tutors of French.

"Good knowledge of French became an export item," he said.

But it was only when the dialects appeared to be in real danger from the end of the 19th century that enthusiasts started to write grammars and note dialect words, and write down songs and stories.

Now the vast majority of native dialect speakers – those who learned it as children from their parents – are aged at least 60.

The only exception is the village of Evolène in canton Valais, where it is the mother tongue of much of the population – although even there people will switch to French out of politeness if a non-dialect speaker wants to join in.

Elsewhere, the remaining dialect speakers, and some younger enthusiasts, are keeping patois alive. Meyer presents a weekly dialect programme on Fribourg's local radio station – usually speakers, aged 60 and over, talking about their memories – and teaches an evening course.

Although few people still speak dialect, many understand it, he says, so his programme has a body of potential listeners.

Anne-Marie Yerly is helping to compile a dictionary of the Gruyère dialect and writes a weekly column in it in the local paper.

She has run into an unexpected difficulty in collecting words. "All the people who started writing in patois in the 1920s were old priests, old men, old peasants. They described rural life, agricultural and craft tools. There's plenty of stuff in those areas. But when it comes to the family and women, there's hardly anything."

And in her weekly column she has to find a way of talking about things that didn't exist in her parents' day. She tries to turn phrases so as to avoid adapting French words. Rather than talking about emails, she will use *mèchôdzo* – a message; the dialect equivalent of "I called you" is a way of avoiding a neologism like "phoned".

Gottraux in canton Vaud sees the same trend. Instead of adapting the French "voiture", some people talk of a "petrol cart" – "tsè à petrole" – he told swissinfo.ch.

But although he has seen an upsurge in curiosity, and says people are proud of knowing a few words, for most this is where it stops.

"People have a lot of other things to do, and learning patois takes a lot of time."

Gottraux is unusual in that he learned his dialect as an adult out of interest – but at least there was still a dialect for him to learn.

Joël Rilliot is more unusual still: the last dialect speaker in his canton of Neuchâtel died in 1920. But, in a search for his roots, he decided to try to resurrect it. His family has always known he is "a bit crazy", he admitted.

"I speak only patois to my children. Never French."

Learning patois has opened his eyes to the history of ordinary people in the canton and helped him understand his cultural heritage, he told swissinfo.ch.

As academic linguists working on dialects, Kristol and his team can only use the information of people who learned the language naturally as children.

"Amateurs who are trying to revive the language have little to teach us, unfortunately."

"It's very praiseworthy that people should try to preserve their heritage – through plays and songs, for example – but when I speak to them, I find all these people have stopped speaking the language to their own children."

"So it's no longer being transmitted. And that is the end of a language's life."

China reasserts language policy as Tibetan protest spreads

TibetanReview.net, 24 October, 2010

The Tibetan protest against the compulsory switch to Chinese medium teaching in schools in Qinghai Province was more widespread and began earlier than has been reported in the outside world recently, according to China's official Xinhua news agency Oct 22. The report cited the provincial government as confirming that middle school students in the Tibetan autonomous prefectures of Huangnan (Tibetan: Malho), Hainan (Tibetan: Tsolho), Haibei (Tibetan: Tsojang) and Guoluo (Tibetan: Golog) prefectures had "expressed their dissatisfaction" from Sunday to Wednesday (Oct 17 to 20).

And the Tibetan protest against compulsory Chinese medium teaching in schools that was first reported in the outside world as having begun on Oct 19 in Rebkong (Chinese: Tongren) County of Malho spread to Tsolho and numerous other places over the following days, provincial authorities have sought to reassure the teachers and students in an open letter Oct 22 that education in their ethnic language won't be neglected. Significantly, however, the letter justified the move to newly introduce the putonghua (mandarin) Chinese medium teaching, the cause of the protest.

However, the Xinhua report cited Wang Yubo, director of the provincial department of education, as saying that in places where conditions are not ripe, the authorities won't forcefully push the reforms. The education authorities will follow teaching rules and listen and respect viewpoints and advices from students and their parents before carrying out the reforms, he was cited as saying.

It was not clear, however, whether this assurance amounted to anything and whether it would be enough to satisfy the students when the province's mid- and long-term plan (2010-2020) for reform and development of education, released in September 2010, clearly mandates putonghua as the teaching language. Wang's claim that the new policy calls for bilingual education is therefore inconsistent with this new policy mandate.

Meanwhile, the Los Angeles Times online Oct 22 reported that between 200 and 300 students at the Central University for Minorities in Beijing staged a rare public protest that day against the new education policy in Qinghai. "Chinese law says that ethnic minorities have the right to study their mother tongue first in school – that's why the students are angry," Xiong Kunxin, a professor at the university was quoted as saying.

The report said the protest lasted about two-hour around mid-day, after which the president of the university and teachers called them into classrooms and asked them to write out their complaints in Chinese.

The report said that On Sept 30, People's Daily, the Communist Party's mouthpiece, ran an article quoting Qiang Wei, the party secretary of Qinghai Province, as saying in a speech at a Sep-

tember 13 education conference that mandating Chinese language instruction was crucial.

“Officials at all levels must overcome all your worries, overcome the wrong idea that to adopt common language education for minority students will hurt minority people’s feelings or affect the development of minority culture or affect social stability,” he was quoted as saying. The article was reported to have provided tinder for the protests.

Protests were reported to have broken out at numerous other places as well, both in and outside Qinghai. The New York Times online on October 22 cited posts on the Internet as saying 400 Tibetan students held a rally on October 22 on the campus of Minzu University of China in Beijing which train students from ethnic minority regions who might then return home and work for the government. It was reported to have more than 600 Tibetan students. The report said photographs showed a large group of students gathered on a concrete walkway lined with shrubs.

Other photos were reported to showed uniformed guards milling around some students.

In China, even giving greater prominence to Mandarin in areas where that is not the language spoken by the majority of the people have led to protests. In July, people in the city of Guangzhou, where Cantonese is the traditional language of the majority, assailed a local politician’s proposal to force prominent programmes on a local television network to stop broadcasting in Cantonese and switch to Mandarin ahead of the holding of the Asian Games there in November 2010.

Other places in Qinghai where protests were reported to have taken place included Chabcha (Chinese: Gonghe) on October 20, where about 2,000 students from four schools demonstrated, shouting “We want freedom for Tibetan language”, reported the Guardian online October 22, citing the Free Tibet group. The New York Times online report said that on October 21, students in the town of Tawo (Chinese: Dawu), also protested, with the police preventing people from going out into the streets.

Tsigorthang (Chinese: Xinghai), Mangra (Chinese: Guinan), Trika (Chinese: Guide), and Xining being some of the places mentioned in various reports.

Although no security clampdowns have been reported so far, Radio Free Asia online (Washington) reported October 21 that large numbers of security personnel had been dispatched to Tibetan areas following the large-scale student protests.

China Teachers Sign Petition in Support of Tibetan Language Creole

By Edward Wong Published: October 25, 2010

Hundreds of Tibetan schoolteachers signed a petition recently that was sent to the government of Qinghai Province in western China, demanding that schools preserve the use of Tibetan

as a main language of instruction. Parts of the petition, which was dated Oct. 15, were put up on a Tibetan blog, www.khabdha.com, and show that the protests over language policy led by thousands of Tibetan students last week in Qinghai had widespread teacher support. The petition demands that officials follow the Chinese Constitution, including Article Four: “All ethnic groups have the freedom to use and develop their own spoken and written languages and to preserve or reform their own folkways and customs.”

4. Appeals, News and Views from Endangered Communities

European Parliamentarians protest against closure of Mari schools in Russia

From the Indigenous Peoples, Issues and Resources web-site (www.indigenousspeoplesissues.com) 31 July, 2010

Dear Recipient,

We would like to express our deepest concern regarding to closing the only school in the Perm region where Mari language has been taught. Closing the Vasinsko primary school will deny the Perm Maris their linguistic rights which can impede preserving Maris’ indigenous language and culture.

We would like to kindly remind You that the International Human Rights Law sets standards for linguistic rights and for the protection of the identity of linguistic minority groups such as Maris. We appeal to You to preserve the Vasinsko primary school and do everything in Your power to protect Maris’ language and culture.

Best regards,

Heidi Hautala

Member of the European Parliament

Chair of the of the Subcommittee on Human Rights at the European Parliament

heidi.hautala@europarl.europa.eu

Hawai’i: Fix Immersion school testing

Editorial comment from the Star-Advertiser, Honolulu, Hawaii, 30 July, 2010

Like many educators before them, teachers of native languages have voiced their frustration with a law that, while well intentioned, seems too inflexible to work across the full spectrum of the nation's schools.

That law, No Child Left Behind, imposes requirements that, they argue, are at cross purposes with the mission of teaching languages through immersion. No school system has an indigenous language immersion program as extensive as Hawaii's, so it was not surprising that Hawaiian leaders were front and center at a recent Washington, D.C., summit, petitioning federal officials for an exemption.

What they and teachers of Cherokee and Ojibwe want is freedom from the No Child requirements that children be tested in English and that teachers be "highly qualified."

On the first point there is some sound reasoning behind the request. Students learning to speak Hawaiian do so by being fully immersed (hence, immersion) in Hawaiian as the language of instruction. This is why language arts instruction in English isn't introduced until the fifth grade.

So it's understandable why Hawaiian-immersion teachers say it's unfair for these students to be tested in English immediately after beginning their study. Those test results don't reflect the students' mastery of the subject matter—including math, reading comprehension and science—because their inexperience with English expression muddies the results. And these bilingual students, as they get older, have proven capable of keeping up with their peers in regular schools.

The younger grades in Hawaiian immersion programs already test in Hawaiian, because the state Department of Education got federal clearance to cover them with an exemption intended for students speaking English as a second language. Other native immersion programs have no such approval.

No Child needs more flexibility on multiple fronts, and its overhaul is overdue. But whenever the revisions finally do begin, one of the sensible changes would be to provide a testing exemption for students in all native-language immersion programs, introducing English-language testing at a later stage.

BUT THIS relaxation of the rules should only go so far. At some point students do need to develop competence with English-language examinations, a skill all will need as they move on to higher education or the workplace.

Further, providing teachers with the same "highly qualified" credentials may be difficult, but that's no excuse for lowering the bar at these schools. Native programs need to step up training of educators so that standards of teaching are on par with those at other American schools. No child should be left behind.

Helping to perpetuate native languages in this country is a worthy goal: The story of Hawaii, in which a nearly extin-

guished language has been rescued from the brink, shows how effectively immersion education fuels this success. But it shouldn't be forgotten that the fundamental purpose of schools is not to preserve a language—it's to educate children.

The primary mission of No Child, however it's reformed, is to hold students and teachers to standards that will equip them for the real 21st century world.

Such an achievement is the bottom line, and policymakers need to keep their eyes fixed on it

No more Pacific language reading materials

From the New Zealand Scoop web-site (Pacific.scoop.co.nz)

Press Release – Pasifika library and information recruitment

New Zealand Ministry of Education Ceases Production of the TUPU Series Pacific Island Reading Materials From December 2010.

The NZ Ministry of Education announced today the 4th September that it has been instructed by Government to cease producing the TUPU Pasifika languages series from the end of this year. The Ministry is calling it a pause, but documents make it clear it ceasing production indefinitely- (double talk?). There will be no more for the indefinite future or until a change of Government as according to the Minister of Education and the Ministry of Education literacy in a Pacific language does not contribute to the academic advancement of Pacific students in our schools. Monty Python has redefined literacy like characters, as only literacy in English. (See the USA English Only movement; Crawford 2007, 2008, 2009; May 2009)

The TUPU series are Pacific language readers for beginners in a range of Pacific languages includes; Cook Is Maori, Niuean and Tokelau. According to the recent Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People NZ recently signed and the proposed Human Rights Commission National Languages Policy, these languages are minority protected Indigenous languages of the NZ Realm and NZ is obliged to protect and support them. This includes their use in the Cooks Niue and Tokelau themselves which are all part of the legal Realm of NZ governed by the Queen of NZ (See NZ Governor General's website).

This appears to be little more than institutional racism and a Pacific Human Rights violation of major proportions. We guess it will take a complaint to the HRC and a court case to get NZ to live up to its legal obligations in this regard- Does this sound familiar to our Maori colleagues!!!

The TUPU series is vital importance to the NZ curriculum for at least the following reasons-

1) Pacific reading materials are vital to the Learning Languages Curriculum learning and teaching of Pacific language for all NZ children in the Learning Languages Curriculum. Without literacy materials it is very unlikely students can become successful fluent learners of these languages as they provide the major source of vocabulary input (Nation, 2000) especially

those threatened languages when use in the families and communities has dropped so low that vocabulary input is now very limited from community sources. -Or is it just that Learning languages is mainly about foreign languages like French, German, Japanese, and Chinese?

2) Pacific reading materials and literacy and bilingualism in Pacific languages is identified in the Ministry of Education's own website LEAP on tki as a major contributor to academic success of Pasifika students in NZ schools for which they paid Prof Stephen May, and Dr Margaret Franken over \$350,000 to research. In addition they have just paid us \$60,000 for a just completed review research on Maori and Pasifika bilingual/immersion education and a separate \$60,000 from the Manurewa Education Initiative to produce a standardized Samoan Reading Test. Last month they let a \$60,000 contract to review ECE similarly. This is in addition to the huge research base on the benefits for literacy in English (Baker, 2006; Garcia, 2009; Thomas & Collier, 1997, 2002) of being literate in your own languages as well as in English. This research is presented in ALL the current MoE documents including Effective Literacy Practice and the ELL assessment documents we have all been encouraged to use in the National Standards briefings recently. The apparent unawareness of Ministry Officials of their own research and policy astounds us, and makes NZ look like something out of Monty Python and Faulty Towers. No wonder the Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs is currently investigating establishing its own Bilingual Education schools (see 2010 MPIA Statement of Intent). 3) The TUPU series is also essential to the 33 Pasifika Medium Bilingual Education programmes that run in NZ schools. Without a series of readers in Pacific students cannot become bilingual and bi-literate and the many benefits for academic achievement acknowledged in the Ministry of Education's Best Evidence, Best Practice report by May Hill & Tiakiwai (2004). In addition the materials are shared with Pacific countries who use these materials for their literacy programmes in the Islands or special publication series as in the recent case of Samoa are produced under contract for Samoa. For research on the academic success of students in these programmes see May, Hill & Tiakiwai, 2004, May 2005, McCaffery, Tuafuti et al (2003); Aukuso, 2005, Esera, 2002; Toloa: McCaffery, Dale & Keegan, 2010; Tuafuti & McCaffery, 2005)

4) The cut yet again sends a message to Pacific communities that their aspirations for our children are of little interest or concern to the politicians or those Ministry educators charged with ensuring the future well being of the 20% of our 2030 NZ population that will be of Pacific ancestry. Claims of valid genuine consultation with the Pacific community look only like attempts to shift the blame for the cuts from the Ministry of Education to the Pacific community itself. We will watch with interest what the Pacific community, the HRC and the courts have to say about such deceit.

We call on all language and literacy educators to express you and your organisation's concerns to the Minister of Education, Anne Tolley; The Prime Minister Hob John Key; The Secretary of the Ministry of Education, Karen Sewell, Dr Pita Sharples and Maori party MPs, your local MPs, Labour Pacific MPs and Pacific Organisations and churches.

International conference on Linguistic Diversity announced

Press release from Network to Promote Linguistic Diversity, 26 October, 2010

The Network to Promote Linguistic Diversity (NPLD) is organising its first international conference in Brussels on 27 October 2010. After three years of existence, the NPLD wants to offer an opportunity for an open dialogue amongst policy-makers and language planners from all over Europe on the benefits and challenges of European cooperation and support for linguistic diversity as well as for Constitutional, Regional and Smaller-State (CRSS) languages.

The event will be a celebration of the work achieved by the Network as the main European cooperation platform fully dedicated to CRSS language communities. The objective will be to present the successful approach and structure adopted by the NPLD to achieve its objectives as well as to showcase the outcome of actions achieved within its fields of activities in the last three years: project developments in various thematic areas, exchanges of best practices and advocacy actions.

The event will be placed within an EU perspective. Future policy challenges and opportunities both for EU and local language planners will also be addressed by participants as well as the importance of European cooperation between linguistic communities.

The conference will be a unique opportunity for CRSS language communities to show how they can work in partnership with EU institutions through a win-win approach, contribute to the policy-making process and future EU priorities, and share their expertise with EU civil-servants in a wide range of areas related to language acquisition and multilingualism. The NPLD is also a major intermediary organization between EU institutions, Member States and local CRSS language communities. These three stakeholders can bring mutual benefits to each other and should produce more efforts to collaborate.

The NPLD is pleased to welcome keynote speakers and policy-makers at its event, representing the European Commission, the European Parliament, international networks and organisations or national and local public bodies working on the promotion of linguistic diversity.

Background information:

There are over 45 million lesser used regional or minority language speakers, and approximately 60 minority languages in Europe. The contribution of these languages to our societies is multifaceted and impacts on various social, cultural and economic dimensions of our lives.

In the last decades, various EU Member States, regions and communities have put into place successful language policies and support measures for these languages. Yet, most of them face an insecure future and many do not benefit from recognition, legal status or from adequate levels of funding.

The NPLD wants to invite EU Member States and the EU to further recognise and support linguistic diversity as stated in the Lisbon Treaty. Our languages need to benefit from the support of language planning bodies, supportive legislation and from financial support at regional, national and EU levels.

*Contact: Network to Promote Linguistic Diversity - Project Coordinator, 5-7 Market Chambers, Cardiff CF10 1AT
Tel: ++44 2920 878 041*

5. Allied Societies and Activities

Consortium of Training in Language Documentation and Conservation

The Consortium on Training in Language Documentation and Conservation (CTLDC) fosters networking and collaboration among people and organisations that support training in language documentation and promote the ongoing use of all of the world's languages.

The CTLDC was established in 2009 as an international response to the crisis confronting the world's languages. Its goals are to:

- construct a clearinghouse of materials accessible to LDC trainers and community members from across the globe,
- provide a forum for the sharing of curricula, teaching and assessment strategies, and methods,
- facilitate the explicit discussion of the goals and models currently being developed and implemented for training in language documentation and conservation (LDC),
- encourage partnerships between trainers of varied backgrounds and experiences,
- take into account a wide variety of perspectives and approaches by bringing together instructors from universities, communities, intensive institutes, school-based programs, language centers, and other initiatives,
- promote new collaborations, exchange ideas, and support training efforts worldwide,
- identify successful practices for LDC education,
- establish ethical and other principles to guide practitioners in documentation, conservation, and capacity development activities,

- develop strategies to increase the range of funding opportunities to support LDC training at all levels,
- publicize LDC activities and events to raise greater awareness about the importance of linguistic diversity.

The CTLDC is headed by its two convenors, who are supported by a Steering Committee and an international Planning Group.

Convenors

Margaret Florey, Resource Network for Linguistic Diversity

Carol Genetti, University of California at Santa Barbara

Steering Committee

Toshihide Nakayama, Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, Japan

Victoria Rau, Institute of Linguistics, National Chung Cheng University, Taiwan

Feng Wang, Peking University, People's Republic of China

Planning Group

A 46-member international Planning Group has been established to guide the development of the Consortium. The Planning Group comprises representatives of organizations which are at the forefront of supporting linguistic diversity through planning and administering training programs, creating funding strategies to support linguistic diversity, designing tools to provide more accurate data on trends in linguistic diversity, establishing resource networks, and developing and influencing language policy.

6. Letters to the Editor

7. Publications, Book Reviews

Tim Brookes: *Endangered Alphabets: an essay on writing*

Champlain College Publishing Institute, Champlain VT, USA, 2010

Any visitor to the 14th FEL conference in Carmarthen this year will have seen a series of varnished wooden plaques with strange carved inscriptions on them. These are the work of Tim Brookes, a resident of Vermont, who works at Champlain College. Tim makes no claim to be a linguist, but he is fascinated with scripts, and the more obscure the better.

The book, a handsomely produced paperback in landscape format, tells in his engagingly frank way of his initially amateurish attempts to learn to carve the characters of each language on offcuts of maplewood acquired from a local timber yard. What began more or less as a hobby quickly became an obsession. For him the pleasure of his craft is not so much linguistic as aesthetic. Passionately in his text he explains the difficulties he experienced in rendering the sinuous curves or severe angles of each script, wherever possible taking as a text the translation of the text of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights into the respective language.

Not all of the scripts he chooses are endangered – he has chosen some of them for the sheer aesthetic challenge of carving the Declaration in them on wood – for example, the Khmer script. Brookes truly revels in the experience. He also revels in the process of discovery, through the scripts, of cultures that were previously unknown to him – Samaritan, Hmong, Cherokee, Buginese and others.

In a world of linguistics where written language generally plays second fiddle to the spoken variety, it is refreshing to see a book like this, which regards the written word as primary. Beautifully produced, the book contains 16 colour illustrations of Brookes' handiwork on wood. So beautifully produced, in fact, and on such an important subject, that my only real criticism arises – the minutiae of his practical difficulties are sometimes set out in annoyingly trivial detail. But Brookes is an engaging storyteller, and his enthusiasm for his subject is never in any doubt.

Copies of 'Endangered Alphabets' are available from our Foundation at £14 sterling plus postage and packing; you can order them through the Editor, or the President of FEL at nicholas@ostler.net.

The Broken String: the story of a lost language. Film by Saskia Schaik

Reviewed by Nicholas Ostler

The title of this DVD (© VPRO 2010 www.nps.nl/hetuurvandewolf), which has already been shown on NPS television in the Netherlands, is familiar: it shares its main title with a book (subtitled 'The Last Words of an Extinct

People') by Neil Bennun, published in 2004 by Penguin. This is no coincidence. "The broken string" recalls the words of Dia!kwain, translated as follows:

"My father used to sing that the string had broken, the string he used to hear when !Nuin-!kuiten had called forth the Rainbull. That was why things were different now... For things continue to be unpleasant for me; I do not hear the ringing sound in the sky that I used to hear. I feel that the string has really broken, leaving me. So when I sleep I do not feel the thing which used to vibrate in me, as I lay asleep."

Both these works tell the story of how Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd between 1870 and 1876 recorded as much as they could of the language and literature of the !Xam people, Bushmen of what is now northern South Africa. It is a classic, but very early, story of language extinction under a spotlight: two concerned European linguists (a German and an Englishwoman) struggle to record a language and culture, building strong scholarly, but also human, links with some of the last speakers, but are unable to delay the heartless effects of the colonial incursion on the speakers' independent existence, and ultimately their lives. Van Schaik's film is complementary to Bennun's book. It is naturally strong on the stark beauty of the !Xam heartland, big, flat and apparently (to a European interloper's eye) empty, and the feelings of the English-speaking and Afrikaner scholars who try to reconstruct the !Xam past. But it gives little of the book's richness in exploring the actual detailed content of !Xam culture as Bleek and Lloyd were told about it, beyond revealing that animals had all started out as beings which had originally been human, but then found reasons to change.

It does, however, do justice to the timelessness of the !Xam vision. For example, the mythical story which explains how the pied crow got its white throat makes it discover that the hunters it awaits are not returning; but they have been killed not by some primeval enemy, but by Boers.

This is perhaps some compensation for extinction, if any there could be. Their world was eternal, or it was nothing. And thanks to Bleek and Lloyd, its memory lives on, even if our fast-changing times. But those who speak of it are gone.

Australian: New Yolngu dictionary helps speakers understand health issues

From the Sydney Morning Herald, 10 September, 2010

A dictionary in Yolngu will counter fear and ignorance, writes Lindsay Murdoch

When some Yolngu Aborigines living in north-east Arnhem Land were asked last year about their understanding of a heart attack, they replied that it was an alien disease where an agent or foreign body attacks someone's heart.

A stroke, they told researchers, was also a term unknown in their vocabulary: they thought it meant soothing a sick person.

For decades Western doctors and health workers have struggled to communicate with indigenous people from remote communities for whom English is their second, third or even fourth language.

Marilyn McLellan, a linguist, says their health is constantly at risk because they do not know what health workers are talking about.

One indigenous woman who thought she was having a minor operation on her foot awoke to find she had lost her toes.

"The doctors weren't just glibly doing something but it was a misunderstanding and she was devastated to find such a drastic thing had happened when she didn't know."

The first anatomical dictionary of its kind to translate between English and an Australian indigenous language has been published by the non-profit organisation Aboriginal Resource and Development Services.

Yurranydjil Dhurrkay, a translator, says the dictionary, which took six years to complete, will go a long way towards building better communication between health professionals and indigenous patients, health workers and interpreters.

"English is not our first language so most people don't always understand what is being said," Dhurrkay says. "For most people it brings fear to them and most people will try to understand it but not really fully understand everything."

The dictionary translates more than 200 terms into Yolngu Matha, the main language used by up to 10,000 Yolngu people. It explains words in simple language and carries messages about health.

Nursing mothers are told that "breast milk has the right ingredients for babies to grow well. Shop milk comes from cows and is not as good for small babies up to crawling stage."

An illustration of a liver sits beside a poignant message.

"The liver is important for taking away the poison of drugs and alcohol . . . some people drink too much alcohol. That damages their liver so it cannot do its important work."

McLellan says words like cell, DNA and bacteria are examples where there is no equivalent in the Yolngu language.

"Historically speaking, these things belonging to the microscopic world don't exist in the Yolngu people's body of health knowledge," she says.

"A less obvious example is the word muscle, which was actually very difficult to translate because Yolngu have a different concept what it is."

Alice Mitchell, a nurse who has worked with indigenous people in the Northern Territory for more than 20 years, says lack of information and understanding is one reason for the failure to stop preventable conditions, such as rheumatic heart disease.

The territory has one of the world's highest rates of the disease, which occurs after curable skin or throat infections.

Page 158 of the dictionary has illustrations showing heart valves, how they keep the blood flowing one way through the heart and the consequences of valves being dysfunctional.

"To learn how to prevent rheumatic heart disease one has to understand about causal bacteria, where bacteria live and reproduce, about how they do damage to the heart valves," Mitchell says. "This all involves lengthy discussions about the microscopic world."

Mitchell says lack of information is also an important factor in the territory's high rates of diabetes and kidney failure.

"What is diabetes? How does it affect your body? What do our kidneys do? How does the doctor know my kidneys are failing?" she asks. "I know that indigenous people, whose second language is English, simply do not have this information so they cannot make informed choices."

Mitchell, who spoke at the launch of the dictionary in Darwin this week, says that while it was designed to benefit Yolngu speakers, it can also be adapted for other indigenous groups.

About 60 per cent of Aboriginal people living in the Northern Territory speak a language other than English at home.

There are now plans for a legal dictionary to help indigenous people understand the territory's laws.

Pacific Linguistics: new publications

PACIFIC LINGUISTICS has announced the publication of the following books:

Endangered Austronesian, Papuan and Australian Aboriginal languages: essays on language documentation, archiving and revitalization

Gunter Senft, editor

The contributions to this book concern the documentation and revitalization of endangered languages and the archiving of documented language materials. The anthology focuses mainly on endangered Oceanic languages, with articles on Vanuatu by Darrell Tryon and the Marquesas by Gabriele Cablitz, on situations of loss and gain by Ingjerd Hoëm and on the Kilivila language of the Trobriands by the editor. Nick Thieberger, Peter Wittenburg and Paul Trilsbeek, and David Blundell and colleagues write about aspects of linguistic archiving. Under the rubric of revitalization, Margaret Florey and Michael Ewing write about Maluku, Jakelin Troy and Michael Walsh about Australian Aboriginal languages in southeastern Australia, whilst three articles, by Sophie Nock, Diane Johnson and Winifred Crombie concern the revitalization of Māori.

PL 617 2010 ISBN 9780858836235 227 pp.

Prices: Australia AUD \$66.00 (incl. GST), Overseas AUD \$60.00

A journey through Austronesian and Papuan linguistic and cultural space: papers in honour of Andrew K. Pawley

Edited by John Bowden, Nikolaus P. Himmelmann and Malcolm Ross

The papers in this volume have been presented to Andrew K. Pawley in honour of his extensive work on Austronesian and Papuan languages and cultures. They cover a wide range of topics, from language description to historical linguistics and from archaeology and population genetics to the anthropology of performance and the typology of poetic meter. The book provides a fascinating snapshot of current work across the fields of Austronesian and Papuan linguistics and culture history and the papers in it will be important reading for anyone working in these fields.

PL 615 2010 ISBN 9780858836204

689 pp. Prices: Australia AUD \$163.90 (incl. GST), Overseas AUD \$149.00

Kalenjin language dictionary aims to set the record straight

By Julius Sigei, From the Saturday Nation, Nairobi, 24 September, 2010

When Chinua Achebe wrote his ground-breaking novel, *Things Fall Apart*, in 1958 he set out to correct the misrepresentation of his community by the works of such Eurocentric novelists as Joyce Carry and Joseph Conrad.

He particularly took issue with *Mister Johnson* and *Heart of Darkness* for “depersonalising a human race, reducing a great culture to a handful of threats and grants.”

In his record-setting mission, Achebe said he wanted to depict the African society in all its grandeur and all its weakness.

Taking on the same cue last year, Warwick University scholar Kipny'aanko Seroney said he was out correct the “misinterpretation of his Kalenjin language”, albeit belatedly, with the publication of his new dictionary, *Samburtaab Ng'alekab Kaleenchin* (Kalenjin Dictionary).

In the foreword to the compelling 13,703 entry volume, Mr Seroney says Christian missionaries and the colonial administrators did not analyse the Kalenjin Kalenjin language in a broad sense.

“They put down Kalenjin words in a manner that suited them, not in a manner used by Kalenjin speakers. This subverted the language and stunted its development,” he says.

Europeans began writing Kalenjin in the 1920s. These early works were intended to assist members of the community to read and write.

This is the first time a Kalenjin dictionary defines words in Kalenjin and gives English equivalents.

The dictionary attempts to present a unifying talking point for the six million (the latest census puts the number of those living in Kenya alone at 4.9 million) speakers of the over 10 dialects of the group called Kalenjin.

Mr Seroney insists that the groups, mainly found in Kenya with some in Uganda and Tanzania, are mutually intelligible despite their variants. Ironically, this is also the dictionary's Achilles' heel, for in this ambitious move to write one dictionary, he has provided a dilemma to the language speakers as some dialects are so disparate that some words mean the exact opposite in a different dialect. Perhaps taking cognisance of this, the writer has circumvented the hurdle by presenting variations of such words.

Also a producer at the Washington-based Kassfm International, Mr Seroney says such vernacular stations as Kass and Chamgei have already smoothed the way for the standardisation of the Kalenjin language. “The fact that these two vernacular stations command impressive listenership all over Kalenjin land is a pointer that the unification of the language is not only a possibility, but indeed a reality,” he told *Saturday Nation* in a telephone interview.

The section on vowels and consonants will come in handy to teachers of English working among Kalenjin students in appreciating their difficulty in adapting to the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA).

The dictionary will also benefit linguists and anthropologists. Professor Chris Wanjala, the chairman of the National Book Development Council of Kenya, says of the book: “The Kalenjin dictionary is a welcome contribution to the efforts being made to promote indigenous languages. Expressing yourself in your mother tongue is a human right recognised by UNESCO.”

8. Places to go on the Web

Snowflakes - Indigenous place-names

By Jane Simpson from the Transient Languages and Cultures blogspot at the University of Sydney web-site, 15 September, 2010
([http://blogs/usyd.edu.au/elac](http://blogs.usyd.edu.au/elac))

Last week in Guovdageaidnu/Kautokeino, Norway, at the *Sámi allaskuvla*, the Sámi University College, was the first International Conference on Indigenous Place Names - "Exploring ways to reclaim cultural identity through place names", beautifully, minutely and intricately organised by Kaisa Rautio Helander. The name 'Guovdageaidnu/Kautokeino' illustrates the range of the topic:

- meaning: in Sámi *Guovda* 'what is in between', *Geaidnu* 'road'; in Norwegian, Kautokeino is a name only
- layering: Kautokeino is the Finnish spelling, now adopted by Norwegians
- official naming policy: which name to use officially, which name comes first on road-signs

In the spring, a single snowflake melts, joins other snowflakes, becomes a trickle, a stream, a river, a sea - this metaphor with many interpretations is the heart of a poem by an early twentieth century Sámi writer, Pedar Jalvi which Kaisa recited at the start of the conference. You could use it for place-names - one Indigenous place-name on a map doesn't convincingly show prior occupation/ownership, but thousands do. Or you could take it for this first conference itself - a river of understanding formed from trickles of people from different places - Māori, Zulu, Xaayda Gwaay.yaay (Haida Gwaii), Masai, Shipibo-Konibo, and particularly the Arctic (Sámi, Inuit, Nenets and Veps). They all have reasons to be passionately concerned about the nature, recognition and transmission of place-names.

Each day of the conference started with different Sámi people singing *yoik*, which, so Mikkel Nils Sara said, often "extol the splendour of relations between land, man and beast". Yoik also developed in part as a way of keeping contact among tundra dwellers - you can yoik a person - sing their yoik. On the first day, the singer sang the tundra (a word that comes from Sámi, *duottar* in Northern Sámi) which gives the reindeer food and sang about the conflict with the miners who want to take their land. "And the only thing we can do is sing our beloved land".

Ideas in the opening speech by Láilá Susanna Vars of the Sámediggi (Sámi parliament) recurred in many of the papers.

[JHS:HT*] Sámi place-names are history, our ancestors' words, our experiences, memories and stories. They are words and phrases, they are instructions and they are understanding, they are explanations, they are paths, they are journeys. .. Sámi names are our common wealth, our language, our experience, our stories, our knowledge and it is our culture and our memory and our rights and they tell about our belonging to our areas. Our place-names are our future and our children's heritage. It gives them the feeling they own the area when they know their name, it is their wealth and their language and our ancestors' instructions going together.

Parallel sessions and a wealth of papers mean I can't report on all of them. But... a paper I found exciting was Mikkel Nils Sara's paper "To Know, Recognize and Describe a Landscape. Examples from Nomadic Reindeer Herding" which showed how place-names in this tundra area stem from the interaction of semi-nomadic reindeer herders with the land. Looking at place-names in the UK, it is easy to see how names grew by reference to agricultural activity (X-field, Y-mill). In Australia

rapid settlement and the need to create reference names means we have ended up with place-names that are commemorative (Adelaide, Sydney, Melbourne) or real estate hype (Paradise) or just evocative (Canberra, since its meaning in the local Aboriginal language is still debated). Sara described other ways people interact with land, in the heartland of the Northern Sámi-speaking people, the dry mountain plateaus where the snow is shallow enough for the reindeer to find winter-food.

Places are not only the obvious rivers and mountains which occur in many specific-generic combinations, but also types of place: resting places, dwelling places, summer retreat from insects, stopping places, hunting grounds. An understanding of how reindeer move and use the land underlies many place-names - a hill which is too steep for reindeer, terrain that is difficult for reindeer, a place which relates to movements of reindeer at certain time of the year, where old female reindeer stay behind. Visibility matters - terrain is described as dark or light; in an area which is dark for part of the year; many rivers cannot be seen in winter and are only recognised by their surroundings. Similes are invoked, involving the colour and texture of reindeer coats at different times of the year.

Sara seemed also to link this to a difference in kinds of knowledge: *diehti* know, knowledge formed first with words, which can flow from person, content that can be verbalised and transferred, and *mahti* know how to do. I took this as distinguishing between different aspects of placenames - content which come from knowing what to do with the land, and reference - calling to mind a place for someone else. Place-names are a way for reindeer herders to give locations to each other accurately. These days you can use GPS locations, (and one delegate came across a white reindeer with a GPS locator around its neck). But a place-name still beats a string of numbers for memorability.

Naming a place is not just creating a mnemonic to refer to the place by, or creating a mnemonic that fits into ways of knowing about the country, and into songs (Lyn Carter and Trish Johnston, *Singing the land*. Using Maori songs (*waiata*) to verify place and space on the landscape). Naming a place is taken as a political act - if I name it, I am asserting the right to name it, and that can be taken as ownership. Place-names have been, and continue to be, used as evidence of ownership by traditional groups. No wonder Norwegian Sámi resent the late nineteenth century government assertion that "Instead of foreign place names, a Norwegian name should be used", according to which Sámi placenames are foreign (Kaisa Rautio Helander, *The Function of Place Names in Building a Representation*. Treatment of Sámi Place Names in Norway as an Example).

Restoring an earlier name is also a political act - Sámi activists wrote Sámi place-names on road-signs, which were then shot at by other people, so Asbjørg Skåden described (Place names being more than names of places. Place names as ethnical, political, cultural and lingual markers). On the other hand, re-statement of Saami names on road-signs in northern Finland appears to have aroused little negative reaction (Káre Vuolab-Lohi, *Saami Place Names and Road Signs in Finland*).

I used 'earlier', because in many areas there isn't a hard-and-fast division between 'Indigenous' and 'Introduced/non-Indigenous'; there is a layering of earlier and later place-names,

shown by Jesta Masuku in (The influence of Kalanga on place names in Zimbabwe's Matopo District: Whose culture, whose values?) and by Peter Raper (Diachronic Toponymic Stratification in Southern Africa) - he argued for a San substrate (including calques of San placenames). Not that this is justification for retaining the place-names of the latest immigrants.

The UN has been active in promoting the study and retention of indigenous and minority names- through the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) and formally, through the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Article 13.1 *Indigenous people have the right to... designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons.*

There was some interesting discussion from representatives of various Geographic Names Boards (e.g. Carl Christian Olsen on the Geographical Naming Authority in Greenland and Nobuhle Ndimande-Hlongwa on Standardization of Indigenous Place Names for Towns and Cities in South Africa).

The major focus of the participants was on retention, preserving names which themselves reflect tradition. But there was also some indications of designation. In South Africa, people were arguing for rights to name new suburbs and roads with names from local languages (Gugulethu Mazibuko on Preserving Oral History through the use of Indigenous names in naming KwaZulu-Natal District Municipalities in South Africa). The structure of the new name was sometimes commemorative of people - Barbara Wilson mentioned putting a Xaayda name of her uncle on a mountain.

For many groups struggling against dispossession, ill-treatment and poverty, reinstating earlier place-names may not be a high priority, even though it clearly shows the presence of the Indigenous people and thus makes it hard for the dominant group to avoid recognising the Indigenous people. And even when names are recognised, dispossession still continues -a point made passionately by Navaya ole Ndaskoi, (The Greater Siringet Region was Maasai Rangeland). He described the plight of the Masai whose names are recognised (Siringet/Serengeti), but whose traditional grazing lands have been taken over as wildlife reserves, whose herds and way of life are being destroyed by drought, and who are chased at gunpoint out of the wildlife reserves. Some Masai feel that outsiders value their lives at less than that of a baby rhino.

Australian Bureau of Statistics publishes state-level Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survey booklets

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (Ausstats) has published population survey booklets on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, including details of language competence. The booklet for Queensland can be downloaded at

[http://ausstats.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/subscriber/nsf0/69FCA914BEA3E2ECCA2577A70022701/F/\\$File/natsiss%20A5%20booklet/_qld_web.pdf](http://ausstats.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/subscriber/nsf0/69FCA914BEA3E2ECCA2577A70022701/F/$File/natsiss%20A5%20booklet/_qld_web.pdf)

9. Forthcoming events

International Conference on Language Documentation and Conservation (ICLDC) – Strategies Moving Forward

The 2nd ICLDC will be held February 11-13, 2011, at the Hawai'i Imin International Conference Center on the University of Hawai'i at Manoa campus. Two days of optional technical training workshops will precede the conference (Feb. 9-10). An optional Hilo Field Study (on the Big Island of Hawai'i) to visit Hawaiian language revitalization programs in action will immediately follow the conference (Feb. 14-15).

Website <http://nflrc.hawaii.edu/ICLDC/2011/>

Puliima 2011 National Indigenous Languages and Technology Forum

We would like to invite you to participate in the "Puliima 2011 National Indigenous Languages Technology Forum" to be held at the State Library of Queensland in Brisbane from Wednesday the 11th of May through till Friday the 13th May 2011.

The aim of the Puliima Forum is to bring together people from all over Australia and overseas who are involved in Indigenous language projects and communities to share skills and information on the use of a wide range of technology to support their work. The event showcases a variety of production tools, models and programs that support content production in a range of mediums (sound, multi-media, image and print) and enables community users to experience them first hand. It incorporates knowledge of linguistics, educational programs and teaching methodologies as well as legal, moral and cultural aspects of community language project development.

The 2011 Puliima Forum will run over three days, and **will include as an Australian first, a separate forum for Indigenous linguists**, of which we are pleased to say there is a growing number. We aim to allow the participants to share their experiences and draft proposals to support employment initiatives, at the same time establishing a supportive network for ongoing contact.

This will be the third Puliima Forum, with the conference having been held in Newcastle in 2007 then Melbourne in 2009 with over 200 people expected to attend the 2011 Forum.

We are thrilled to be hosting Puliima 2011 once again and we encourage you to participate to explore and share the many ways in which language is either being revitalised or preserved in your area.

Linguistics Symposium at University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee

Language Death, Endangerment, Documentation & Revitalization: the 26th Linguistics Symposium, University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee, 22-26 October 2011

In a globalized world where hundreds of languages are expected to become extinct in the 21st century, it is highly relevant to analyze the viability and continuity of threatened languages. The purpose of the 26th Linguistics Symposium is to discuss this impending loss to humankind from a multidisciplinary perspective.

We invite contributions for the assessment of this process from Linguistics, Sociology, Psychology, Anthropology, Education, and related fields. Equally welcome is the participation of practitioners in language revitalization efforts.

We wish to combine theoretical and practical perspectives for the analysis of the linguistic and social processes involved in language death, endangerment, documentation and revitalization.

Possible topics include the following:

- The genetic and areal distribution of endangered languages
- Structural characteristics of endangered languages
- Cultural characteristics of endangered language communities
- Causes of language endangerment
- Documentation of endangered languages
- Language revitalization programs and practices
- Academic ethics and advocacy in language endangerment

Abstracts to be submitted by 1 February 2011 to:
26thlinguistics-symposium@uwm.edu

10. Obituaries

Death of last speaker of Cochin Portuguese Creole

By Hugo Cardoso, 30 August 2010

I have just heard that Mr. William Rosario passed away; he was, to the best of my knowledge, the last speaker of Creole Portuguese in Cochin, and I was lucky enough to visit him twice and make some recordings. In fact, Portuguese Creole is still spoken in Cannanore (further north) and the two varieties seem very close, but this marks the end of a long linguistic tradition in Cochin. It's very likely that this is where the first of all Luso-Asian Creoles formed.

I was wondering if you'd like to include a note on the next FEL newsletter. So far, all that's written about it is my rather sentimental account here: *[Oferenda blog-spot reproduced below – Ed.]* but I'll be happy to give you further details if you like.

'It was a great joy, Christmas time was', Mr. Rosario said into the microphone, reminiscing about when neighbours would gather to sing the 'jinjri nona' and dance to the sound of guitars, violins and harmonium.

That day, back in 2007, Mr. Rosario glowed. he seemed genuinely delighted to finally speak his mother tongue again, even to a complete stranger who had just shown up on his doorstep, clumsily trying to explain how he'd heard a rumour that the last speaker of Creole Portuguese in the whole of Cochin might live there. Mr. Rosario confirmed: that he was, yes, to the best of his knowledge, ever since his friend Mr. Paynter had passed away a few years earlier.

That day, back in 2007, Mr. Rosario showed no sign of discomfort. The next day, however, he was in intense pain from his back, and it rhythmically broke his voice while he apologised for not being able to help me with my recordings.

That day, back in 2007, i was immediately touched by the warmth of Mr. Rosario's welcome and the easy smile of his family. three years and a few letters later, when I returned to their vypeen cottage, i was treated like an old friend and shown right through to the Rosarios' dinner table. their remarkable generosity, i could see, was still vital, and so was Mr. Rosario's patience: he agreed to spend nearly a week teaching me about that language he alone carried around.

That was last January. and now, late at night, an email (how unfittingly prosaic!) arrives announcing that 'Mr. William expired on the 20 of August at 1.15 am'.

I cannot find the right register to simultaneously report the demise of a kind friend and the death of a language: one is worthy of primal grief, the other probably requires cool and composed factuality. but I mourn the two. Mr. Rosario is gone, leaving his family and friends lonelier. and gone is also the mother tongue of five centuries' worth of Cochin families, modest witness to an encounter which changed the order of the world. leaving us all that much poorer. and I will leave it at that. silence now.

Seppo Suhonen (1938-2010) in memoriam

From the Society of Friends of Livonia (Liivi Sõprade Selts), Tallinn, Estonia 17 September 2010 (translated by the Editor)

Yesterday we received the sad news that the linguist Seppo Suhonen has departed. Suhonen was known above all as a scholar of Baltic-Finnic languages (being Professor of Baltic-Finnic languages at the University of Helsinki from 1978 to 2001). Seppo Suhonen began his linguistic career with research into the Livonian language. His doctoral thesis on Livonian, "Die jungen lettischen Lehnwörter im Livischen" appeared in 1973. His publication in 1975, 'Liivin kielen näytteitä' (Specimens of the Livonian language) was one of the few collections of Livonian texts to appear since the second world war. Suhonen was also active in the Finno-Ugrian Society, being its secretary (1975-1983) and chairman (1991-2000). The Friends of Livonia remember a versatile and beloved linguist.

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 linguistic identity. They have every right to do so. And we, as scientists, or con-

cerned 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.



A food distribution site in Pakistan following the recent disastrous floods, which threatened not only lives but also minority languages. FEL members donated funds toward the relief effort, through a non-government agency which has particular concern for the plight of Pakistan's ethnic minorities. Picture courtesy of Fakhruddin. .