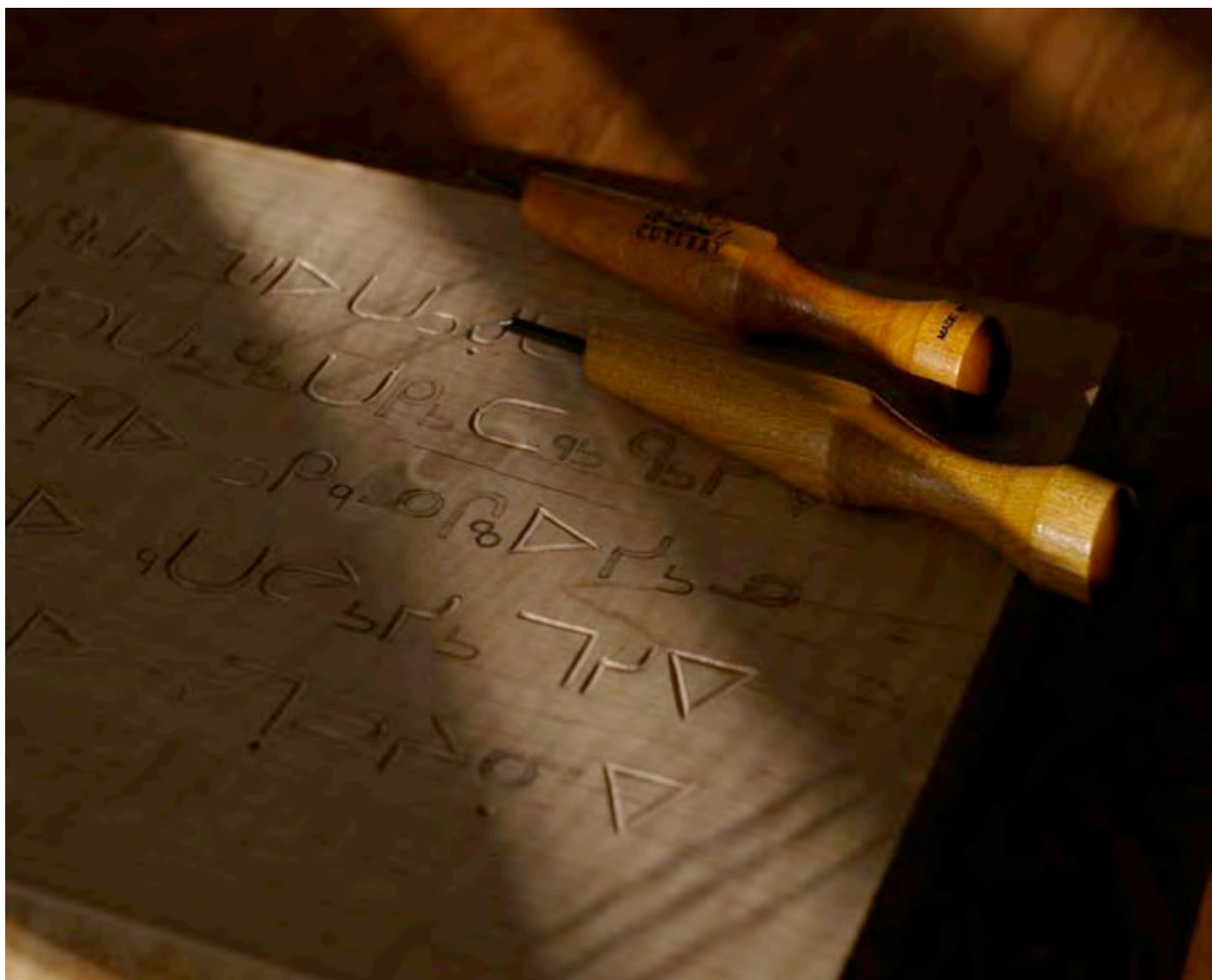
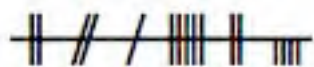


OGMIOS



Carving in the Inuktitut script of Canada by Tim Brookes. For more on Tim Brookes' alphabet carving project, see "In search of Cherokee" in this issue

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Back cover image: The Baybayin script of the Philippines, as carved by Tim Brookes

1. Editorial

This editorial is being written shortly before one of the most logistically challenging annual FEL conferences we have had – the 13th, to be held in Khorog, Tajikistan. Khorog is situated in the Pamir Mountains, which are often referred to as a “museum of languages” because of the survival there of a number of Indo-Aryan languages of the Pamiri group. Geography can often be an aid to the survival of languages, providing them with the security of isolation. On our excursion further into the Pamirs, after the end of the conference on 27 September, our participants can hope to see for themselves how these small and isolated language communities survive. Details of the conference were published in the previous issue of *Ogmios* and are available on the Foundation’s web-site.

Your editor has been doing a bit of travelling himself lately in the cause of endangered languages. In the last issue we reported the death of the last mother-tongue speaker of Livonian in Latvia. This is a language in which I have long had an interest, and in fact I wrote my M.Phil. thesis on it, but had been out of touch for some years with the Livonian scene. I discovered that there are still people interested in researching the language and its turbulent history, and that a group of ‘Friends of the Livonians’ based at the University of Tartu, Estonia, and in Finland, was going on a tour of the Livonian sites – the recently-deserted villages, those where the language died a hundred and fifty years ago in the north of the country, and the strongholds of Livonian culture in the northeast, as recorded in the 13th-century *Chronicle of Henry of Livonia*. It was a very well organised, friendly and informative tour, and there is no finer way for an endangered-languages enthusiast to enjoy like-minded company, beautiful scenery and a sense of the presence of a departed people.

If *you* have also been on an excursion, apart from academic field-work, with similar ‘friends’ of a lost or declining language, why not write to *Ogmios* and tell us about it?

Chris Moseley

2. Development of the Foundation

FEL XIII – The 13th annual conference of the Foundation for Endangered Languages

The Foundation’s 13th annual conference, on the topic of ‘Endangered Languages and History’, is to be held from 23rd to 28th September 2009. The main venue for the conference is to be Khorog, in the Pamir Mountains, in the heart of the country’s minority-language area. In view of the limited access and special travel arrangements required, we’re setting out here (and on the ogmios.org web-site) the arrangements you need to know about. We can promise a very stimulating programme, not only of papers on the topic, but also excursions.

Travel to Tajikistan:

Useful links

Website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Tajikistan, which includes all the required information about travel to Tajikistan and Tajik embassies abroad.

<http://www.mid.tj/>

Information about travel to Pamir

<http://www.pamirs.org/travel.htm>

Important notice:

The participants need a special permit to travel to Khorog (in addition to visa).

The permit can be obtained together with the visa from the Tajik Embassies abroad.

The conference participants are advised to commit at least 1 week of stay in Tajikistan.

Arrival date to Dushanbe: 21-22nd of September

Travel to Khorog: 23rd of September

Conference dates: 24-26th of September

Excursion: 27th of September

Return to Dushanbe: 28th of September

Departure from Tajikistan: 29th of September.

Conference fees

US\$500 for participants from developed countries;

US\$300 for participants from developing countries (including Russia, Central Asian countries, Afghanistan, Pakistan);

A subsidised rate will be applied to local participants.

The fee includes conference fee, conference proceedings, travel to Khorog by road, food, accommodation and excursion in Badakhshan region. (The fee does not include expenses in Dushanbe. The local organising committee can arrange booking hotel in Dushanbe on request. The price will range from US\$50-US\$150).

Chris Moseley

13 August 2009

Announcement of AGM: call for Officer and Committee nominations

As Secretary of the Foundation for Endangered Languages, I hereby give notice that:

1. The 13th Annual General Meeting of the Foundation will take place on 25th September 2009 at The Institute of Humanities, Academy of Sciences, Tajikistan, Khorog, Tajikistan starting at 17:00 local time

All members are entitled to attend and vote at this meeting.

2. The Agenda will comprise:

- Minutes of the 12th AGM
- Matters Arising
- Chairman’s Report
- Treasurer’s Report
- Election of Officers for the year beginning 25th September 2009

Any additional items for the agenda should be sent to reach the President (nostler@chibcha.demon.co.uk) by 11th September 2009.

3. The membership of the Executive Committee for the year following 25th September 2009 will be chosen at this meeting.

Nominations for election to Offices (Chairman, Treasurer, Secretary) and the Executive Committee should be sent to reach the President by 11th September 2009.

There are up to 15 places on the Committee (including the named Officers) and should nominations exceed vacancies, election will be by ballot.

Nigel Birch, Secretary, Foundation for Endangered Languages

3. Endangered Languages in the News

Never mind the whales, save the languages

By Peter Monaghan, from *The Australian (Higher Education section)*, 24 June 2009

Worried about the loss of rainforests, the ozone layer, quokkas? Well, none of those is doing any worse than a large majority of the 6000 to 7000 languages that remain in use on earth. One-half of the survivors will almost certainly be gone by the middle of this century, while 40 per cent more will probably be well on their way out. In their place, almost all humans will speak one of a handful of mega-languages – Mandarin, English, Spanish – although often a poor version of them.

Linguists know what causes languages to disappear. Demographic shifts, government neglect or suppression of regional and indigenous languages and the depredations of mass media all play a role.

Less often remarked is what happens on the way to disappearance: languages' vocabularies, grammars, and expressive potential all diminish.

"Say a community goes over from speaking a traditional Aboriginal language to speaking a creole," says Nick Evans, an Australian National University linguist and leading authority on Aboriginal languages. "Well, let's just use talking about the natural world as an example. You leave behind a language where there's very fine vocabulary for the landscape. Inside the language there's a whole manual for maintaining the integrity of the landscape, for managing it, for using it, for looking for stuff. All that is gone in a creole. You've just got a few words like 'gum tree' or whatever."

All speakers become less able to process and express the wealth of knowledge that has imbued ancestors' lives with meaning over millennia. It's no wonder that communities tend to become demoralised, says Evans, who has dedicated his career to the tall order of keeping shrinking languages going.

"There are times when what people speak is like seeing the world through very badly made thick glasses," he says "You can avoid bumping into objects, but you don't see all the beautiful detail."

Evans describes the dimensions of the loss, culled from his years of work in Northern Australian Aboriginal communities, in the recently released *Dying Words: Endangered Languages and What they Have to Tell us* (Wiley-Blackwell). The situation is so serious that it warrants a global effort to document and preserve languages, he proposes.

How much would that cost? To train on linguists to document one struggling language costs about five hundred thousand dollars. That covers doctoral training and two or three years of post-doctoral work "Multiply that by, say, 4000 languages," says Evans. "That's two billion dollars."

Too much? It's small potatoes, compared with big-science budgets, he notes. "How much did sequencing the human genome cost? A fair bit more than that, I'd think."

The scientific payoffs would be enormous, he says. That kind of Manhattan project of human speech would secure the raw data that linguists depend on to shape theories about how language works. And even programmes that only partly resuscitated languages would reap social benefits. With the compilation of a dictionary, a grammar, and other printed materials, "people suddenly see their language as something immensely valuable, as something to be proud of, and to learn," Evans says.

If the losses are so huge, why are relatively few linguists combating the situation? Australian linguists, at least, have distinguished themselves by the preservation they have achieved. Just as governments have supported documentation efforts in some countries, including Germany, China and Russia, Australian governments began in the nineteen-seventies to back a major push that has resulted in good documentation of most of the 130 remaining Aboriginal languages, although almost all the survivors are at risk of dying off.

In England, the Arcadia Fund (formerly Lisbet Rausing Charitable Fund) has helped another Australian linguist, Peter Austin, to direct one of the world's most active efforts to stem language loss, at the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies. Austin, who like Evans studied at the ANU linguistics department during the long tenure there of Aboriginal languages specialist Bob Dixon, heads a programme that has trained many documentary linguists in England as well as in language loss hotspots such as West Africa and South America.

At linguistics meetings in the US, where the endangered language issue has of late been something of a flavour of the month, evidence is mounting that not all interventions will be particularly helpful. Some linguists are boasting, for example, of more and more sophisticated means of capturing languages: digital recording and storage, Internet and mobile telephone technologies, and know-how from such fields as signal processing and global positioning systems. But those technologies, say some doubters, are encouraging a "commando style" of recording trip: Zip in, switch on digital recorder, clear off, download to hard drive, and nod at funding agencies' requirement that speaker communities have access to gathered material.

That's not quite what some endangered language advocates have been seeking, for more than 30 years. Most loud, and untiring, has been Michael Krauss, of the University of Alaska. He has often complained that linguists are whistling Dixie while most of their raw data disappears on the breeze.

Who is to blame? Noam Chomsky, say Krauss and many others. Or, more precisely, they blame linguists who have fetishised the approaches of the most prominent of all linguists. Documentary linguists, who go out into the field to study, record and describe languages, argue that theoretical linguists, who draw conclusions about how languages work, have held such sway that the field has largely ignored the death throes of languages.

Chomsky, from his post at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, has been the doyen of theoretical linguists for far longer than he has been a prominent political commentator. In 1957, he published his landmark *Syntactic Structures*, which argues that all languages exhibit certain universal grammatical features, encoded in the human mind. American linguists, in particular, have focused largely on theoretical concerns ever since, even while doubts have mounted about Chomsky's universals.

Austin and company are in no doubt that because languages are singular and irreducible, even if they do tend towards common syntactic features, creating dictionaries and grammars requires prolonged dedication and is inevitably a hard slog. As Krauss puts it: "You learn a language by sitting there with people. You ask an old lady what she calls various kinds of bushes."

That patient study may require knowledge of geographic features, farm tools, ethnobotany, mythology, and oral literature. It requires that linguists remain alert not only to languages' structural subtleties, but also the social, historical and political factors that bear on them.

It also calls for persistent funding of field scientists who may sometimes have to wade, intrepid, into harsh and even hazardous settings. Once there, they may need such non-linguistic skills as diplomacy in the face of community suspicion.

Evans makes no bones about showing communities that he is willing to fight for their rights, linguistic and other.

He often acts as an expert witness and interpreter in legal proceedings relating to land rights, for example. He notes that because Aboriginal community leaders expect to engage in give and take with visiting outsiders, linguists can build relationships that permit “sustainable linguistics”.

So much the better, he says, because endangered language communities have cause to doubt or even oppose efforts to preserve their languages. They may have seen support and funding for such projects as immersion schools come and go. They may have ceased bothering to speak their languages to children, who they believe will profit from speaking a dominant tongue.

Plenty of students continue to be drawn to the intellectual thrill of linguistics field work. Postgraduate programmes have increased in several countries. That’s all the more reason to clear away barriers, contend Evans, Austin and others. The highest, they agree, is that the linguistics profession’s emphasis on theory saps young field linguists of their enthusiasm, over time.

Chomsky disagrees. He recently has begun to speak in support of language preservation. But his linguistic, as opposed to humanitarian, rationale for that stance is, let’s say, unsentimental. The loss of a language, he states, “is much more of a tragedy for linguists whose interests are mostly theoretical, like me, than the descriptive linguists who focus on specific languages, since it means the permanent loss of the most relevant data for general theoretical work.”

There’s a certain cold logic to that argument. Chomsky says he certainly deplores the force that most often causes language deaths. “It’s known as imperialism,” he says.

But outrage about that damage, he argues, should not lead the profession essentially to lower its standards by rewarding more greatly the documentation of languages.

At the moment, few institutions award doctorates for such work, and that’s the way it should be, he reasons. In linguistics, as in every other field, he believes that good descriptive work requires thorough theoretical understanding and should also contribute to building new theory.

But that’s precisely what documentation does, objects ANU’s Evans. The process of immersion in a language, to extract, analyse, and sum it up, deserves a Ph.D. because it is “the most demanding intellectual task a linguist can engage in.”

Searching for Cherokee

Tim Brookes

As you approach Tahlequah, Oklahoma, a modest little burg of some 15,000 souls situated 60 miles east of Tulsa in gently rolling woodland and farming country, the signage on the town line proclaims that Tahlequah has been chosen as the Best Small Town in Oklahoma and the 55th Best in the United States. What it doesn’t say is that Tahlequah is the only town on Earth where you can find street names, business signs, notices and even newspaper articles in Cherokee.

According to the U.S. Census, more than 25% of the population of Tahlequah (pronounced with the stress on the first syllable, *tah-la-quah*) is ethnic American Indian. Although the Census doesn’t ask respondents to specify to which Indian nation they belong, we can take it for granted that a majority of that 25% will be Cherokee, because Tahlequah is home to the headquarters of the Cherokee Nation and the greatest concentration of ethnic Cherokee in the United States. This is, literally as well as figuratively, Cherokee County, U.S.A.

The heart of the town, lying in a slight bowl, consists of two sections of Muskogee Avenue, which runs north-south. The larger by far, lying to the south, is a thoroughly routine strip of big-box stores, gas stations, retail franchises and fast-food joints.

You could drive through this section without seeing a single clue to the presence of Cherokee, the people or the language. Nor at the northern end of Muskogee, where the main drag runs into the campus of Northeastern State University, with its standard landscape of dorms, teaching buildings, parking lots and stadium.

Between the two, though, Muskogee runs through a slender seven-block strip dubbed Historic Downtown, kitted out with faux-vintage streetlamps, and here, as you’re looking around to get your bearings, you’ll notice something unique. The streets, named after Native American tribes—Shawnee, Delaware, Muskogee, Keetoowah, Choctaw—have their new green signs painted not only with their names but also with a sequence of curious symbols. Some of them look like familiar English letters, some look like fragments of or variations on English letters (half an A, a 4 with an added O), and some are entirely unfamiliar, but all in all they certainly don’t spell out anything you can read. These are the street names in Cherokee.

Once you start looking more carefully, you may see that the Post Office has its name in both English and Cherokee. Wheelchair access and tobacco-free signs around the old courthouse are also in both languages, and the front window of the Bank of America has an entire screed in Cherokee.

Yet eventually you’ll stop to wonder about something. These signs, no matter how visible, are not functional. Instructions that people might actually need to follow (the Post Office’s hours of opening, for example) are in English only. In other words, whoever painted these signs *didn’t expect anyone to be able to read them*.

This is, in fact, not surprising, because even among the Cherokee, very, very few can still read and write their own language. So what are the signs doing there? And what is the current state of Cherokee, a linguistic invention so remarkable that the likeness of its creator represents the state of Oklahoma in the National Statuary Hall in the Capitol Building in Washington, D.C.?

Senator Sykes (R-24, Newcastle), SJR30 English Only bill will be heard before the Senate General Government Committee on Monday, February 16th at 10:00 a.m. This bill provides for a constitutional amendment declaring the English language to be the official language of the State of Oklahoma.

The Cherokee Nation opposes this legislation. Oklahoma tribes have come together to fight against the English Only legislation. Other professional groups in health, education, business and clergy have joined efforts to stand against this proposed legislation.

I have a peculiar interest in these questions. I’m not a professional linguist or anthropologist. I’m not Cherokee: I grew up in England and now live in Vermont, in northern New England. I’m a writer—but I’ve always loved good wood, and for Christmas 2008 I started carving a professional sign for my wife to hang outside her office. When the rest of my family saw it, they wanted their own signs, too; and shortly I began carving signs in Chinese, having fallen in love with the swoop and curve of characters created with a brush. One thing led to another, and early in 2009 I found myself looking for other languages to carve. I stumbled across Omniglot.com, an online encyclopaedia of the world’s written languages, and discovered that many of the world’s most interesting or beautiful scripts are, in fact, endangered. I decided to create an exhibition of about a dozen of these imperilled writing systems, each of them saying the same thing, namely Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”

Cherokee was the fifth language I carved, and one of the hardest. Here’s why: a vernacular, cursive language is easy to carve because it’s easy to write, and it’s easy to write because (a) it mimics the natural motions of hand and wrist and (b) it allows for the variations caused by the character of the individual writer.

Cherokee was nothing like that. It was like carving a stone monument, all straight lines and concentric or symmetrical curves. Carving a straight line or a perfect circle requires a mechanical exactitude that is very hard to replicate using a hand tool, just as writing or drawing a straight line or a perfect circle is not a pen-friendly form.

Written language has tended to evolve from hand-held technologies (stylus, brush, pen, stick, knife) to mechanical technologies (printing press, typewriter, computer). The printed form is more—well, conscious of form. Formal. Not only does printing reproduce each letter identically each time it appears, but the typefaces we've developed over the centuries for printing tend to embody qualities that are not quite the same as those of handwriting: balance, uprightness, symmetry, clarity. The printed word is, visually, a temple to the language, all pillars and cornices.

This was precisely what was so hard about the Cherokee syllabary: almost every letter had formal head-and-foot serifs, often very elaborate ones. Some letters had serifs even where traditional English printing wouldn't—on top of a curve, for instance. I found myself longing for a language I assumed must exist: a colloquial Cherokee, a handwritten Cherokee, a Cherokee that was easier to write and to carve.

Surely, I thought, it was historically inevitable that such a written form must exist? After all, there were handwritten (or scraped, painted, brushed or scratched) writing systems all over the world that in recent centuries developed their own printed forms; surely it was impossible that there might be a printed form of a language but no handmade one?

I decided to make a quick trip to Tahlequah, my carved Cherokee board in hand, to see if I could find some answers.

After its Sunday-morning Bible show, KTLQ ("Classic Country of Oklahoma") broadcasts the only Cherokee-language radio show: "Cherokee Voices, Cherokee Sounds," produced by the Cherokee Nation and hosted by Dennis Sixkiller, a native of Tahlequah.

(This doesn't mean he has killed six men, or that one of his ancestors killed six men. WHAT DOES IT MEAN? A wide stretch in the Illinois River just down the road from Tahlequah is called Lake Tenkiller.)

Sixkiller delivers Cherokee news and community announcements (coming up shortly is the annual bow-and-arrow shoot-off) first in English, then in Cherokee. The news is punctuated with singing, some of it recorded at a recent all-Cherokee gospel gathering.

The centrepiece of today's show, however, is an interview with a group of young Cherokee cyclists following the Trail of Tears from Cherokee, NC to Tahlequah.

At this point I need to interrupt the broadcast with a quick lesson in Cherokee history, for those who have difficulty remembering which episode of domestic ethnic cleansing was which. And this is important, because it has everything to do with the creation of the written version of the Cherokee language, and equally with the sad decline of that language.

The Cherokee, who at the beginning of the eighteenth century numbered perhaps 17,000 people, originally lived along the Tennessee River in the Appalachia Mountains, in a region that probably extended from present-day Virginia down into present-day Georgia.

The name Cherokee (which around Cherokee County, Oklahoma, is pronounced "Chur-kee") derives from the original *tsa-la-gi*, *cha-la-gi* or *zah-la-gi*, meaning "Principal People."

Their situation, rarely a stable one thanks to a constant series of wars with their neighbours the Shawnee, the Creeks and the Chickasaw, became more difficult with the arrival of the colonial powers. In 1738 a smallpox epidemic, brought to the Carolinas by the slave ships, killed thousands of the tribe. A bewildering series of shifting alliances with the British, French and Spanish made many Indian nations

pawns in the colonial game, and the Cherokee were no exception. In addition, encroachment on the traditional Cherokee lands by the new settlers forced a significant portion of the nation to move west and settle in present-day Arkansas, where, facing warfare with the local Osage and pressure from the U.S. government, one faction of the Cherokee moved down into Spanish Texas.

At this turbulent point in history the Cherokee language, which like all indigenous languages existed purely in spoken form, was changed in a unique way by an utterly remarkable man. His English name was George Gist, or Guess. His Cherokee name was Sequoyah. He was the first identifiable person who became literate by inventing his own writing system—and in the process brought literacy to an entire people.

The facts of his life are not always clear or undisputed, but we can be reasonably sure of the following.

He was born around 1770 in the former Cherokee village of Tuskegee on the Little Tennessee River—a village that now lies drowned beneath a reservoir. According to his official Cherokee Nation biography, "he worked as a trader, a silversmith and a blacksmith. Making his own tools, such as hammers and drills, he also constructed his own bellows and forge."

He was one of the Cherokee who moved into Arkansas, and "in approximately 1809, Sequoyah gathered with some friends in his shop, and the conversation led to a discussion regarding the non-Indian's method of communicating through writing. Many thought that it was some sort of witchcraft, but Sequoyah seemed to understand that the writing stood for words. He pondered devising a way for the Cherokee to be able to do the same thing...."

His own people ridiculed him at first, pointing out that no Indian language had ever been written down, but first by scratching marks with a nail and later using pen and paper, Sequoyah created a remarkably effective and suitable written version of his language. Rejecting the idea of coming up with a notation for every single word, which would require thousands of symbols, he broke words down into the most common syllables, or syllabic sounds, and created a set of symbols that would represent each of these syllables—a task made easier by the fact that every syllable in Cherokee ends with a vowel. Not an alphabet, then, which implies one symbol per sound, but a syllabary.

He went through many trials and errors, working with such single-mindedness and in the face of such ridicule that his wife is said to have burned his cabin, or at least his papers, to try to get him to give up his linguistic labours and go back to doing some real work.

The first to read and write the syllabary was his daughter, A-Yo-Ka, who would turn out to play a crucial part in the story. When the word got out that father and daughter were communicating by using marks in the fashion of the whites, Sequoyah and A-Yo-Ka were charged with witchcraft, and were brought before George Lowery, their town chief, for trial in 1821. Luckily, according to a Cherokee law enacted a decade previously, a civil trial had to be held before an execution could take place. Lowery brought in a group of warriors to judge what was termed a "sorcery trial."

A clever test was devised. To prove that he wasn't just remembering random marks he had made, Sequoyah and A-Yo-Ka were placed out of earshot of each other and separately given dictation—and then asked to read each other's messages. When the test was successful, and Sequoyah subsequently taught a number of boys to read and write his new script, the Cherokee acquired literacy at a speed and with an eagerness possibly unmatched in history. By 1830 some 90% of Cherokee could read and write their own language.

This achievement was unique in many ways. No indigenous people of North America, as far as we know, had their own written language, and when one developed it was invariably the work of missionaries such as James Evans, who developed a script for Ojibwa that was used in schools and missionary work.

Sequoyah's efforts were helped by Dr. Samuel Worcester, a white missionary, and Elias Boudinot, a Cherokee Christian convert. Worcester organized Cherokee into an alphabetical order, had type cast for it and set up a printing press that turned out Bibles, hymnals and handbills. (He also went to jail for a year, charged with civil disobedience, for opposing the subsequent deportation of the Cherokees.) Boudinot became the first editor, in 1828, of the *Cherokee Phoenix*, the first Indian newspaper, with columns in Cherokee and English.

This rapid transition from a handwritten script to a printed one may seem only natural to us now, but it's worth pointing out three things about it whose significance may not be obvious.

First, print confers portability and durability on a language. As the Cherokee Nation has written, "This gift benefited not only the teachers and missionaries, but helped preserve history, culture and spiritual practices." Yet the printed version of the Sequoyah syllabary did something more practical than that: it created books and documents that recorded and preserved the Cherokee language itself during a century of turmoil when the people their culture and their language were struggling to survive. It was like writing that could not be erased on a rock that could not be broken.

Secondly, print confers status, and thus political and potentially economic power. Cherokee automatically became different from other indigenous languages by being available in book and newspaper form, and the brief flourishing of the *Phoenix* allowed and even encouraged (as we'll see in a minute) whites to take the Cherokee intellect and culture seriously.

On the other hand, Sequoyah allowed (and perhaps even encouraged) Worcester to do something that has awkward consequences for the Cherokee language even today. To quote the Cherokee Nations history of Sequoyah once more:

"The type, which was cast by Baker and Greene of Boston, was not identical to the designs Sequoyah originally developed, but were modified."

This modification is crucial. Sequoyah reportedly was aware in some sense that the characters that worked best for printing were different from those used in handwriting, and "he copied some of the letters from [a] family Bible and said these would do for print and the old ones for writing."

Here's the point: Sequoyah may not even have been able to read the letters he found in the Bible. When he saw S, he certainly didn't hear S. The shapes D, R and T had nothing to do with the sounds we pronounce "d," "r" and "t." These borrowed shapes paradoxically made the language look more familiar to Europeans, but in decades to come would make the business of relearning their own language harder for English-speaking Cherokees.

More subtly, it seems unlikely that Sequoyah knew the meaning, origins or function of the serif. As a result, those annoying little formalities that were such a pain to carve took on a completely new significance. My guess is that Sequoyah didn't know that to a European they are meaningless flourishes, and that a capital I could just as well be written with a simple vertical line. I don't have hard evidence, of course, but the circumstantial evidence is strong: in Cherokee, changing the serif on a letter (a European letter, that is, a Cherokee syllable) changes its sound. Serifs are in fact a kind of built-on diacritical mark and even more confusingly the very shape of the serif (the squared chisel-notch, for example, versus the rounded finish like the claw-and-ball at the carpet end of a Chippendale chair-leg) can make a major difference to the sound of the syllable and the meaning of the word.

Yet no matter how awkward the printed form, it was bound to destroy its cursive antecedent. As I say, I'm no linguistic anthropologist or historian of language, but from what I can tell, in the history of the world's languages, whenever a handwritten form of a language has coexisted with a different printed form, the printed form has almost always marginalized the handwritten form or even driven it to extinc-

tion. The sad fact is that Sequoyah's invention, in its original and purest form, has vanished.

At the time, of course, it's unlikely anyone saw this as a problem. In 1824, the General Council of the Cherokee Nation voted to give Sequoyah a large silver medal as an honor for his creation of the syllabary, and in 1828, the U.S. government proclaimed "...that the United States will pay five hundred dollars for the use of George Guess, a Cherokee, for the great benefit he has conferred upon the Cherokee people in the beneficial results they are now experiencing from the use of the alphabet discovered by him," though reportedly not all the money was paid.

History would have been very different had this respectful attitude characterized all the U.S. government's dealing with the Cherokee. Within two years, though, the Indian Removal Act made provision for Indian nations to be forcibly removed from their homelands and resettled farther west. The Choctaw went first, followed by the Creek, Seminole and Chickasaw nations, and in 1838 some 7,000 army, militia and volunteers herded 13,000 Cherokee into what may have been the world's first concentration camps, and then forced them to march a thousand miles west, in winter, to Oklahoma, an event known in Cherokee as *Nunna dual isunyi*, or "the trail where they cried." Thousands died of disease, cold and starvation.

The survivors were settled around Tahlequah, in Osage territory—a recipe for trouble. In another unfortunate twist, the Cherokee nation sided with the Confederacy in the Civil War. The victory of the Union forces, followed by the creation of the state of Oklahoma, meant the end of autonomous government for the Cherokee. Many schools and local governments punished children for speaking Cherokee, and it's not clear what, if anything was written or published in the Cherokee syllabary for more than a century.

Meanwhile, back on the radio, the Cherokee kids are talking about their forthcoming bike trip. It'll take them twenty days, perhaps a little more. To me, this sounds like a modern echo of an ancient ceremonial ordeal, but they don't say much about the trip and its significance—they're teenagers, after all. They're ready or anxious or excited, more aware of the physical challenge than the historical or spiritual significance. They give their English names, adding their Cherokee name (one is called "Bear") only when Sixkiller asks. He tells them over and over to be careful out there. Those roads can be dangerous, he reminds them.

This radio show originally aired as a half-hour program exclusively in Cherokee, but the Nation decided to expand it and broadcast in both English and Cherokee. With this act of bridge-building in mind, Sixkiller includes a short lesson in Cherokee language—which, like most Oklahomans, he pronounces "Chur-kee."

He spells out five words, in alphabetical order, all beginning with W, using English letters. For example:

Warrant: *a-da-ni-yv-do-di* (the "v" is silent).

Wash: *gu-hi-lo-a*.

After spelling them out he pronounces them, slowly at first, then more fluently. When he has finished he tells us we have five more words to add to our list. It's hard to see how someone would learn a language from a vocabulary list, but then again, it's hard to know where to start when the majority population has little interest in learning or even preserving a Native language. And I'm not only talking about Oklahomans and their view of Cherokee—I'm talking about Americans and their view of all Native languages.

The United States has a dismal record on minority languages. It is currently second only to Australia in the number of indigenous languages currently on the verge of extinction: the U.S. has 68 of the 516 languages identified as endangered in the world as a whole.

By these extreme and grim standards, Cherokee is doing pretty well, according to *Ethnologue*, the global language resource.

Cherokee is not as badly off as Coeur d'Alene, which at the end of the twentieth century had only five speakers out of an ethnic population of about 800, or Coos, which had one or two out of 250, nor Nisenan, which had a single speaker. These figures are based on outdated census information, though: by now, many of those last survivors must be dead.

No, Cherokee is limping but not collapsing. Combining the populations in Oklahoma and the much smaller group in North Carolina, there were 308,132 ethnic Cherokees in 1990, of whom some 14,000 could speak Cherokee as well as English, and about 130 spoke only Cherokee (a number that has likely shrunk considerably in the last two decades).

The problem is that, as in most endangered languages, it's an ageing generation that still speaks only Cherokee, or speaks any Cherokee at all. Starting some time after World War II children in most indigenous groups grew up speaking English, a generation gap that has only widened in the past 50 years. The Cherokee themselves speak less and less Cherokee, and even those who still speak the language can't necessarily read and write it. According to the Cherokee Heritage Center, only one in three or four Cherokee who can speak Cherokee can write it.

How does that compare with other tribes? Thinking back to the tribes commemorated in the street names in the Historic District of Tahlequah, Delaware is now extinct. Choctaw has perhaps 9,000 speakers, all elderly, with a literacy rate of 5-10% in their native language. Muskogee is spoken by maybe 4,000, again mostly older adults. In a generation, almost all of the indigenous languages of the United States could be dead.

The following afternoon I drive out to the Cherokee Heritage Center, a beautiful wooded site just south of town with a museum and a recreated village. Once on Cherokee Nation property, the signage changes: or the first time, all the signs are in both Cherokee and English, plus something else I haven't seen before: Cherokee words written out phonetically in the Latin alphabet so non-Cherokee-speakers (or Cherokees who know a few words of their language but can't read their syllabary) can sound them out.

This, I realize, is a gamble, and a very interesting one too.

My first reaction was one of relief: finally I can pronounce these words that hitherto had been decorative, evocative but opaque. As such, adding the Latin-alphabet version has an inviting, educational function: it offers the outsider a first step into the Cherokee language.

On the other hand, is it also the first step down a slippery incline? A number of cultures around the world have decided to abandon their own traditional script in favor of something more universal and "modern"; are the Cherokee ever likely to do the same? Their syllabary is a source of great pride to some Cherokee because it's so deeply rooted in their history and culture, but it also adds an extra step to learning the language. It's an extraordinary question: might they have to sacrifice their script in order to save their language?

In a broader sense, does it help or hurt a language to have its own unique script? Is any language always going to have to face a choice between the past and the present?

And here's an extra wrinkle to this odd situation: in Cherokee we have an endangered language and an endangered alphabet, yet in parts of Tahlequah, at least, the endangered alphabet is more visible than the endangered language is audible. The only spoken Cherokee I've heard so far has been on that one-hour radio program. Do these few symbols scattered around the historic district at least serve a signaling function, like small flags or handkerchiefs or maybe smoke signals, letting the passer-by know that Cherokee still exists as a language, not drowning but waving?

Inside the Heritage Center's museum, more mixed messages.

I've brought my Cherokee board with me, wrapped for travel in a large padded envelope.

The only employees visible are two teenagers, a boy and a girl, who are taking turns to staff the gift shop cash register and lead guided tours. I stroll over to them, slide out the board and show them.

Nothing happens. They look it over, allow as how it's nice work, and that's that. Puzzled, I press on with questions: have I got the syllabary right? Can they see any mistakes? Do they perhaps want me to make a copy so they can hang it in the Center?

They laugh a little uncomfortably and fess up: they can't read it. Maybe the director of the Center will be able to, but they're not sure, and in any case, the director is away right now.

For the first time, I get an edge-of-the-cliff-of-destruction vertiginous sense of what it means for a writing system to be endangered. It must be like the bat specialists currently investigating white-nose disease deciding to head out to the largest bat colony in the state just so they can be sure to find some bats to test, finding the mouth of the cave, squeezing inside and finding absolutely nothing alive. Here I am in the shrine to Cherokee culture and they recognize some of the characters but have no idea how to sound out the words or make meaning of them.

Yet the main exhibition at the Center offers all kinds of hope, and suggests some strategies for reviving not only a threatened language, but its unique written form.

The exhibition is called "Generations: Cherokee Language Through Art." To create it, 93 Cherokee as young as 3 and as old as 91 chose a character from the Cherokee syllabary and created a piece of 7"x7" artwork that incorporated that character. Some are painted, some photographed, some quilted, some painted or stamped in clay, some constructed out of feathers, beads, flowers, or any number of odds and ends.

In an accompanying text, each artist says what the Cherokee language in general, and this exhibition in particular, means to them. And in the background, the p.a. system carries the sounds of Cherokee voices speaking and discussing the syllabary.

This could easily have been little more than a well-meaning grade-school project for bored children on a hot afternoon, but instead the curators have worked in multiple dimensions to bring thought to bear from all kinds of angles. The sound track, voiced by elders, brings a gravitas to the overall effect. The children who have taken part in the project, all of them students in the total-immersion program that has recently started in the Cherokee school nearby, represent a generation that is not just new but newly-sprung from nothing, as it were. Ten years ago the county had virtually no Cherokee-speaking children.

The textual contributions by the adults in particular--teachers, writers, even a curator at the Smithsonian--are very thoughtful. They bring their ideas and reflections to the project ("A language is a whole ecosystem of thought," writes Jerry Flanary) but they also work in the opposite direction, showing that the Cherokee circulate in all areas of society, walk all walks of life. The issue of the Cherokee language suddenly seems much less local. This is an American question, and the Cherokee are helping Americans think about it.

The dim interior and the echoing soundtrack give the whole place the appearance of a well-lit cave. It's as if the visitor is going back in time and finding, to his surprise, not the faded petroglyphs of a long-dead civilization but color, light and laughter, the sounds of children's voices.

The following day I plan to sit in on a Cherokee language course at Northeastern State, but the course has been cancelled because of poor enrolment.

This sounds like more bad news about Cherokee, but once again the situation is more equivocal than it may seem. The abandoned course is not a lone outrider but a sign that NSU, like several other colleges and universities, is taking Cherokee more rather than less seriously.

Wyman Kirk, one of the instructors (he describes himself as a “re-learner” of Cherokee), emails me an overview. In collaboration with the Cherokee Nation, NSU offers a B.Ed. in Cherokee Language and will shortly offer a B.A. in Cherokee—something along the lines of a Cherokee Studies degree, he explains. Three people have already graduated with the B.Ed. The first was Greg Drowningbear, who has moved on to teach Cherokee language at the University of Oklahoma, a major regional university. One of the other two, Rebecca Drywater, directs the Cherokee Nation Immersion School, and as such was partly responsible for the “Generations” exhibition at the Heritage Center.

The NSU program, then, though recent and still quite small, may already be having an impact on the fate of the Cherokee language. Nor is it the only higher education program in Cherokee, Kirk explains. Back in the homelands, Western Carolina University in North Carolina offers a minor in Cherokee Studies which includes several Cherokee language courses in a Cherokee Language Program, part of an ongoing process to revitalize Cherokee there, with funding from the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. The University of Oklahoma offers several Cherokee language courses, as do Tulsa Community College, Rogers State College in Claremore, Oklahoma, and Haskell Indian Nations College in Kansas.

“As for other places,” he concludes, “I’m not sure. I know that several colleges and universities have offered and probably still offer Cherokee language (usually two semesters or so), but I can’t recall the exact names and places. There’s a community college in Texas (I believe in Plano) that offers Cherokee, and I know Cherokee has been offered in other colleges in Texas as well. The difficulty in offering Cherokee is, as you’d expect, having someone who can teach the class.”

He signs off:

Donadagohv’i,

Wyman Kirk

The Tahlequah Public Library has no books in Cherokee, or even posters in Cherokee that might arouse a curious young mind to ask questions. It does, however, have microfilm holdings of the *Cherokee Phoenix*, from the newspaper’s brief flourishing in the decade or so between the first appearance of printed Cherokee and the Trail of Tears. Here’s the very first issue of the *Phoenix*, printed in Atlanta in February 1828, all sooty around the slightly ragged edges. It presents news and views of the day, plus the text of the Cherokee Constitution, all alternating between English and Cherokee. One of the editors explains the virtues of the newly-minted Cherokee syllabary which, it argues, is considerably easier to learn than English.

It’s been years since I’ve used a microfilm viewer, and I ask at the desk for help.

“Chur-kee, can you help this gentleman out?” calls one of the library staff. A young lady comes over to show me how to operate the microfilm/PC interface. I ask her if she is indeed Cherokee, and if so, whether she speaks her native tongue. She smiles, shrugs and shakes her head at the same time. She tried learning at one point, she says, but there was nobody else for her to talk with in Cherokee, so she gave up, and since then she’s forgotten the little that she learned.

Marybeth Nelson, working at the Museum of the Five Civilized Tribes on a hilltop on the outskirts of Muskogee, a few miles down the road from Tahlequah, takes my Cherokee board and her eyebrows go up.

“This is nice work,” she says—a great compliment, as she herself is an artist who combines Cherokee words with images they represent. (Her work can be found on MySpace.) But once again, it turns out that she can’t read it: her mother was Cherokee, but her father was German and she was raised in upstate New York “among whites,” as she explains. And more interestingly, she doesn’t think I’ve got the lettering right.

“Hmmm,” she says. “I don’t know that letter. Nor that one.”

That’s interesting, I thought. *She didn’t say, “You’ve got this letter wrong.” She said, “I don’t know that letter.”* We think of language as being right or wrong, but that implies a settled alphabet and a series of language guardians, so to speak, who prevent it from morphing. For her, Cherokee is a core group of known letters, but beyond that anything might be happening in terms of regional variants, new evolutions. All languages have a penumbra, a grey area at the edges, but with Cherokee the penumbra might be as large as the solid core.

I’ll come back later to the question of which letters I’d got “wrong,” and why. Right now, Marybeth is following a different train of thought; she’s talking about her own difficulties with painting the characters of the Cherokee syllabary.

Like several other people I’ve spoken to, she admits to finding the syllabary difficult. It’s those serifs, after all. She’s all too aware that shaping a letter slightly differently may change its pronunciation entirely. Cherokee has three forms of S, she explains, and at least two look identical at first glance.

It seems to me, though, that this is not so much a problem with Cherokee so much as a difficulty that comes from being educated first in the English language. The Cherokee W isn’t a W at all, nor is the S an S. This problem, it seems to me, is entirely a product of the Reverend Worcester’s desire to create a printed Cherokee script—to make Cherokee more English, in other words. By making Sequoyah’s original symbols look more familiar to English or European eyes, Worcester was actually creating a long-term problem he surely didn’t foresee: he loaded down the characters with the wrong phonetic luggage.

It wasn’t just that he made a W that should not be pronounced as a W; he created an entire range of characters that looked as if they should be voiced in the same way and with the same assumptions that we voice English letters. That’s just plain misleading. In English we have a letter for each sound; except in very rare instances, we don’t need to modify a character with some kind of additional printed appendage to indicate it needs to be voiced a certain way. Anyone who learns Cherokee from birth, and learns the syllabary from birth as a mother tongue, learns to look for and understand this signage just as anyone learning Arabic from birth is entirely at home with an array of diacritics that leave an English-speaker flatfooted and gasping.

But nowadays Marybeth’s problem is the rule rather than the exception: it’s entirely possible that there is not a single young Cherokee who has learned the tongue of his grandparents from birth and the symbols of Sequoyah as his or her first experience in reading. Everyone nowadays is working backwards from Worcester’s version. An entire language is in retrofit.

I ask her about the Five Civilized Tribes: Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Muscogee (Creek) and Seminole, called “civilized” because they adopted, or adapted, white technologies or practices. Only Cherokee, though, had developed its own written language. Did that help the language survive? Had the other languages fallen farther into disuse?

Marybeth frankly doesn’t know much about the other languages. The gift shop sells basic introductory books for Creek and Seminole, but they’re not exactly user-friendly. They seem to have been written as grammars, not as how-to books, hardly exuding confidence that anyone will actually want to learn that tongue.

One of my ambitions for this brief trip is to have someone write out Article 1 of the UDHR in handwritten Cherokee. The version I have seems all too mechanical; apart from my various minor mistakes, it could have been stamped into the board. I’d far rather carve something that was a clear echo of language that someone actually wrote, the style and personality of the writer embodied in the slope of letters, the sweep of the hand.

Marybeth understands what I’m after and why—she just doesn’t know anyone who can do it.

She confers with a colleague, who is also Cherokee. Neither knows anyone around here who can actually write Cherokee by hand.

She knows some people who may be able to help me, but they're in North Carolina. She'll put in some calls and let me know.

The Cherokee Nation Complex is right next to Route 62, and the first landmarks you see, coming from Muskogee, are Sequoyah school, a magnificent new structure in reddish-brown stone, its architecture suggesting its cultural origins and purpose. Rising beside it is a tall white water-tower, decorated with an arrowhead and the word Sequoyah—possibly the only example of a major hydrological apparatus named after a linguist.

The complex is rich with bilingual signs in Cherokee and English, but tucked away a little downhill on the campus is the only building I come across whose signage is in Cherokee alone—suitably enough, as this is the elementary school where the Cherokee-only immersion program is held. Children, almost all of whom speak English at home, typically start the program at the age of three or four. Once inside the school, English stops.

At the moment, the program has about 60 kids, and extends up through third grade. Each year, the administrators hope to add another year.

The teachers have the only qualifications that are available: they can speak, read and write Cherokee and are willing to teach. This was an issue of debate before the program began: do you start to revive a language by teaching it, or do you wait until the revival has gone far enough to create people who are qualified to teach it?

The decision was made: even if the program was run by volunteers and relearners who themselves were learning on the job, so be it.

If the Cherokee had waited for a sufficient number of college-trained state-certified teachers who had the language abilities and wanted to teach in the program, they might have waited for ever.

“If this generation doesn't learn,” one of the teachers tells me, “we'll pretty well have lost the language.”

Perhaps half a mile from Sequoyah School in the direction of Tahlequah, the main administrative offices of the Cherokee Nation spread out beside the main road. My first port of call is the office of the monthly *Cherokee Phoenix*, which occupies several rooms of a converted motel.

The paper, like the Cherokee, has been through more than its share of hardships. Its most recent revival began with the long-delayed constitutional recognition of the Cherokee Nation in 1975.

Its current editor, Bryan Pollard, grew up in Oklahoma, and was working as an editor in Oregon when he decided he wanted to be closer to his grandparents, one of whom was (half) Cherokee. He returned to Cherokee County, where the editor of the *Phoenix* created a job for him—and when the editor retired, he took over the paper.

In addition to providing Cherokee news, the paper has taken on a broader and weightier task: to assist in the revival of the Cherokee language.

Each issue, Bryan sends between two and seven articles over to Anna Huckaby, in the Nation's education-and-translation office, to translate—even though almost nobody will read the Cherokee version.

“We're putting the cart before the horse,” he admitted. “We want the language to be available so that if someone sees it they might become curious, and take an interest. We're hoping that it's a spark of inspiration rather than a utility of communication. We're hoping that the spark of inspiration will *lead* to the utility of communication. I hope that one day we'll be able to publish entirely in both English and Cherokee, and a mass of people will be able to read either one, but that's not the case at the moment.”

I think the conversation is more or less over, but Bryan adds two more discoveries to my visit.

The first is that he figures out why two of my characters were unfamiliar to Marybeth Nelson at the Museum of the Five Civilized Tribes.

He doesn't read, speak or write Cherokee, but he has looked long and hard at the language with the eye of someone who knows a fair amount about writing and printing.

Some of the variants in carving, he suspects, probably came from Cherokee relying on a type-based form that seemed durable and consistent but was actually surprisingly vulnerable. One syllable, which is pronounced “*de*” but looks like an S, has especially elaborate serifs—and at some point, either because of a fracture in a single piece of type or pixilation in a computer font, appears to have suffered a sideways shift halfway up as if caught in a very small earthquake. In the version I copied, those serifs had been extended until they looked like a pair of horizontal lines running across the S. (Frankly, this is a plausible error because a different character, *ga*, looks like a capital S with a *single* horizontal line running across it!) And nobody at the press, of course, would have known it was a mistake.

Another error, he shows me, in the syllable *wa*, was probably caused by a pixilation on an enlarged computer font. What I'd taken as a diacritical mark is probably just a serif that got slightly separated from its parent letter.

Later, I go back to the Wikipedia entry on the Cherokee language and despite a certain vainglorious boasting (“since the fairly recent addition of the Cherokee syllables to Unicode, the Cherokee language is experiencing a renaissance in its use on the Internet”) the example it gives—Article 1 of the UDHR, not surprisingly—is vertically compressed to a disturbing degree and its diacritical points are barely decipherable. It's worse than useless.

The map is not the territory, and the Internet is not the map.

We get to talking about the original version of Cherokee, the handwritten language that Sequoyah created that is now generally thought of as dead and vanished.

Bryan, it turns out, has given a great deal of thought to this original form. He goes over to a shelf and takes down several sheets of paper. Over the last few years, he says, he's collected as many specimens of old cursive Cherokee as he could find in an effort to try to reconstruct the language as Sequoyah created it.

“I tried to find points of truth in each one and then I tried to crawl into the mind of Sequoyah.”

It was, he explained, a process of pattern discovery. What does each version of the same character have in common? Which might have been an original, and which a corruption?

That's the question I've been facing, too, in my carving project. How do I know what is really representative of any given script, especially an endangered one? Of any given letter, what is personal idiosyncrasy and what is essential? When does an n become an h—or do we decide largely on the basis of context? After all, “She invited me ih” means nothing; “She invited me in” might mean everything.

For Bryan, it was an even harder job because Sequoyah himself almost certainly went through a series of prototypes (Cherokee.1, Cherokee1.1, Cherokee 2.0, as it were) before he was finished, and his ribbon-like cursive is far less easy for us to recognize than the Anglo-based typeface that we have now.

Abruptly, he steps back from the desktop with his sheets of paper, and rolls up a sleeve. This is why he was pursuing his studies in original Cherokee so devotedly: he wanted to be tattooed in it.

He displays his tats: one on each upper arm, one on each lower leg. The spell out the Cherokee words for generosity, honesty, patience and humility. The letters curl like unspooling ribbon.

Bryan's ur-Cherokee is extraordinary, not so much an example of language as art, as in the exhibition at the Heritage center, as it is an

example of art as language. The stiffness of the printed Cherokee is gone, and with it the strange and unconvincing welding of stolid upright with appended twiddle, accessory or ornament.

Each one has the thick luscious strokework of calligraphy. Some are like soft wrought iron; others have the fantastical elaboration of an Elizabethan signature. Many seem like musical notation, but musical notation freed of the responsibilities to stay within the usual dot-and-stick limitations and allowed to dance with the music itself.

If this is really written language the way Sequoyah envisioned it, his conception not only had the intellectual brilliance required to create a writing system from scratch, but an aesthetic brilliance that loved the way a pen moves on a page.

His tattoos raise the fascinating question of how Cherokee might have developed if it had not been converted so quickly into a printed form. What if it had had, say, twenty years to develop as a handwritten language?

Maybe a cursive form would have developed. As Bryan's tattoos show, Sequoyah was working on a form that not only identified individual syllabic sounds with particular symbols, but also created symbols that had a flowing, hand-made quality and could easily be joined to create unified words. And as such it might have evolved into something smoother, more flowing, and just plain more user-friendly than it is now.

We will never know if that would have happened—we don't even know if it *did* happen—but it's a fascinating notion that the Cherokee language, which must have set some kind of world record in moving from invention to mechanical reproduction, was disseminated, ultimately saved and yet permanently hampered by being rushed into print.

Bryan sends me across the parking lot to the central building of the Cherokee Nation with instructions to ask for Anna Huckaby, in the Nation's translation and education office.

Anna is perhaps 50, friendly but deliberate in manner. She went to school at a time when a kid would still get insulted or abused for being or speaking Cherokee. It was a different kind of immersion: every class was taught in English. There were three or four other Cherokee kids in her class, she said, and they'd help each other out, but if the teacher heard them talking in Cherokee the kids wouldn't see recess again for a week or more.

At home her parents spoke Cherokee. Her father was a storyteller rather than a reader, but her mother read stories to the kids every night from the Bible, and Anna decided she would learn to read and write so she would be able to tell those stories too. The only incursion by English into their home was on Saturday nights, when the radio was turned on for the Grand Ole Opry.

At what point, I asked her, did the children in Cherokee households start to grow up speaking English? I had noticed a fairly specific age divide: everyone I interviewed who was under the age of about fifty told me that they never learned more than a few words of Cherokee, if that—but they also said that their parents spoke the language. This would put the great change at some point after the Second World War, perhaps?

"It was television that did it," she says. The timing would certainly match: in rural America, television would have appeared between about 1948 and 1952, the wealthier households buying the first sets. Anna believes it was television that drove the wedge between the generations, and between the languages. The Cherokee kids who grew up watching it not only learned English, but through English-language television learned to scan a broader, more colourful, more exciting horizon.

I explain the reason for my visit, produce my now well-travelled board, and hand it to her. She calls in Ed Thrower, one of her assistant translators, and holds it so Ed can see it, and they both lean forward.

Their reaction puzzles me. They both look at it, saying nothing.

"What do you think, Ed?" Anna asks. Ed, who is not a hasty man, studies it for a long time, saying nothing, expressionless. It takes him as long to digest it as it would have taken me to digest the same two sentences in German, which I studied for four years in high school and haven't used in the 38 years since. Is he noticing the variants? Is he confused by them? Does he see them as mistakes?

"Does it make sense?" I ask.

"Oh, I've got most of it," he says, not taking his eyes off the board. "It's just this word here."

"Is it wrong?"

He shakes his head, frowning at the board. Finally it hits me: it's a word he doesn't know. He can sound it out, because Cherokee is a phonetic language, but he doesn't know what it means.

I feel like such an idiot. Not only am I still assuming that a Cherokee would know Cherokee, but I was making the absurd assumption that to know a language was to know all of a language, as if a language were a sense or a skill rather than a set of verbal symbols.

By this logic, it's a mistake to think of language as either living or dead. Language is a muscle: the more we use it, and the greater the range over which we stretch it, the healthier it is. On the other hand, the less you use it, the more it atrophies to the point of uselessness.

In its decades of decline, Cherokee has been used, I imagine, in a steadily dwindling range of circumstances. Infrequently-used words have been forgotten or not passed on, and the core vocabulary must have become steadily less applicable to a world of increasingly rapid change. The text of the UDHR, in its formal, even diplomatic prose, ventures well beyond the core vocabulary in any language, living or moribund. If I walk out of my front door and collar the first person passing my house, can I guarantee that he or she will be able to make accurate use of the word "endowed"? How many people are completely comfortable with abstractions such as "reason," "conscience," "dignity," even "rights"?

Moreover, if you know only, say, 500 words in one language but 25,000 in another, necessity will drag you toward the latter: the first is sooner or later going to melt into the second, leaving only the words for which the second has no equivalent.

Luckily, Cherokee is a polysynthetic language that gives great play to compound metaphors. Wikipedia (summarizing Ruth Bradley Holmes and Betty Sharp Smith's *Beginning Cherokee*, published by the University of Oklahoma Press) observes that the Cherokee language has coined the delightful words *di-ti-yo-hi-hi* (literally, "he who argues repeatedly and on purpose with a purpose") to mean "lawyer," and *di-da-ni-yi-sgi* (literally, "he catches them finally and conclusively") to mean "policeman."

Finally Ed nods, and reads it aloud in Cherokee to Anna, who reads it aloud back to him, comparing notes. They both nod, gravely, in approval.

"That's well said," Ed says.

"I might use that," Anna agrees.

Finally, I ask if either of them would mind writing out Article 1 of the UDHR in Cherokee. Anna passes the task over to Ed, who draws a piece of lined paper toward him and goes to work painstakingly, with a pencil.

Struck by a thought, I ask a second favour. I've already carved the title-sign for the exhibition, but it would be so much more interesting if it read "Endangered Alphabets" not only in English but in one of the endangered scripts. Anna agrees, and while Ed is working on his copying she pulls up a piece of paper and a pen, and stares at the ceiling in deep thought.

Both processes take much longer than I'd expected. As I've said, Ed is not a hasty man in speech or manner. When he finishes he checks his work several times, and has Anna check it again.

When they finally show it to me, I am inwardly disappointed. He has copied every base-and-capital serif with the utmost care, has made every syllabic character upright, crisp, perfectly articulated. It looks just like the carving. It looks printed. Those two sentences have taken Ed fourteen minutes.

Anna, meanwhile, has been working earnestly on the translation of "Endangered Alphabets."

Anna consults both Ed and a dictionary. "Alphabets" is hard to translate, and in any case makes no sense when Cherokee is a syllabary rather than an alphabet. They go with "languages," a technical point I'm willing to concede: in the case of Cherokee, if one dies, the other dies.

What about "endangered"? What does that actually mean? I suggest "In danger," but they are well aware that the phrase begs the question of the degree of danger and its urgency. They try several options, rejecting "in danger of being lost" as too mild. They settle on "in danger of dying."

The work doesn't end there. As Anna starts to write the final words, she pauses, her lips moving, and she and Ed move through a fascinating process that might be called linguistic excavation. They can say the word "danger" to each other easily enough, but because Cherokee is written phonetically she needs more than a conversational adequacy, the kind of approximation we all make every time we speak. She and Ed speak the word back and forth to each other. Is it *go-na-yay-gi* or *go-na-yay-ga*?

Anna and Ed come to a decision, and she writes it out in a beautiful, albeit simplified Cherokee, perhaps the Cherokee of the future, not cursive but unencumbered by the serifs of a white man's typography:

There's one more twist in this story.

Later, when I come to write this text out by hand, in pencil, in preparation for carving it, I decide to make sure I've got her characters right. In checking her writing against the Cherokee syllabary on Wikipedia and in the www.native-languages.org web site, I discover that in no fewer than three places she's used a character that's *not on the chart*. It's a version of the "di" syllable, but it's got a line through it. And she's the official translator for the Cherokee Nation!

An endangered alphabet (or in this case, syllabary) is exquisitely vulnerable to error and variation. All it takes is a slip or an idiosyncratic choice by one printer, or even one person, and the language may be changed forever. The English letter E is used probably billions of times every day—an enormous mass of tradition and habit that makes it almost unthinkable that anyone would write it, say, without the top bar, and equally unthinkable that if such a mistake were made, it wouldn't be noticed and corrected every time, over and over.

A vital language in widespread use is a major river, with its own current and direction. An endangered language is barely a trickle. A leaf, a twig, a pebble may be enough to divert its course or dam it up altogether, and a hot day may evaporate it out of existence.

It's obvious that a spoken language may die if each of the last few speakers has nobody else to talk to in their native tongue. What's not so obvious is that a written language needs tending, and the fewer people who write it, the more skilled attention and tending it needs.

Bryan's goal may be realized when he can run equal column inches in English and Cherokee, but perhaps the most encouraging sign of health will be when someone writes a letter to the editor, in Cherokee, pointing out a typo.

Tim Brookes is an English-born writer and journalist, now resident in the USA, with a special interest in endangered alphabets.

You can find out more about his unique alphabet-carving project on his web-site/blog, www.timbrookesinc.com. He is also developing a publishing company at Champlain College, Burlington, Vermont.

Many of Fiji's 300 dialects in danger of being lost

By Epeli Vakatawa and Solomone Meciusela in Suva, from Pacific Scoop (NZ)

Seventy-six year old Jona Yabaki is somewhat unique when it comes to indigenous Fijians living in Suva. He does not speak the standard Fijian language (known as Bauan) that is widely used for communication in Fiji's capital and in most parts of the country.

Yabaki, from Jiliva village in Kadavu, only speaks his village dialect. He is the only one in the family of eight fluent in the dialect. The rest speak standard Fijian or mixed form of their own dialect.

"If we want to preserve our dialect, we should speak it. We should ensure that it is also used by the community, especially children," says Yabaki.

These are significant words, given that many different indigenous Fijian dialects are in danger of being lost forever.

Dr Paul Greaghty, associate professor in linguistics at the University of the South Pacific, says there are around 300 Fijian "communalects" in Fiji, but the figure is decreasing.

"Every part of the islands is losing its language to some extent; there is nowhere in the country where the language is being maintained," says Dr Geraghty, an authority on indigenous Fijian languages. Language loss occurs when a language that previously existed no longer exists because nobody speaks it any more. Many varieties of Fijian have been replaced by standard Fijian.

According to Geraghty, most villages in areas such as Nacekoro eastwards towards Naweni in Cakaudrove have lost their dialects. The list includes Qoma, Verata and many parts of Lomaiviti, including Koro to some extent. In the urban areas, the cosmopolitan make-up has contributed to language loss.

Dominant dialect

Dr Geraghty says the dominant standard Fijian spoken in the country is not the Bauan dialect it is often assumed to be.

"The Bauan dialect is the communalect spoken by the people of Bau, and increasingly, Bauans are changing their dialect to sound more like standard Fijian. In fact, the Bauan dialect is probably one of those that is endangered," he says.

Standard Fijian became known as Vosa vakaViti Raraba in the 1970s when the first monolingual Fijian Dictionary began, according to Dr Geraghty. "Every dialect is becoming more like standard Fijian with every generation," he says.

A senior researcher at the Institute of Fijian Language and Culture (IFLC), Sekove Bigitibau, concurs with Dr Geraghty. "One major reason for the loss of dialects is that people speak standard Fijian instead of their own dialects," he says.

Bigitibau says the standard Fijian widely used today is not only spoken by indigenous Fijians who live in the urban areas but increasingly by the non-indigenous population. Apart from standard Fijian, English is inundating Fijian dialects.

Bigitibau says it seems parents do not care about the loss of their dialects and do not bother to speak them at home, or teach them to their children.

Language loss

According to Dr Geraghty, language loss also results when parents do not teach their children.

“A lot of parents think if they speak English to their child, they will become educationally successful. But there is absolutely no proof of that.”

In fact, Dr Geraghty says Fijian children in Suva who are most successful in education are the ones who actually know their own dialect.

“Children who are taught at home by their parents because they are multilingual have a broader view,” he says.

Language preservation is one of the key priorities of UNESCO. This year it launched an electronic version of the new edition of its Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger. The atlas lists about 2500 endangered languages around the world. It says that although around 6000 languages still exist, many are under threat.

Fiji, according to UNESCO, is better off than some places in the world, including parts of the Pacific, where the situation is extreme and languages almost extinct. But Fiji's situation is still a matter of concern, especially if preservation efforts are minimal or non-existent. According to UNESCO, language diversity is essential to human heritage. “Each and every language embodies the unique cultural wisdom of a people. The loss of any language is thus a loss for all humanity,” says UNESCO's new edition atlas.

Cultural identity

Bigitibau says language is “God given” and an integral part of a people's identity. “This makes it an important aspect of any culture.”

The Fiji government through the IFLC is conducting research and compiling records.

Bigitibau says the Fijian monolingual dictionary that was launched in 2007 is a positive breakthrough.

Dr Geraghty, one of the researchers of the Fijian dictionary, says preservation is the first step.

“We can preserve dead things, even dead languages. What is needed next is to revitalise the use of our dialects.”

Dr Geraghty adds that there is a need to make the Fijian language a medium of teaching in early education. Dr Jacqueline Fa'anunu, a lecturer in linguistics at USP, says that in Tonga, the use of the Tongan language in schools has proven successful in boosting literacy levels.

“In Tongan schools, students in their first six years learn literacy skill in their own language,” she says.

“This is the correct way to go because they are learning to read and write in a language they already know.”

Dr Fa'anunu adds that for Fiji, it would be a challenge to have the same concept considering the diverse ethnicity.

Yabaki of Kadavu, referred to earlier in the story, did not forget his dialect even though he has lived in a settlement in Suva alongside Fijians from different parts of the country for more than 30 years.

“We should take care of something that belongs to us,” he says, referring to the precious gift of one's native tongue.

Epeli Vakatawa and Solomone Meciusela are student journalists at the University of the South Pacific.

East Turkestan: UAA Concerned about Comments on Language Policy

Below is a press release published by the Uyghur American Association (from the UNPO web-site).

The Uyghur American Association (UAA) is concerned that comments made recently by the Chairman of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, Nur Bekri, are an attempt to label peaceful Uyghurs as terrorist suspects and indicate an intensification in the Chinese authorities' campaign to marginalize the Uyghur language.

In a report issued on June 5, 2009 by the China Daily, the Chinese government's English language newspaper, Mr. Bekri is quoted as saying that “[t]errorists from neighboring countries mainly target Uyghurs [Uyghurs] that are relatively isolated from mainstream society as they cannot speak Mandarin. They are then tricked into terrorist activities”.

The China Daily article also reports an acceleration in the implementation of the “bilingual” education policy in East Turkestan, which is also known as Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. Since its inception in 2002, the “bilingual” education policy has mandated the use of Mandarin Chinese as the primary language of instruction for Uyghur students throughout the education system. Mr. Bekri said that “[t]he students have benefited from mastering Mandarin. We are making our best effort to create opportunities and an environment for them to learn the language”.

UAA believes Mr. Bekri's comments imply that those Uyghurs who only speak their mother tongue are inherently terrorist suspects. UAA also believes that by associating the Uyghur language with terrorism, Mr. Bekri is attempting to justify a language planning policy aimed at eliminating the use of the Uyghur language in the education system.

In a statement, Uyghur democracy leader, Ms. Rebiya Kadeer, said “Nur Bekri's comments illustrate the irresponsibility of the officials supposedly charged with the welfare of millions of Uyghurs in East Turkestan. The Uyghur language, which was spoken in East Turkestan long before the Mandarin language and is the mother tongue of Mr. Bekri, is under intense pressure. Mr. Bekri has made suspects of all those people who speak Uyghur in East Turkestan. His promotion of “bilingual” education will result in the elimination of the Uyghur language in East Turkestan as future generations of Uyghurs are educated in Mandarin Chinese.”

The People's Republic of China (PRC) is removing Uyghur language instruction from schools in East Turkestan in violation of its domestic law and international agreements. In the past two decades, and with increasing intensity since 2002, China has pursued assimilationist policies aimed at eliminating Uyghur as a language of instruction in East Turkestan.

Employing the term “bilingual” education, the PRC is, in reality, implementing a monolingual Chinese language education system that undermines the linguistic basis of Uyghur culture.

The “bilingual” education imperative marks a dramatic shift away from more egalitarian past policies that provided choice for Uyghur parents in their children's languages of instruction.

Greenland: speaking Kalaallisut to the Naalakkersuisut

Brussels, 24/06/2009 by Davyth Hicks (from Eurolang web-site)

On Sunday Greenland ushered in a new era of self-governance that may lead to eventual independence from Denmark, its ruler since 1721. Kalaallisut, also known as Greenlandic, a traditional Inuit language, is the country's official language, and Greenlanders are now recognized under international law as a separate people from Danes.

Galician: over 50% are mother tongue speakers

Santiago, Thursday, 25 June 2009 by Fernando Arrizado Abuin (from Eurolang web-site)

A new survey launched in Galicia indicates that 50.3% of the inhabitants of Galicia have the Galician language as their mother tongue. Also, the survey shows that only 3% of those living in Galicia consider themselves as Spanish only.

24.2% have grown up bilingually in both Galician and Spanish, according to the survey conducted by the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (Sociological Research Centre, CIS).

The study, undertaken in March after the elections to the Galician Parliament and published last week, indicates that only 24.9% recognize Castilian (Spanish) as their mother tongue.

Politically, nearly one quarter of around 3,000 respondents declared themselves as Galician nationalists. 62% of Galicians are comfortable with the present level of self-government that the Autonomous Communities in the Spanish state have.

Seven in ten citizens consider themselves Galician and Spanish equally. Almost 20% feel more Galician than Spanish. 3.8% sees themselves as just Galician, in contrast to 3% who see themselves as Spanish only.

The CIS is an independent entity assigned to the Ministry of the Presidency of the Spanish Government. It was established in 1977 to study Spanish society, using public opinion polls as one of its main forms of data. (Eurolang 2009)

UHI's Gaelic-language strategy sets standard

From the Times Higher Education Supplement, 13 August 2009
By **Hannah Fearn**

Degrees in subjects from music to media studies will be taught in Gaelic by a Scottish institution in a move that others in the sector are being encouraged to follow.

The UHI Millennium Institute will also offer its students modules in the history and culture of Gaelic as part of a newly launched language plan.

Other subjects to be offered in the tongue include cultural studies, education and teaching.

The institute, which has 11 constituent colleges and is soon to become the University of the Highlands and Islands, is leading the way in Scotland by publishing a Gaelic-language strategy.

It follows in the footsteps of Welsh universities, which already offer similar provision in their native tongue.

The universities of Aberystwyth, Bangor and Swansea are among those that offer degrees taught in Welsh in disciplines other than the language itself.

Anna Walker, Gaelic development officer at UHI, said the language strategy would open up the institution to new learners.

"We're delivering services to communities where Gaelic is a living language," she said. "We have a duty to support potential and existing students, and we're allowing them to use their language of choice."

Hugh Dan MacLennan, a member of the management support team at Bord na Gaidhlig, Scotland's Gaelic Language Board, said the university was "ahead of the field".

He said: "UHI is strategically and practically in a very important position within the Gaelic education sector."

"It's very important it is seen to be delivering a meaningful and robust Gaelic policy. If it is not doing so successfully, others will not follow suit."

Other universities in Scotland may follow the institution's lead. The University of Glasgow recently appointed a Gaelic development officer, and a language strategy is expected to follow. "One would hope that where one institution goes, others will follow,"

Dr MacLennan said. "We're looking to UHI to set a standard."

Southeast Sulawesi Tribe Using Korean Alphabet to Preserve Native Tongue

From the Jakarta Globe, 6 August 2009

Seoul. A small Indonesian ethnic group with no written version of its language has decided to adopt the Korean alphabet known as Hangul, a scholar involved in the project said on Thursday.

It is the first case of Hangul, a phonetic alphabet, being used by a foreign society, said Seoul National University professor Lee Ho-Young.

Lee said that the Cia-Cia ethnic group in the southern part of Buton Island in Southeast Sulawesi, including in the city of Bau-Bau, had adopted the script to transcribe its aboriginal Austronesian language.

Their language is also known as Cia-Cia and is closely related to the Wolio language prevalent in Southeast Sulawesi.

Ancient Cia-Cia literature exists in the Gundul script, a form of Arabic with five additional letters and no signs to denote vocals that was used in the old Malay world.

Lee said that the city on July 21 began teaching students the alphabet based on textbooks created by the Hunminjeongeum Research Institute, a linguistic society in Seoul.

"The Cia-Cia are now able to preserve their native language," said Lee, an institute member who played a key role in creating the textbooks, describing the case as "historic."

The books explain the history and culture of the ethnic group, which numbers about 60,000. "I hope this will be a stepping stone for the spread of Hangul abroad," Lee said.

The decision "reflects our efforts for years to spread Hangul abroad," he said. "The tribe also wanted to promote economic and cultural exchanges with our country."

The institute has promised to start work in November on a cultural center for the ethnic group, to train language teachers and to support cultural exchanges.

It has been trying for years to spread the Korean alphabet to minority tribes across Asia who lack their own writing system.

The institute was quoted by The Korea Times on Thursday as saying that the Cia-Cia had been "on the verge of losing its language, due to a lack of tool to hand it down to its descendants."

According to the institute, since last month, dozens of children in the tribe have learned how to write, read and pronounce the Korean alphabet based on a textbook provided by the institute. Another 140 high school students in the city have recently followed suit, it added.

Agence France-Presse

4. Appeals, News and Views from Endangered Communities

Kenya: Kalenjin Knowledge Network

A new initiative has been launched to bring together Kalenjin intellectuals, business leaders and professionals with European scholars who have conducted research on the Kalenjin communities. The aim of the network is to:

1. bring together those interested in Kalenjin language and culture;
2. promote scholarship on the Kalenjin communities and the training of young Kalenjin scholars';
3. develop an archive for Kalenjin research and scholarship, and ensure that copies of all the relevant academic work (including policy research) on Kalenjin culture and language are held in the major university libraries in Kenya, and in the local 'outposts' of the Kenyan National Library situated in various locations within the different Kalenjin areas; and
4. to encourage Kalenjin professionals, NGO activists and community leaders to read, comment on and use the research materials produced on their communities, and to involve them in collaborative scholarship with Kenyan and overseas scholars where feasible and appropriate.

The knowledge network is being led by Kibny'aanko Seroney and the first meeting of the network will be in London in the autumn. We are writing to you now to invite you to join the network and to take an active part in the further development of this initiative. We would be particularly interested to know if you have current or future work planned, and if you can put us in touch with other scholars working on the Kalenjin.

Kibny'aanko Seroney can be contacted by e-mail at: kseroney at kassfm.co.uk. KASS-FM is the first Kenyan radio station to broadcast live from outside Kenya, and can boast 4.2 millions of listeners. On 2nd October 2009 it will be celebrating its 1st anniversary with an event to be held at the London School of Economics.

5. Allied Societies and Activities

Langscape – Vanishing Voices of the Great Andamanese

As your Editor, I would like to give a plug to an excellent sister publication – *Langscape*, the quarterly newsletter of Terralingua, an

organisation sympathetic to our aims. The Spring 2009 issue contained an excellent article on the 'Vanishing Voices of the Great Andamanese' by the noted expert on the languages of the Andaman Islands, Anvita Abbi. *Langscape* is available on-line. If you would like to join Terralingua and receive its newsletter, the e-mail contact is membership at terralingua.org.

6. Letters to the Editor

7. Publications, Book Reviews

The Cambridge Handbook of Literacy

The Cambridge Handbook of Literacy, ed. David R. Olson & Nancy Torrance, Cambridge University Press, 2009: ISBN13-9870521862202

This handbook marks the transformation of the topic of literacy from the narrower concerns with learning to read and write to an interdisciplinary enquiry into the various roles of writing and reading in the full range of social and psychological functions in both modern and developing societies. It does so by exploring the nature and development of writing systems, the relations between speech and writing, the history of the social uses of writing, the evolution of conventions of reading, the social and developmental dimensions of acquiring literate competencies, and, more generally, the conceptual and cognitive dimensions of literacy as a set of social practices.

Contributors to the volume are leading scholars drawn from such disciplines as linguistics, literature, history, anthropology, psychology, the neurosciences, cultural psychology, and education. (*Publishers' notice*)

Spelling and Society

Mark Sebba: Spelling and Society, Cambridge University Press, 2007: ISBN13-9870521848459

Spelling matters to people. In America and Britain every day, members of the public write to the media on spelling issues, and take part in spelling contests. In Germany, a reform of the spelling system has provoked a constitutional crisis; in Galicia, a 'war of orthographies' parallels an intense public debate on national identity; on walls, bridges and trains globally, PUNX and ANARKISTS proclaim their identities orthographically. The way we spell often represents an attempt to associate with, or dissociate from, other languages. In *Spelling and Society*, Mark Sebba explores why matters of orthography are of real concern to so many groups, as a reflection of culture, history and social practices, and as a powerful symbol of national or local identity. The book will be welcomed by students and researchers in English language, orthography and sociolinguistics, and by anyone interested in the importance of spelling in contemporary society. (*Publishers' notice*)

Indigenous Language Revitalization

Readers of the *Ogmios* Newsletter might be interested in the new 2009 book downloadable at <http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~jar/ILR/> titled "Indigenous Language Revitalization: Encouragement, Guidance & Lessons Learned" edited by Jon Reyhner and Louise Lockard and published by Northern Arizona University. Its contents include:

1. Encouragement Guidance and Lessons Learned: 21 Years in an Immersion School

Darrell Kipp

2. Wenesh Waa Oshkii-Bmaadizijig Noondamowaad? What Will the Young Children Learn.

Margaret Noori

3. Someone Else's Language: On the Role of Linguists in Language Revitalization.

Margaret Speas

4. Must There Be Two Solitudes? Language Activists and Linguists Working Together.

Keren Rice

5. Linguistic Cages and the Limits of Linguists.

Lenore Grenoble

6. Language Renewal as Sites of Language Ideological Struggle: The Need for "Ideological Clarification".

Paul V. Kroskrity

7. Changing Pronunciation of the Maori Language: Implications for Revitalization.

Jeanette King, Ray Harlow, Catherine Watson, Peter Keegan and Margaret Maclagan

8. Language is Life: The Worldview of Second Language Speakers of Maori.

Jeanette King

9. Reo o te Kainga (Language of the Home): A Ngai Te Rangi Language Regeneration Project.

Ngareta Timutimu, Teraania Ormsby-Teki and Riri Ellis

10. Indigenous New Words Creation: Perspectives from Alaska and Hawai'i.

Larry Kimura, The Hawaiian Lexicon Committee and Islik April G.L. Counciller

11. The Pedagogical Potential of Multimedia Dictionaries: Lessons from a Community Dictionary Project.

Haley De Korne and The Burt Lake Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians

12. Developing Intermediate Language Learning Materials: A Labrador Inuttitut Story Database.

Joan Dicker, Ewan Dunbar and Alana Johns

13. Indigenous Language Revitalization and Technology: From Tradition to Contemporary Domains.

Candace K. Galla

14. Blackfoot Lullabies and Language Revitalization.

Mizuki Miyashita and Shirlee Crow Shoe

15. Modifying Assessment Tools for Ganohsesge:kha: He:nodeye:stha, a Seneca Culture-language School.

Melissa Borgia

Gaps in Australia's Indigenous Language Policy.

Gaps in Australia's Indigenous Language Policy: dismantling bilingual education in the Northern Territory by Jane Simpson, Jo Caffery, and Patrick McConvell, AIATSIS Research Discussion Paper number 24, Canberra 2009.

This Discussion Paper is a timely response to the decision taken in 2008, recorded in recent issues of *Ogmios*, by the Education Depart-

ment in the Northern Territory of Australia, to cut back severely on bilingual education in indigenous languages and English in the schools of the Territory. The document is the results of workshops and a detailed survey of the situation before and since this crisis in education, and interviews with numerous Indigenous people. It makes an eloquent appeal for the right to bilingual education as a vital factor in the retention of indigenous languages.

Chris Moseley

8.Places to go on the Web

Compiled by Francis Hult

Circle of Stories

<http://www.pbs.org/circleofstories/>

A resource that explores Native American Storytelling through documentary film, art, and photography. Resources, including lesson plans, are available for educators.

Disappearing Languages

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/mission/enduringvoices/index.html>

'Enduring Voices—Documenting the Planet's Endangered Languages.' The website provides links and resources about documenting and revitalizing endangered languages throughout the world.

The Linguists

<http://thelinguists.com/>

The official website for the documentary film *The Linguists*. The site includes information about the film, dates and locations of upcoming screenings, and information about purchasing the DVD.

First International Conference on Heritage/Community Languages

<http://www.international.ucla.edu/languages/nhlrc/conference/>

This conference, sponsored by the National Heritage Language Resource Center at UCLA, will take place from 19-21 February 2010. The plenary speakers are Nancy H. Hornberger, Joe Lo Bianco, and Maria Polinsky.

Endangered Languages Radio Program

<http://wamu.org/programs/kn/07/03/07.php>

A program about endangered languages on American University Radio, hosted by Matthew Fellig and featuring David Lightfoot, Kendall King, David Rood, Begona Echeverria. Audio download available.

Information and Resources on Dying Languages

<http://www.endangered-languages.com/>

A website that provides links to books, websites, audiovisual material, and other information about dying languages throughout the world. The site was founded by Swarthmore College undergraduates Aaron Stein, Michael Shin, and Rio Akasaka.

Endangered Languages of Indigenous Peoples of Siberia

<http://lingsib.unesco.ru/en/>

A website for information about indigenous languages in the Siberia region. The site includes information about research and educational projects related to languages such as Aleut, Chelkan, Chulym, Ket, Nivkh, Oroch, Selkup, Shor, and Udeghé.

Northern Multilingualism

<http://www.northernmultilingualism.fi/>

This site describes a multi-sited, longitudinal research project to document multilingualism in the North Calotte region and related areas. The project examines relationships among indigenous languages, national languages, and international languages in the areas of media, education, and tourism.

Native American Language Center

<http://nas.ucdavis.edu/NALC/home.html>

The NACL at the University of California, Davis promotes research and education related to the preservation and revitalization of Native American languages. The site provides links to current projects as well as additional web resources.

Index of Native American Language Resources

<http://www.hanksville.org/NAresources/indices/NALanguage.html>

This is a list of numerous general resources as well as specific information about the languages of the Iroquois Confederacy, Cherokee, Navajo, Ojibwe, Sioux/Lakhota/Dakota, among others.

New Lakota dictionary takes publishers' award

From Lakota Language News (www.lakhota.org)

In June 2009, the Lakota Language Consortium's (LLC) New Lakota Dictionary received the Bronze Medal in the "Reference" category of the 13th annual Independent Publishers' Book Awards (IPPY) competition.

The competition, hosted by the Independent Book Publishers' Association, recognizes excellence in independent publishing. "This is great news," said Wil Meya, Executive Director of the LLC. "There were more than 3,380 entries in 65 national categories overall and to receive the 2009 IPPY award is certainly an honour. It reflects well on the quality of the dictionary and all the hard work by the editor and all the contributors." Other presses honoured included Yale University Press, which led the medal count with five, and Indiana University Press and Kent State University Press followed with four and three medals.

Three anonymous judges vetted the Lakota dictionary. Competition judges hold various roles within the book community: newspaper reviewers, librarians, bookstore owners and buyers, designers and other publishing professionals.

The New Lakota Dictionary represents a major step in standardizing Lakota writing and provides Lakota-English/English-Lakota sections and incorporates the dialects of Yankton-Yanktonai and Santee-Sisseton.

The Dictionary contains 20,000 definitions, including over 6,000 words that have never appeared in a dictionary, and a 90-page section on grammar. The 3,000 "most important" words are highlighted.

9. Forthcoming events

International Seminar on Endangered Languages in India, 22nd-23rd October 2009

Two day international seminar on language endangerment on 22nd-23rd October 2009 in collaboration with India International Centre, Sahitya Akademi, CIIL, ICCR

Day 1 (22nd October 2009) Inauguration and Plenary Session

Inaugural address by Sunil Gangopadhyay, Chairman Sahitya Academy.

Keynote Address: Christopher Moseley (Editor-in-chief, World Atlas of Endangered Languages, UNESCO)

Session I: Overview of Endangered Languages in India

Which language family poses the biggest threat?

Which geographical areas are threatened most?

Session II: Is Revival Possible or Desirable - Best Practices

Problems and solutions in revival programmes

How to save endangered languages - Documentation and Archiving

Day 2 (Friday, 23rd October)

Session I: Impact of Hindi on Unwritten Languages

Hill regions & North East Regions

Other Regions

Bilingualism and multilingualism (including Hindi and 3 language formula, life expectancy of a language in a multilingual context)

Session II: Language & Power & VIIIth Schedule

Valedictory Session: Opening Address

Summing up and recommendations

Valedictory lecture

Closing Remarks (INTACH)

Workshop on the Languages of Papua. Melanesian languages on the edge of Asia: past, present and future

8th-12th February 2010, Manokwari, Indonesia

First Call for Abstracts

This workshop will focus on the most linguistically diverse part of the world – Melanesia – which straddles countries of Southeast Asia and the Pacific. Melanesia contains around a fifth of the world's 6,000 languages in under 3% of its land area and less than 0.2% of its population.

These languages are astonishingly diverse, barely known to science, and face the threat of extinction without trace in the coming century unless concerted international efforts are made to meet the huge challenge of documenting them. This conference addresses the scientific issues raised by these languages. The scientific part of the program will cover the whole gamut of linguistic questions from phonology to syntax to typology to historical linguistics, as well as topics bordering musicology, anthropology and prehistory, plus papers on digital archiving, documentary linguistics, scientific infrastructure and the training of linguists from minority language groups. Besides the scientific questions, the theoretical recognition of cultural and linguistic rights of minority groups in Indonesia, Timor Leste and Papua New Guinea faces enormous practical difficulties if it is to be realised, as national governments have indicated they wish, as education programs that allow children to receive part of their schooling in their mother-tongue.

The conference will run from Monday the 8th to Friday the 12th February 2010, and will include a free day for an excursion and informal discussions on Wednesday 10th.

The conference will be followed by a one-day master class on Field Methods and Language Resources on Saturday the 13th of February.

Invited speakers include Linda Barwick, Steven Bird, Mark Donohue, Michael Dunn, Nikolaus Himmelmann, Steve Levinson, and Ger Reesink. David Gil, Department of Linguistics, Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology

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 concerned human beings, will applaud them in trying to preserve part of the diversity which is one of our greatest strengths and treasures.

1.3. The Need for an Organization

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

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

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

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

In order to further these aims, there is a need for an autonomous international organization which is not constrained or influenced by matters of race, politics, gender or religion.

This organization will recognise in language issues the principles of self-determination, and group and individual rights. It will pay due regard to economic, social, cultural, community and humanitarian considerations. Although it may work with any international, regional or local Authority, it will retain its independence throughout. Membership will be open to those in all walks of life.

2. Aims and Objectives

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

- To raise awareness of endangered languages, both inside and outside the communities where they are spoken, through all media;
- To support the use of endangered languages in all contexts: at home, in education, in the media, and in social, cultural and economic life;
- To monitor linguistic policies and practices, and to seek to influence the appropriate authorities where necessary;
- To support the documentation of endangered languages, by offering financial assistance, training, or facilities for the publication of results;
- To collect together and make available information of use in the preservation of endangered languages;
- To disseminate information on all of the above activities as widely as possible.



The Baybayin script of the Philippines, as carved by Tim Brookes. See his article 'In Search of Cherokee' in this issue.