

FOUNDATION FOR ENDANGERED LANGUAGES

OGMIOS



OGMIOS Newsletter 42: — 31 August 2010

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A view of the campus of Trinity St David, University of Wales, venue of the Foundation's 14th annual conference, September 2010

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Merlin counsels King Vortigern on the red dragon and the white:



King Vortigern - fleeing the Saxons - was trying to build a castle at Dinas Emrys Snowdonia. But the building would not stay up: Vortigern was advised that a fatherless child must be sacrificed. Now Merlin had no human father. But he also saw that the true cause was an underground pool where a red and a white dragon fought, the white winning at first, but then the red .The red dragon was the Britons, and the white dragon, the Saxons.

1. Editorial

For its fourteenth annual conference, The Foundation of Endangered Languages is coming 'home' to British Isles for once, namely to Carmarthen in Wales, between 13 and 15 September 2010. This issue of *Ogmios* will appear at about the same time as the conference, and registrations for it have already closed, so the announcement of the conference appears below as a matter of record. In the previous issue we had the announcement of our Annual General Meeting, which is, as usual, being held in the middle of the annual conference, to ensure the presence of the maximum number of members old and new, and thus a quorum for the meeting and a forum for discussion of the Foundation's work.

At the time of writing these lines, Pakistan is suffering terribly from flooding; one fifth of the country is under water and millions of people are dispossessed of their homes, livelihoods and many lives have been lost. Even strictly from the point of view of endangered languages, this humanitarian disaster will have a serious impact on the country's minority language situation. Naturally that cannot be an immediately priority for those providing aid, but in the longer term the smaller languages of Pakistan are likely to be in greater danger than they were. Our committee member Saiqa Asif in Multan has sent graphic accounts of the nature and scale of the humanitarian catastrophe. In future issues of *Ogmios* I hope we will be able to provide some news and analysis of the impact of the disaster on the linguistic make-up of Pakistan.

In neighbouring India, the representation of language endangerment in that country by the *UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger* continues to provoke some controversy in the media. In this issue we reproduce one reaction from a leading Indian Newspaper. Although there appears to be some lingering confusion about what constitutes a 'language' or a 'mother tongue' in the terms of the Indian census, it is invigorating that so much interest in the subject is taken by the Indian press.

Chris Moseley

2. Development of the Foundation

FEL XIV. Reversing Language Shift: How to Re-awaken a Language Tradition

University of Wales, Trinity Saint David, Carmarthen, Wales, 13-15 September, 2010

The Foundation for Endangered Languages, in association with the University of Wales, Trinity Saint David is holding its fourteenth annual conference on the theme of Reversing Language Shift.

Language revitalisation is now receiving greater attention from academics, language planners, politicians, institutions and organisations worldwide. A step further than documentation, language revitalisation, supported by active policy, offers the possibility of reversing a shift that threatens over half of the world's languages

Many take language vitality to be symbolic of national and cultural identity. In the Celtic regions, in particular, governments are taking a leading role in the struggle to reverse language shift by various efforts including attempts to increase the number of speakers of the respective languages.

Wales provides a good vantage point from which to consider prospects for reversing language shift. It has experience in gauging levels of political support at local, national and international levels. Census figures show an increase in the number of users of Welsh, especially amongst the younger generation, which can be attributed to the education system. However, some academics doubt whether such in-

creases in speaker numbers lead to increased language fluency and use. While efforts to achieve the Welsh Assembly's goal of a "bilingual Wales" have led to demands for greater legislative powers and autonomy on linguistic issues, immigration into the traditional heartlands is steadily reducing the density of Welsh-speakers there.

Language revitalisation requires the collaboration of a wide range of expertise. Institutional, political, and local support all play crucial roles, along with educationists and language planners. But how can these, working together, have practical effects in the daily language usage of ordinary people?

Travel

Carmarthen's nearest airport is Cardiff, 110 Km away. If direct flights to Cardiff are unavailable, try Bristol (175 Km from Carmarthen) before any of the London airports.

Trinity University College, Carmarthen and Saint David's University College, Lampeter, are merging, a process to be completed by September 2010. Trinity University College is famous in Wales for promotion of bilingualism and bilingual teaching, recognised by the Welsh Assembly Government as a key provider of Welsh-medium higher education.

The Carmarthen (Caerfyrddin - "Castle Merlin") campus of University of Wales, Trinity Saint David is situated on the edge of a market town with a population of 13,500, most of them fluent Welsh-speakers. The town claims to be the oldest in Wales, with a medieval castle and a Roman amphitheatre. Carmarthen's name under Roman rule was Moridunum Demetarum ("Sea Fort of Dyfed", in English).

Conference chair

Dr Hywel Glyn Lewis

Ysgol y Gymraeg ac Astudiaethau Dwyieithrydd School of Welsh and Bilingualism Studies

Prifysgol Cymru: Y Drindod Dewi Sant University of Wales: Trinity Saint David

Caerfyrddin Carmarthen

Cymru Wales, UK

Executive Committee meeting 14 August

The FEL Executive Committee met on 14 August in advance of the next Conference. The main item of discussion was the forthcoming Conference (FEL XIV). Hywel Lewis has done a sterling job and the programme looks good with interesting keynotes confirmed. The social side has not been neglected either, with traditional Welsh singing and dancing laid on for one of the evening. The Welsh connection continues with excursions to two local schools a primary (5 – 11) and secondary (11 – 16) where teaching is in the medium of Welsh and for some pupils it is their second language.

Fundraising was another topic. It's not something we have been good at least in terms of raising significant amounts. The Committee has decided to set up a strategy subcommittee after the Conference to look at ways of doing this more effectively – if any readers have ideas we'd be pleased to have them – email suggestions to the Secretary.

Our work for UNESCO continues. For those unaware we have contracted to provide a service checking comments on the *Atlas of World's Languages in Danger* (<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00139>). Perhaps as a result of this we have also been asked to bid for the running of a small grants scheme that UNESCO are planning.

3. Endangered Languages in the News

An Essay in Wood

Tim Brookes

The Endangered Alphabets Project began as a way to solve a perennial problem: what to get the family for Christmas, especially when we have no money?

Let me back up. Ever since I started writing about guitars and guitarmaking, one of my pleasures has been to drop in at my local speciality hardwood shop.

The place is constantly in a fine balance between order and clutter: boards eight and ten feet tall leaning against the walls, half-finished kitchen counters or shelving units standing on the shop floor, the brief, decisive whine of the circular saw, the lower considered drone of the sander echoing through the tawny room.

I go there as a bottom-feeder, rooting through the bin of offcuts for a nice remnant of cherry or curly maple that might cost me a dollar, looking for interesting blemishes, a knot-hole like a black sun or the thumb-hole in a painter's palette. I love the deep planky rattle as the boards fall back against each other or against the wall, the smell of sawdust and the faintly oily aroma of cherry and some of the exotics: teak, mahogany, blackwood, little-known varieties of rosewood from Madagascar and South America.

Most of the boards, of course, are long cut-and-planed rectangles, but one day I came across something different, just in, brought down in the back of a pickup by a farmer from up near the Canadian border: a stack of half-a-dozen maple flitches.

A flitch is a slab of wood you get when you cut a tree lengthwise into strips without squaring it off first. (The same word is used when a butcher does the same thing to bacon.) In other words, each piece of wood has what is called a "live edge"—one lengthwise edge, or perhaps both, that follow the ragged contour of the trunk, often with the bark still clinging in place.

In the case of these boards, every one had that ripple in the grain that makes some woodworkers call it tiger maple, and others curly maple: once carved and painted, a coat of polyurethane makes the grain spring into an opalescent third dimension, taking on the illusion of depth called *chatoyance*—literally cat's-eye-ness.

The wood was so compelling I went back several times, looking for an excuse to buy some and do something with it. I'm not a luthier or a cabinetmaker or a woodworker, but I thought I might just be able to carve some signs.

I'd made a sign to hang outside my wife Barbara's therapy office, and another to go by the mailbox outside our front door—very basic stuff—but Christmas was approaching, I had no money to buy presents, and I'd heard Barbara say she could use another sign to go on the door of her consulting-room. Hearing this, my older daughter Zoe, a senior at the Rhode Island School of Design, asked that while I was at it, could I make a sign for her to hang by her work at the annual RISD art sale?

Over the ten weeks before Christmas I went back four or five times, at first buying just a two-foot piece off the end of one board, finally buying the last flitch in the shop, the skinny one that must have been the penultimate slice off the trunk, bark all the way up both edges, the whole flitch ten inches at its widest.

Working in that familiar pre-Christmas secrecy, I made one sign for Barbara, another for Zoe, another for my younger daughter Maddy, who saw Zoe's sign and decided she wanted one too, another for my

sister Jennie in London to hang by their front door like a shingle to announce her boyfriend's photography studio, and one for the Division of Communication and Creative Media office on the campus of Champlain College, where I teach. I became Joe Signage.

After Christmas, which seemed to go very well, I noticed a rectangular hole in the living-room wall which I'd cut as a recessed niche for a stereo system, but the stereo had turned out to be so crappy we'd pulled it out and thrown it away. The space was calling out to be filled with some kind of objet d'art, or maybe another carved sign—but the niche was vertical rather than horizontal, and all my signs were horizontal. Wait a moment: a sign would be vertical if it were in Chinese....

I looked up the Chinese characters for "House of Music and Art," and carved them into a piece of white maple, filling in the letters with glossy black enamel paint, the final product looking almost like black ink on silk.

This launched my Chinese-carving phase. I came up with Chinese monograms for everyone in the family and carved them into Barbara's flute case, into the underside of a set of wooden plates. I made individual door-plates for Zoe and her boyfriend Chad, to go along with matching plant shelves for the post-graduation apartment, each bearing a Chinese character for luck.

By February I had run out of ideas for Chinese-character projects. Maybe I'll work with another language, I thought, and what came to mind was Malayalam.

I'd seen plenty of Malayalam in southern India, and I loved its (to me) incomprehensible curls: it was like a writing system made up of elaborately-bent paper clips. Googling for Malayalam, I came across the website that changed everything: Omniglot.com, a site dedicated to all the world's writing systems, past and present, extinct and living, real and imaginary.

It was a stunning panorama. What inventive genius! What staggering variety! Some languages seemed more like elaborate decorations than meaningful symbols; some looked more like thickets of thorn bushes; some seemed utterly alien, as if the hand of man had had nothing to do with their creation at all.

At the same time, though, I was struck by how *few* different writing forms exist on the planet. The world's 6,000-plus languages are written in fewer than a hundred alphabets. Whole areas of the globe—South America, for example—are home to a bewildering variety of tongues, but are all written in the Latin alphabet. Admittedly, in many cases (Australia, for example, and parts of Africa) that's because indigenous societies hadn't developed writing before they were visited or overrun by Europeans, but in many cases a local written form, invented by local genius and using local materials, was marginalized by the colonizers and ultimately abandoned by its creators.

The Latin alphabet in particular has gone from being the alphabet of military empire to the alphabet of economic empires and, most recently, of the Internet. On a global scale, writing is already dominated by as few as four major alphabets: Latin, Arabic, Cyrillic, and Chinese.

What's more, of the fewer-than-a-hundred writing systems currently in use, more than a third are endangered. One fascinating and unfamiliar script after another is no longer taught in schools, no longer used for commerce or government, understood only by a few elders, restricted to a few monasteries or used only in ceremonial documents, magic spells, or secret love letters.

By chance, the text that Simon Ager, the creator and curator of Omniglot, had chosen to illustrate all these writing systems in action came from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), adopted by the United Nations in 1948. In point of fact, Simon was making use of an opportunity already provided for him by the U.N., which was and is in the process of translating the UDHR into every

language in the world. What struck me, though, was the actual language of Article One, his text example of choice:

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.

This exhortation, in combination with the rarity or even extinction of so many of the languages and/or writing systems of the world, seemed bitterly ironic: the endangered alphabets had shrunk to the margins of their societies precisely because people had *not* acted towards each other in a spirit of brotherhood. A more powerful nation had overwhelmed weaker ones; majorities had suppressed minorities; and now the global expansion of computing and the Internet had accelerated the process of extinction. These gnarly or magnificent old scripts were being replaced by the beige, rectangular uniformity of the keyboard.

I decided there and then that I'd carve Article One of the UDHR in maybe eight or ten of the most endangered writing systems.

To say I didn't know what I was doing is a laughable understatement. I'm not a linguist, or an anthropologist, or (what would have been most useful) a linguistic anthropologist. I didn't even know there were such creatures. I didn't know anything about the history of writing except what I'd seen in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo: a series of statues combined with hieroglyphics that suggested art and writing had a common ancestry.

I'd like to be able to say I chose my subjects based on which were in the most immediate danger, but it's not true. The rarest writing systems were most likely to have caused Simon Ager the greatest trouble, too, and instead of Article One he had been forced to substitute some piece of ancient poetry, or a fragment from some scroll. I was determined not to accept substitutes, but that meant I spent a year and a half trying to find one of the vanishingly small number of people who could still write in these arcane and archaic scripts and beg them to write Article One for me. Availability, in the end, turned out to be the common denominator. I even chose to include one script for reasons that turned out to be entirely false—but false in a way that was so interesting I decided to include it anyway.

Needless to say, I couldn't speak, read or write any of the languages I ended up carving, though in some cases I came to recognize certain valuable landmarks, such as the punctuation that denoted the end of a sentence.

What's more, I'm a writer, not an artist. My mother was an artist, and my daughters have picked up the gene that skipped a beat. Back when I was in high school, the only subjects I consistently came close to failing were art and woodwork.

Above all, I thought this project was a kind of ridiculous obsession, like the guy who builds a scale model of Rouen Cathedral in his garage, using nothing but matchsticks and glue. It never occurred to me that anyone else would be remotely interested.



The history of any creative project is a story of its mistakes. My mistakes began long before I even started carving.

I assumed that Sterling would of course have more maple flitches with that wonderful ripple in the grain. I loved the idea of these scripts appearing between live edges, as if to emphasize the antiquity of the scripts, their handmade nature.

Not so: the farmer had dropped off just those few boards, and had then retreated into the snowiest corner of the state for the winter. Flitches of curly maple are, in fact, pretty rare. I had a Catch-22, maybe even a Catch-44 on my hands:

A: Every sawmill is set up to cut boards, not flitches: the first thing they do is run the trunks through the saw to take off the bark. The default setting is the clean rectangle.

B: Few maple trees have that glorious ripple, and there's no way to identify them from the outside.

C: I could go to a mill and pick through the boards to find some with the grain I wanted, but then I'd have a squared-off board, not a live edge.

D: By the same token, if I could find someone who would take down a maple tree and cut it into flitches, there was no guarantee the grain would be anything other than straight and dull.

I called three lumberyards. No luck. I called two foresters. No luck.

I called the state Forest Products Association. No luck. I looked through website photos of online wood-sellers. (Some luck, but the cost of shipping would kill me.) I found the name of someone who would undertake to track down maple flitches for me, but that kind of hand-selection would end up costing me as much as an entire forest.

In the end, my salvation was a typical Vermont salvation: the farmer who had supplied those original flitches called the hardwoods shop Sterling to say he had some more, but he couldn't get to them right now as they were buried under several feet of snow. As soon as the weather warmed up a little he dug them out, threw them in the truck, drove down to Burlington, and the Endangered Alphabets Project was a go.

Over the next few months, after many trials and almost as many errors, I developed a carve-and-paint modus operandi.

Once I'd chosen an image—in this case, of course, a piece of some unfamiliar text, usually found online or sent to me by some kind correspondent in some distant corner of the world—I printed it out as large as I could on our little home printer and took it and a slab of maple down to Kinko's. Oddly enough, this caused little stir or comment. Only one person, a young woman of college age, ever asked me about this strange combination of weird writing and slabs o'wood. Once I'd explained it all and she had shown considerable interest, I returned the favor. "And what's that you're working on?" I asked.

"I'm printing out pornography," she said. "It's an art project."

At Kinko's I enlarged the original to the point where it occupied pretty much the right space on the wood, a process involving a maximum of eyeballing and a minimum of actual measuring. (If you're thinking of writing to me and telling me how I could have done some aspect of this project more quickly, cheaply, accurately and with less physical pain, let me warn you not to bother. Several hundred woodworkers are in line ahead of you.)

Next came the stage that caused me the most trouble: image transfer—that is, getting the words from the paper to the wood. When I started out making signs, I taped the paper in place over the wood and went around the outline of each letter with a thin awl making an outline of tiny holes that I used as carving guides. The trouble was, if you look at any of those signs carefully, you can still see many of the tiny holes. Besides, this method only worked for fairly large letters and shapes. Once I started on my Chinese series, I needed a new method. I tried taping the original over the wood and then outlining each character in ballpoint pen, pressing as hard as I

could--and to my surprise that worked quite well, leaving a faint but distinct impression in the wood. The trouble here was that hard areas of the wood (knots, for example) took almost no impression at all.

Plus, let's not rule out stupidity. When I came back from Kinko's with my 11"x17" sheet of photocopier paper, I found that the paper was larger than the board, and, instead of trimming off the excess, I folded it under. That left me with a nice clear image nicely centered on the board, but of course I'd doubled the thickness of the paper I was pressing on, and twenty minutes of grunting, pressing and outlining produced no usable impression at all. The amazing thing is that I made this mistake not once but three times.

Finally I asked Zoe how she did her image transfers. She gave me a long and complicated explanation involving oil of winter-green, but then added as an afterthought, "Of course, you could use transfer paper."

"What's that?" I asked, feeling stupid.

"It's like carbon paper for artists," she said casually. "In fact, you could probably just use carbon paper. Be much cheaper."

Once the image was inscribed on the face of the board and I'd peeled off both the photocopy and the transfer paper, leaving a slightly sooty but workable series of letter-shapes on the wood, I carved each letter using a set of high-quality gouges that I ordered from a catalogue. The longest I've ever carved at a sitting is about an hour and a half; after about 45 minutes my shoulders start aching.

I used to paint the interior of each letter as soon as I had finished carving, but I found to my horror that if the wood is at all fibrous each fiber acts like blotting-paper, and the paint seeps outside the carved shape by capillary action, leaving a ghastly fuzz instead of a clean outline. So I got into the habit of stroking a layer of polyurethane on the newly-carved letters, which did a fair, if not perfect, job of sealing the fibers and keeping the paint where it was supposed to be.

Once the polyurethane had dried, I painted the hollowed-out letters, using black enamel paint—horrible stuff, sticky and hard to clean, but it stood out wonderfully against the wood without looking gaudy. At first I used a \$17 Asian watercolor brush from the high-end art supplies store in town, but frankly enamel paint is a beast, and it ruins any paintbrush pretty quickly. Pretty soon I switched to 85-cent fine-point brushes from the low-end art supplies store and cleaned them literally every three-quarters of an hour with paint thinner, as by then they were clotting into something sticky and useless.

To be honest, the painting stage allowed me to make up for some of the carving mistakes, and once the paint was dry, sanding allowed me to make up for some of the painting mistakes. After that, I cleaned off the sandpaper dust, did a little touch-up, added two coats of polyurethane and I was done--at least until it came time to add nameplates to the back of each board, so exhibitors hanging the strange lettering would know not only which sign was which but even which way up they were supposed to hang.

The image transfer took maybe three hours, the carving spread out over a week or two, the painting could take easily two weeks—but the truth is, once I got into the rhythm of the project this labor, usually at the end of the evening when the rest of the family had gone to bed, this became one of my favorite times of the day. I'm a cerebral person, with a mind that can easily fill up with thoughts like flies in a jar, but the act of carving or painting, of forcing myself to calm down and be utterly precise, shut out everything else.

Meanwhile, something else was going on. Instead of studying languages like a linguist, I was literally making languages, and this odd act of walking in someone else's shoes invited all kinds of questions. Why were the letters of Babayin so thin? Why did Bugis consist of the same shape, repeated time and again in slightly different combinations? Why did Cherokee and Inuktitut consist of such

precise and geometrical shapes, so hard to carve and so unnatural to the movement of the wrist? Was it a coincidence that the scripts of island nations seemed to look like mountains and waves? Why did Samaritan keep reminding me of the Sherlock Holmes story "The Case of the Dancing Men"? Did left-to-right writing predispose the writers in that culture to develop left-handedly? Where could I find an expert on a language that was now used by only a hundred people in the whole world? Who were these people who were now devoting their lives to converting vanishing languages to Unicode? And what was happening to writing in general, all over the world, under the expansive and even imperial onslaught of the computer and the Internet, the keyboard and the laser printer? In short, what could I learn about a written language by the act of carving it?

The Endangered Alphabets Project began to diverge. The original carving-and-exhibition project continued more or less as planned; but as I jotted down my questions, last thing at night, something else developed. A writer's inquiry into writing. Endangered Alphabets, the exhibition of carvings became, in a way, an essay in wood. *Endangered Alphabets*, the book became an essay on paper, wood's offspring.

The whole show, which ended up including thirteen alphabets, took about eighteen months, and when it opened in May 2010, I was astonished at people's interest, the questions the show provoked. Within a week the project's website, www.endangeredalphabets.com, had had 5,000 hits. Interest started coming in from all over the world, and I had to go out and buy a used steamer trunk to ship the boards overseas.

The plan is to display the boards and have the book available at the FEL annual convention in Carmarthen. It's still hard for me to believe. Now if only I could get someone interested in this scale model of Rouen Cathedral.

Tim would welcome suggestions from our readers for new alphabets to tackle. He can be contacted at: timbrookes@burlington-telecom.net

Taiwan seeks to save indigenous languages

By Cindy Sui, Saisiyat tribal area, Taiwan

From BBC News Asia-Pacific web-site, 14 July 2010

Taipei secondary school student Lai Wei-li swayed awkwardly while trying to make music with a Saisiyat tribal instrument of dangling bamboo tubes strapped to her back.

"It's really cool and interesting. It's harder than it looks. I have to control my footsteps, sway my body back and forth, and co-ordinate with others," said Lai, while playing the "tapangsan".

Half Han-Chinese and half indigenous, it is not often that Lai gets to experience indigenous culture.

She can't speak the language of her tribe - the Paiwan. Her mother never learned it, and her maternal grandparents who can, live in a rural area and she only sees them twice a year.

This is the state of indigenous languages in Taiwan.

The island is considered by many anthropologists to be the source of Austronesian languages; all but one of the four primary branches are found here.

It is believed that Austronesians migrated from mainland Asia and Taiwan to South East Asia, the Pacific islands, East Timor and Madagascar thousands of years ago.

But of the world's estimated 300 million Austronesians - including New Zealand's Maoris and Hawaii's Polynesians - few can speak their language, and many languages now face extinction.

Culture eroded

In Taiwan, only about 35% of the 500,000 Austronesian indigenous people can speak their tribal language, said Chang Shin-liang, head of the language and culture department of the government's Council of Indigenous Peoples.

"We're facing a dangerous situation for indigenous languages. Seven out of 14 indigenous languages here are listed by Unesco as critically endangered," said Mr Chang.

"Many people in their 40s and 50s can't speak their mother-tongue, so they can't teach it to the younger generation. The younger people also think 'I'm fine if I can speak Mandarin and English; learning indigenous languages doesn't help me increase my competitiveness'."

The decline of the languages of the island's more than 14 tribes did not happen by accident.

The first large wave of Han Chinese to Taiwan, which started in the 17th Century, consisted of mostly men. They inter-married with indigenous people, with the Chinese culture becoming dominant.

Previous governments' oppressive policies also had destructive effects.

Under Japanese occupation (1895-1945), Taiwanese people were forced to learn and speak Japanese.

The Kuomintang party, which took power in 1945, was responsible for years of harsh suppression of native Taiwanese languages and dialects.

The Kuomintang was trying to promote Mandarin as the national language to consolidate its power, in the face of resistance over its sudden takeover of the island after it lost a civil war to China's Communist party.

"The Japanese and Kuomintang governments' combined 100-year policy of forbidding us from speaking our languages did a lot of damage. It affected three generations," said Mr Chang.

Harsh punishment

Like others of his generation, Lin Yu-cheng, 57, whose Atayal tribal name is Bon, was severely punished under Kuomintang rule when teachers caught him speaking his native language in school.

"They would beat us with bamboo sticks - sometimes until the stick broke - and with their bare hands, which left marks," said Lin, who had picked up words of the Atayal language from classmates as his parents had raised him speaking Japanese.

Teachers also made students wear wooden boards around their necks with the words "I won't speak local dialect" until the next student got in trouble; or a black button as a mark of bad behaviour until graduation day.

"This made us feel so ashamed of our language, our culture, which is something we actually should be proud of," said Lin, now director of the Saisiyat tribal community, which includes the Atayal tribe's people.

More recently, migration from tribal villages to cities, where such languages are rarely heard or spoken, has caused a further decline. About 50% of Taiwan's indigenous people live in cities.

The government has begun to make efforts to save Taiwan's indigenous languages, not only because indigenous culture is a key attraction for tourists, but there is growing recognition that it is an integral part of the island's identity.

Tribal languages are now taught in schools if there are enough students of the same tribe.

If not, children can learn at special centres that run free weekend classes; some 10,000 have already benefited. The languages have no written form, but teachers are being trained to use the Roman alphabet to make learning easier.

Future generations

Summer camps, such as the one attended by Lai in this Saisiyat tribal area in central Taiwan, are also organised. Activities here are designed to make learning fun - by mixing in ancestral worshipping rituals, lessons about medicinal plants, storytelling and music.

But some believe the government's efforts are not enough. And it is unclear whether they can undo past harm.

Some experts believe the best way to save the languages is to improve the economy in the villages where the languages are still spoken, to stem migration.

Slowly, however, there is growing interest among indigenous people and non-indigenous mainstream society in the culture. Several parents, including those who are Han Chinese, have come along to the camp, to learn alongside their children.

Bon, who is hosting Lai and 200 other students at this camp, still gets teary-eyed when he remembers being punished in school.

Despite being nearly 60, he says he also wants to take lessons.

"I want to tell the kids there's still time to learn our languages. Our mother-tongue is our mother; it's something passed down to us from our ancestors. We cannot forget it," said Bon.

At the camp, the children communicate mostly in Mandarin, but they are having a great time learning about their culture.

On arrival, Lai could only say thank you "mali mali" in her tribal dialect, but now she is singing indigenous songs.

"I hope to become fluent one day," she says. "Our culture needs to be passed to future generations."

Linguist on mission to save Inuit 'fossil language' disappearing with the ice

From the Guardian (UK), 13 August 2010 – by Mark Brown

Stephen Pax Leonard will soon swap the lawns, libraries and high tables of Cambridge University for three months of darkness, temperatures as low as -40C and hunting seals for food with a spear.

But the academic researcher, who leaves Britain this weekend, has a mission: to take the last chance to document the language and traditions of an entire culture.

"I'm extremely excited but, yes, also apprehensive," Leonard said as he made the final preparations for what is, by anyone's standards, the trip of a lifetime.

Leonard, an anthropological linguist, is to spend a year living with the Inughuit people of north-west Greenland, a tiny community whose members manage to live a similar hunting and gathering life to their ancestors. They speak a language – the dialect is called Inuktun – that has never fully been written down, and they pass down their stories and traditions orally.

"Climate change means they have around 10 or 15 years left," said Leonard. "Then they'll have to move south and in all probability move in to modern flats." If that happens, an entire language and culture is likely to disappear.

There is no Inughuit written literature but a very strong and "distinctive, intangible cultural heritage", according to Leonard. "If their language dies, their heritage and identity will die with it. The aim of this project is to record and describe it and then give it back to

the communities themselves in a form that future generations can use and understand."

The Inughuits thought they were the world's only inhabitants until an expedition led by the Scottish explorer John Ross came across them in 1818.

Unlike other Inuit communities they were not significantly influenced by the arrival of Christianity in Greenland – so they retain elements of a much older, shamanic culture – and their life is not very different now to how it always has been. Many of the men spend weeks away from home hunting seals, narwhal, walrus, whales and other mammals. And while they have tents, they still build igloos when conditions get really bad.

Their language is regarded as something of a linguistic "fossil" and one of the oldest and most "pure" Inuit dialects.

Leonard was yesterday saying goodbye to family and friends in Eastbourne. On Sunday he flies to Copenhagen – "it's the only place you can buy a Greenlandic-Danish dictionary" – and then it's off to Greenland, taking two internal flights to get to the main Inughuit settlement in Qaanaaq on the north-west coast of Greenland, north of Baffin Bay.

There, Leonard expects to hone his linguistic skills and build contacts for seven or eight months before moving to the most traditional Inughuit outpost in Siorapaluk, the most northern permanently inhabited settlement in the world, where about 70 Inughuit live. It will be here that Leonard hopes to hear the storytelling that lies at the heart of the culture.

Leonard's interest in the Inughuits began 10 years ago when he read Marie Herbert's book *The Snow People*, an account of life with the Inughuits, but it is only recently that he learned how imminent the threat is to their way of life and their culture.

"I just hadn't realised how endangered the community was and this whole culture could simply die, disappear. Normally languages die out because it is parents deciding they don't want their children to speak it."

Leonard, who is 36, will have to adapt to many things, not least the extreme temperatures. Although the average temperature is -25C, it can plummet to -40 or soar to zero in the summer. Then there is the arctic darkness, with the sun expected to go down on 24 October and not rise again until 8 March. It is this time of year that elders talk and pass on their stories and poetry.

Nevertheless, Leonard admitted: "I don't really know how I'm going to deal with it, to be honest."

There appears to be a certain inevitability to the Inughuits being soon forced from their ancient homeland to southern Greenland, making Leonard's mission all the more pressing. Climate change is already leading to a noticeable reduction in seal numbers and the ice will soon become so thin that it will be impossible to use dog sleds.

Leonard intends to record the Inughuits and, rather than writing a grammar or dictionary, produce an "ethnography of speaking" to show how their language and culture are interconnected. The recordings will be digitised and archived and returned to the community in their own language.

"These communities, which could be just years from fragmentation, want their cultural plight to be known to the rest of the world," he said.

Although the climate change catastrophe facing the Arctic is well documented and the Inughuits are visited frequently, Leonard hopes his visit will be more meaningful than others.

"One thing I have been told is that they are tired of journalists popping in and reporting how awful it is that the icebergs are melting and then that's it, so they are keen that someone comes and lives with them and reports back."

India Round Table

By Prof. Panchanan Mohanty

In May this year, three months after one of India's many endangered languages was lost with the death of its lone speaker from the 'Bo' tribe in Andaman, The Ministry of Human Resource Development set up a *Round Table for The Protection and Preservation of Indigenous Traditional Knowledge and Endangered Languages* to review the nature and extent of the threats to the remainder of the country's 196 languages becoming extinct – as warned by the UNESCO Atlas of World's Languages in Danger of Disappearing.

The committee of 21 expert linguists and academics from around the country will also look at oral traditions, identify causes and remedial measures and consider ways to incorporate these languages in the school curriculum.

The Round Table's Terms of Reference are:

1. To review the nature and extent of threat faced by different endangered languages spoken and to identify causes of threat.
2. To examine the measures undertaken to reduce/remove the threats faced by such endangered languages and recommend changes/modifications in the existing strategies.
3. To recommend strategies to ensure inter-language comparability at all levels of education.
4. To suggest measures to ensure that the constitutional obligation of imparting instructions at primary level in the mother tongue of the child is fulfilled.
5. To suggest steps to be taken for creation of trained manpower in all languages.
6. To identify the various traditional and indigenous knowledge traditions existing in the country in oral and written forms.
7. To examine relevance of traditional and indigenous knowledge for the education system and explore avenues to link the oral/traditional knowledge with the mainstream education system and/or knowledge banking systems.
8. To suggest measures to be adopted to revitalize the traditions having civilisational ramifications so as ensure their propagation and perpetuation.
9. To review the nature and extent of threat to the oral traditions and identify causes and examine the measures undertaken to redress the situation at various levels.
10. To suggest remedial steps required to be taken by the Government agencies educational institutions and related areas.

Professor Panchanan Mohanty of the Centre for Applied Linguistics and Translation Studies, University of Hyderabad, a member of the Foundation's Executive Committee, is one of those appointed to the Round table. We look forward to hearing of the Round Table's work and identifying areas where we might be able to work together.

India: Govt. chase to clear language haze

By Cithara Paul, Telegraph of India (Kolkata) 29 August 2010

New Delhi, Aug. 28: Misgivings over a Unesco report that has described 191 Indian languages as endangered and five as extinct have prompted the Centre to begin work on a white paper on tribal languages in each state.

Sixty-four languages that the latest Unesco World Atlas of Endangered Languages describes as endangered are spoken in the Northeast and along the India-Nepal border. Thirty-nine are spoken in the Northeast alone.

“Many of the languages listed as dead or endangered are very much alive and kicking. The government has decided to send fact-finding teams to every state to document the tribal languages, especially those declared dying or dead by Unesco,” a tribal affairs ministry official said.

The Centre for Tribal and Endangered Languages, a division of the Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysore, has been assigned the job. “The CIIL will bring out a white paper. That would be hard evidence which can be presented before any international body,” the official said.

Work is already on with the head of the Centre for Tribal and Endangered Languages, Prof. G. Devi Prasada Shastri, visiting the North-east.

Tribal leaders had brought the matter to the government’s notice. “We received representations that the widely spoken Aimol and Tarao had been put on the Unesco list,” the official said.

The two languages figure on Unesco’s critically endangered list, which would mean they are spoken only by the elderly and that too infrequently and partially. Aimol Literature Society chairman S.L. Warte termed the Unesco report “unfortunate” and demanded correction.

“The population that speaks Andro, Aimol and Tarao may not be large, but these languages are being spoken,” said Ch. Jashobanta, a linguistics professor at Manipur University. Jashobanta, however, agreed that the languages would count as endangered by international standards because less than 10,000 people speak them.

The CIIL says there is confusion over the definition of language. “Most languages listed in Unesco’s e-atlas are not considered languages but mother tongues in India. We go by the Census 2001 definition. If there are 10,000 or more speakers, it’s a language, else it’s a mother tongue,” a CIIL researcher said.

Mother tongues are not included in the Eighth Schedule, a list of 22 officially recognised languages. “Only if a language is in the Eighth Schedule will it be taught in schools as part of the three-language formula,” said Aravind Sachdeva, a specialist on tribal languages. He pointed to an increasing tendency among tribals to speak Hindi or English as the reason for their languages being labelled endangered.

But Asam Sahitya Sabha president Rongbong Terang and educationist Tabu Ram Taid believe tribals can protect their languages. “I don’t think any tribal language of Assam would ever become extinct. I can speak Assamese, English, Hindi and many other languages. But my mother tongue is Karbi and I speak Karbi with my family and friends,” Terang said, describing the Unesco report as exaggerated. Karbi is on the list as a vulnerable language.

Taid, closely associated with the preservation of his mother tongue Mising, too disagrees with the Unesco report. Mising, on Unesco’s endangered list, is spoken by 517,170 people out of a population of 587,310, according to the 2001 census. “Mising today has a firm written tradition and has even been introduced in primary schools,” Taid said.

4. Appeals, News and Views from Endangered Communities

International Day for World’s Indigenous Peoples: not all schoolchildren are equal

From the Education International web-site, 9 August 2010

On International Day for the World’s Indigenous Peoples, EI celebrates cultural diversity in all its forms and notes the contri-

butions of indigenous people and indigenous education workers around the world.

EI also takes this opportunity to call on its members to lobby for full respect of all human rights, including those of indigenous people, particularly in relation to the following topics:

Disappearance of many native and indigenous languages due to poor implementation of mother tongue public education programs or a lack of curricula materials;

Persistence of age-old discriminatory practices and emergence of new forms of exclusion, including the relevance of addressing development needs of indigenous people; and the

Lack of free, prior and informed consent on development initiatives and projects in the traditional lands and livelihoods of indigenous people.

It is indisputable that progress has been made towards achieving the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by the year 2015. However, as we draw closer to the UN Summit on MDGs, from 20-22 September 2010, the realisation of two goals, in particular Goal One: Eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, and Goal Two: Achieving universal primary education, are likely to be unattainable for indigenous peoples. Indeed, there is increasing evidence that indigenous peoples are generally largely overlooked in these global efforts.

A recent study undertaken by CTF/FCE, an EI affiliate in Canada shows that Aboriginal teachers encounter a variety of adverse circumstances, such as “the misunderstandings of Aboriginal education by their colleagues.” Despite the challenging social and political conditions in schools and the communities, or the effects of poverty on students, Aboriginal teachers remain committed to making a difference in education.

The 2010 UN Permanent Forum desk study on MDGs shows that the rates of poverty among indigenous peoples are much higher than the national or non-indigenous rates in developed and developing countries. Indigenous peoples remain amongst the poorest of the poor, with little reference made to them in the reports on the implementation of the MDGs.

EI General Secretary, Fred van Leeuwen, said: “Cutting back on public spending, particularly in education, affects the historical and ongoing denial of the human rights of indigenous peoples. Education is essential for the exercise of all other human rights. There is no excuse for the lack of progress in education, the heart of the Education for All (EFA) process and the MDGs.”

As discussions on EFAs and MDGs are high on the international agenda in coming months, education unions should seize the opportunity to call on their governments and the international community to ensure that public policies also benefit indigenous peoples, so that their rights are lifted to meet international standards. Local and regional policies, as well as pledges made by heads of state at United Nations meetings must also be followed through.

5. Allied Societies and Activities

Endangered Languages and Dictionaries Project

The Endangered Languages and Dictionaries Project at the University of Cambridge investigates ways of writing dictionaries that better facilitate the maintenance and revitalization of endangered languages. It explores the relationship between documenting a language and sustaining it, and entails collaboration with linguists, dictionary-

makers and educators, as well as members of endangered-language communities themselves, in order to determine what lexicographic methodologies work particularly well pedagogically for language maintenance and revitalization.

In addition to developing a methodology for writing dictionaries that are more community-focussed and collaborative in their making, content, and format, the Project is creating an online catalogue of dictionary projects around the world. If you would like your dictionary to be included in the catalogue, please fill out the Dictionary Survey at <http://www.lucy-cav.cam.ac.uk/pages/the-college/people/sarah-ogilvie/elad1.php> or contact Sarah Ogilvie at svo21@cam.ac.uk. We really hope you will want to participate, in order to make the catalogue as comprehensive as possible.

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Social Network for Language Preservation

Pangram is a social network for reviving and preserving minority languages by means of collaborative and participative efforts. Spoken word comes before literacy; yet is often the most ignored element; the site aims to provide an intriguing audio based platform that encourages the less fluent to engage, learn and connect with native speakers. It hopes to bridge the gap brought about by dominating languages and prevent languages from vanishing entirely whilst adding to a growing archive of spoken word.

A short one minute video about the project available here <http://www.vimeo.com/11649407>

The website, still under development, can be found at Pangr.org

If you would like more information, please contact me at infopangr.org
Katy Chung (infopangr.org)

7. Publications, Book Reviews

State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2010

Published by the Minority Rights Group
(www.minorityrights.org)

From the Minority Rights Group web-site

A decade into the new century sees religious minorities confronting serious violations of their rights around the globe. Following the violent attacks of 11 September 2001, governments of every political hue have used "war on terror" rhetoric to justify the repression of religious communities.

Other religious minorities have faced a violent backlash, often unjustly accused of siding with belligerents. In Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Latin America, armed conflict and land seizures have forced minority and indigenous communities away from locations central to their religious beliefs. Europe has witnessed gains by extreme rightwing political parties which are targeting religious minorities with their inflammatory language.

In Central Asia, governments have introduced tough new registration requirements for religious communities and prevented the building of places of worship. In *State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2010*, Minority Rights Group International offers a

comprehensive overview of the situation faced by minorities in a world increasingly divided along religious lines. It includes:

An analysis of government initiatives that contribute to the marginalisation of religious minorities, such as religious profiling and registration laws.

First-hand accounts, from around the world, of the discrimination and exclusion faced by those belonging to minorities who wish to exercise their right to freedom of religion and belief.

An exploration of grassroots efforts through interfaith dialogue to ease tensions, overcome conflicts, and promote peaceful and equitable development.

An overview of the human rights situation of minorities and indigenous peoples in every major world region.

The unique statistical ranking and analysis, *Peoples under Threat 2010*.

8.Places to go on the Web

Dying languages featured in World Watch magazine

The July/August 2010 issue of World Watch magazine, a publication of the World Watch Institute, features an article on dying languages, including an interview with your Editor. The magazine can be viewed on-line at <http://viewer.zmags.com/publication/71a43827>.

9. Forthcoming events

Language Endangerment: Documentation, Pedagogy, and Revitalization

Friday, 25 March 2011

Location: University of Cambridge

Call for Papers Deadline: abstracts due 26 November, 2010.
On-line Registration opens 1 January 2011.

Conveners

Dr Mari Jones (Department of French/Peterhouse, University of Cambridge)

Dr Sarah Ogilvie (Department of Linguistics/Lucy Cavendish College, University of Cambridge)

Summary

The First Cambridge International Conference on Language Endangerment will focus on language documentation, pedagogy, and revitalization.

The following speakers have agreed to give plenary sessions at the conference:

Professor Peter Austin (SOAS, University of London, UK)

Language Revitalization and Pedagogy: a case from eastern Australia

Professor David K. Harrison (Living Tongues Institute for Endangered Languages, Oregon, USA) *Language Extinction: Local and Global Perspectives*

Professor Dr Nikolaus Himmelmann (University of Münster, Germany) *On Language Documentation*

Call for Papers

This conference will bring together academics, students, and members of indigenous communities from around the world to discuss current theories, methodologies, and practices of language documentation, pedagogy, revitalization.

Most of the world's languages have diminishing numbers of speakers and are on the brink of falling silent. Currently around the globe, scholars are collaborating with members of indigenous communities to document and describe these endangered languages and cultures. Mindful that their work will be used by future speech communities to learn, teach, and revitalize their languages, scholars face new challenges in the way they gather materials and in the way they present their findings. This conference will discuss current efforts to record, collect, and archive endangered languages in writing, sound, and video that will support future language learners and speakers.

Documentation is of critical and immediate importance, and is often considered one of the main tasks of the field linguist. Future revitalization efforts may succeed or fail on the basis of the quality and range of material gathered, and yet the process may be rapid and dependent on conscious decisions by linguists and language workers who may be analyzing the form of a language for the first time, and codifying it in dictionaries and grammars. Written documentation of course not only aids the process of standardization but also serves important needs and functions within a community in support of language maintenance such as providing the basis for pedagogical materials in schools and helping to create a community's sense of identity. However, indigenous communities and scholars of endangered languages are beginning to realise that the rapid and often artificial nature of this process can have negative effects - politically, linguistically, and culturally - which feed into issues relating to education and, ultimately, language revitalization.

In addition to the opportunity of sharing experiences with a network of linguists, it is hoped that participants will leave the conference with a new understanding of the topic, innovative ideas for documentation and pedagogy within their own linguistic contexts, and a renewed vigour to implement what they have learnt in their own language situations.

Submission Guidelines

We welcome abstracts (200 words maximum) for papers (20 minute paper + 10 minute discussion) that include, among other topics, discussion of interdisciplinary approaches and innovative techniques for collecting raw material, presenting metadata, and archiving language materials; teaching endangered languages to both children and adults; and revitalizing language use in homes, schools, and communities.

Abstracts are due by 26 November 2010, and should be sent to: Dr Mari Jones (mcj11 at cam.ac.uk) and Dr Sarah Ogilvie (svo21 at cam.ac.uk).

Sponsor

The conveners are grateful for the support of The Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (CRASSH) at the University of Cambridge.

2nd International Conference on Language Documentation and Conservation: Strategies for Moving Forward

Honolulu, Hawai'i, February 11-13, 2011

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

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

The 1st ICLDC, with its theme "Supporting Small Languages Together," underscored the need for communities, linguists, and other academics to work in close collaboration. The theme of the 2nd ICLDC is "Strategies for Moving Forward." We aim to build on the strong momentum created at the 1st ICLDC and to discuss research and revitalization approaches yielding rich, accessible records which can benefit both the field of language documentation and speech communities. We hope you will join us.

TOPICS

We welcome abstracts on best practices for language documentation and conservation moving forward, which may include:

- Archiving matters
- Community-based documentation/conservation initiatives
- Data management
- Fieldwork methods
- Ethical issues
- Interdisciplinary fieldwork
- Language planning
- Lexicography
- Methods of assessing ethnolinguistic vitality
- Orthography design
- Reference grammar design
- Reports on language maintenance, preservation, and revitalization efforts
- Teaching/learning small languages
- Technology in documentation – methods and pitfalls
- Topics in areal language documentation
- Training in documentation methods – beyond the university

This is not an exhaustive list, and individual proposals on topics outside these areas are warmly welcomed.

ABSTRACT SUBMISSION

Abstracts should be submitted in English, but presentations can be in any language. We particularly welcome presentations in languages of the region discussed. Authors may submit no more than one individual and one joint (co-authored) proposal.

ABSTRACTS ARE DUE BY AUGUST 31, 2010, with notification of acceptance by September 30, 2010.



*The Baybayin script of the Philippines, as carved by Tim Brookes.
See his article 'An Essay in Wood' in this issue.*



Trinity St. David campus, Carmarthen, Wales