

FOUNDATION FOR ENDANGERED LANGUAGES

OGMIOS



Graphic design and calligraphy for the endangered Marma language: see interview with Irina Wang on p. 6.

OGMIOS Newsletter 63: — 31 August 2017

ISSN 1471-0382 Editor: Christopher Moseley

Published by:

Foundation for Endangered Languages,
129 High Street,
Hungerford, Berkshire, England

OGMIOS Newsletter 63

31 August 2017

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1. Editorial

At this time of year, and certainly by the time you read this, plans are in hand for the annual FEL conference. This year we are due to return to Europe for our venue: in fact to a country not normally associated with minority languages: Portugal. This year it is a joint conference with our friends at CILDES in Portugal and SOAS at the University of London. You'll see the details in the 'Development of the Foundation' section below.

The name of Tim Brookes will be no stranger to those who have been members of the Foundation for long enough. Working on his own away from his teaching position at Champaign, Illinois, this expatriate Englishman presented us seven years ago with his beautiful book 'Endangered Alphabets', which displayed photographs of his ornate carving on wood in some of the world's lesser known scripts. Tim appreciates these scripts from an aesthetic point of view; the content of their messages is of lesser importance to him. Now Tim has come up with an extension of this idea: board games using endangered alphabets. To some extent the notion of 'alphabet' rather than 'script' is less relevant in Tim's broad games, as the characters are now being taken in isolation, as single engraved tiles, as you will see explained in Tim's article in this issue, and in the accompanying illustrations.

Our new editor

This is the last Editorial I am writing in my long stint as your editor; it's time to hand over the task to fresher, younger blood. Our assistant editor for the past two issues, Hayley Ferguson, is taking over from me for the December issue, and she has made a big contribution to this issue too. I know that you'll support her by sending and suggesting articles to her at hayley@ogmios.org, and I know that you'll enjoy the fresh new angles she brings to the journal.

And I want to thank you, readers and members, for your support of the Foundation over the decade and more that I have been in the Editorial seat.

Christopher Moseley

2. Development of the Foundation

FEL joint Conference 2017: *Communities in Control: Learning tools and strategies for multilingual and endangered language communities*

Hotel Aerosol Alcanena, R. Zeca Afonso, 2380-909 Alcanena, Portugal, 19-21 October 2017

This year's FEL conference, *FEL XXI Alcanena*, is presented in collaboration with the following organisations:

- Mercator Research Centre (Netherlands)

- SOAS World Languages Institute (University of London, UK)
- Interdisciplinary Centre for Social and Language Documentation (CIDLeS, Portugal)

Organising committee:

- Vera Ferreira (CIDLeS)
- Cor van der Meer (Mercator)
- Mandana Seyfeddinipur (SOAS University of London)
- Nicholas Ostler (FEL)
- Steven Krauwer (CLARIN)

During the last two decades many regional, minority, and endangered languages have been documented, leading to the creation of various archived collections. This has mostly been a scholar-driven effort where the language communities have, themselves, not been involved and have not identified with the documentation projects. Most of the data thus produced, especially archived material, has, consequently, been too little used by communities for their own initiatives.

This situation requires an urgent shift in the research model and archive interfaces. It is extremely important to work directly and in collaboration with speech communities; to empower them by enabling them to participate and to bring their own needs, interests and expertise to defining and implementing research agendas and projects.

Whilst it is understandable that language documentation should follow the initiatives of scholars and communities, revitalisation - if it is to be successful - needs to be community-driven. Revitalisation should be a bottom-up process, motivated, desired and designed by the community; it must be integrated into and inseparable from everyday life.

This 3-day conference thus focuses on community-driven activities. Abstracts are invited for papers on the following sub-topics:

- Community-driven revitalisation projects
- Use of archives for language safeguarding, revitalisation and teaching
- Connecting communities to archived collections: content, interface, language
- Development of linguistic tourism: connecting language revitalisation to local economic development as a way of increasing the status of local languages

Alcanena is a municipality in Santarém district in central Portugal.

NAVLIP: Response to questions posed by FEL

Applicants for the Foundation's grants, which often involve the documentation of previously unwritten languages, are offered a separate

stream of funding, generously provided by Prof. Prasanna Chandrasekhar – conditional on their using the Navlipi script which he has created, in transcribing the language. Readers of Ogmios might not be familiar with the script and its principles. Hayley Ferguson posed some questions to Prof. Chandrasekhar on behalf of FEL.

HF: For the past few years you have been offering a separate grant from the FEL grants to applicants who are prepared to use your own Navlipi alphabet for transcribing previously unwritten languages. What motivates your generosity?

PC: I have always been very impressed with the work of FEL and have always been surprised it has not received more funding. This is especially in light of funding received by all manner of foundations and causes, including some in the linguistics field, which can sometimes run into millions of dollars per year. In comparison, my total contribution to FEL, which I believe is just about \$10,000, is paltry. But also, to be frank (and as should be somewhat evident), I also have a somewhat selfish motive – to propagate Navlipi.

HF: What are the principles behind Navlipi? We know that you have written an introductory book explaining Navlipi in detail. Not all of our grant applicants will have seen your book. Are you going to provide a simple introductory guide?

PC: NAVLIPI is the world's first truly phonemic alphabet.

See the document, NAVLIPI_MadeSimple_English_FurtherSimplified_forFEL_c.pdf, which gives a brief but succinct explanation.

HF: What if successful grant applicants run into issues using Navlipi in the field? Are you on-hand to help them solve these?

PC: Yes, definitely. As of this writing (22 August 2017), Navlipi KEYBOARDING software is available for PCs. It is also being written as we speak for Apple and Android platforms. This is expected to be ready within about two months, and will allow texting, etc. on mobile phones, tablets, etc.

HF: Are you open to updating the script should linguists find any improvements that could be made (a Navlipi V2.0, so to speak)?

PC: Yes, of course.

HF: Would you say that Navlipi is bound to a particular culture?

PC: The short answer is NO. If you look at the history of Navlipi, it originally started as a means to provide a single script (alphabet) for all languages of the Indian subcontinent. But it was quickly realized that this would be severely limiting, and so it was immediately extended to ALL the world's languages, including tone languages such as Mandarin, and click languages such as !Xo.

HF: What does the name mean?

PC: As the Preface, Introduction, etc. to the original Navlipi books say: NAVA (or NAWA), "new"; LIPI, "script", "alphabet". (Incidentally, these words exist not only in the original Sanskrit but also in modern derivative languages such as Hindi, Marathi, Bengali, etc.; much like many original Latin words

exist unchanged in modern derivative languages such as French, Italian (and English by borrowing)).

HF: What motivated you to design Navlipi?

PC: See under #6 above.

HF: Your academic background is not in language. From where do your personal interests in the field of linguistic documentation arise?

PC: From a very multilingual childhood and just natural, general interest in languages. I learned several languages on my own without ever having visited the countries of origin or ever even having spoken to speakers of the language. For example, I learned German from a book, *Deutsch leicht gemacht*, and listening to Deutsche Welle radio, at age 16, and was told by many German speakers, when I eventually traveled abroad at age 20, that I spoke "perfectly, like a native".

HF: Do you propose that Navlipi is better used for linguistic documentation, or to be introduced as a script in communities without an orthography of their own?

PC: Absolutely. I also have brought out the severe limitations of the IPA Alphabet in my original Navlipi books. (A reference to these is also in the attached MADE SIMPLE document.) And of course, the IPA Alphabet and other "universal" alphabets are NOT phonemic alphabets.

HF: How would the script be digitised?

PC: Keyboarding is already available for the PC. Very soon (by year-end 2017) to be available for Apple and Android platform mobile and portable devices and also Macs. All this is UNICODE compatible. So to answer your questions, Navlipi has already been "digitized".

HF: In what ways do you feel that Navlipi is more sympathetic to certain types of linguistic documentation than the IPA?

PC: Very briefly, there is no world alphabet or script that conveys such phonemic information clearly and practically. The alphabet of the International Phonetic Association, is a phonetic alphabet and is good at conveying fine nuances of difference between phones. However, it does not inherently convey any phonemic information. And incidentally, the IPA Alphabet, which is basically just an ad-hoc, continuous expansion of the Roman or Latin alphabet since the 19th century, has many other problems and issues that we won't go into here – three examples of these are that some of its letters are completely unrecognizable and look like they're straight from outer space, other letters are very confusing between themselves and it actually makes errors in classification with respect to certain vowel (vocalic) r-sounds.

HF: Do you expect Navlipi will be popularly adopted by the language community in time, or do you think that the IPA will continue to be more efficient in some cases?

PC: The IPA is not a phonemic alphabet so addresses a different audience. Also, it is of course my dream that NAVLIPI may in time be adopted, say, as a common script for Indian languages, then a common script for the Turkic languages which are seek-

ing, as of this writing, to transition from Cyrillic to a Roman / Latin based form.

Navlipi made simple: excerpts

Editor's note: Prof. Chandrasekhar has prepared an abridged version of his Navlipi guide, called 'Navlipi made simple' for the benefit of FEL members. The document is too long to reproduce in Ogmios, but here is a link to it:

[www.NAVLIPI_MadeSimple_English_ABRIDGED_\(noMandarinArabic\)_a.pdf](http://www.NAVLIPI_MadeSimple_English_ABRIDGED_(noMandarinArabic)_a.pdf)

What follows are excerpts from this presentation:

Phonemic Idiosyncrasies" of Languages, and the Need for a Phonemic as Opposed to Merely a Phonetic Script or Alphabet

Having now gained a basic grounding in phonetics, and also having understood the meaning of the term phoneme, the reader will now better appreciate the unique phonemic

characteristics of particular languages or language families, and the phonemic aspects of any method of writing.

For example, we can now understand that, when many Chinese languages do not phonemically distinguish between p and b or t and d (one may say teng or deng in Mandarin without change of meaning), we can say generally that they don't phonemically

distinguish between unvoiced (e.g. p or t) and voiced (e.g. b or d) phones. Similarly, when English does not distinguish between p and ph, or t and th, we say that, generally speaking for unvoiced phones, English does not phonemically distinguish between unaspirated and aspirated versions of these.

We are also now in a position to look at some more bizarre examples of phonemes unique to certain languages. In modern Parisian French (as well as standard High German (hochdeutsch), the r-sound is usually articulated from the back of the throat, more precisely the uvula (see Fig. 1-01, right above); it is in fact designated the "uvular-r" or "throaty-r". However, it can also be articulated with a "rolled" r-sound. Thus, in Parisian

French, one may pronounce rouler ("to roll") with the usual back-of-the-throat, uvular-r, or as a rolled r, rrrouler. Both are equally well understood and do not change the meaning of the word, although they in fact use radically different phones (one emanating from the uvula at the back of the throat and one emanating from the tip of the tongue touching the alveolar ridge). Thus, the uvular-r and the rolled-r belong to the same phoneme in Parisian French. Any universal script must be able to clearly indicate this. (The sharp reader may wonder whether the variants, uvular-r and rolled-rrr, can simply be considered different accents in pronunciation; this is not so, but the discussion of this is beyond our scope here.)

Another, less bizarre example is the Hindi articulation of words having w or v sounds. The w-sound is a semi-vowel, whereas

the v-sound is of course a fricative, simply the voiced version of the f-sound. Now in modern Hindi, whether one says wan or van, the word is still understood as meaning "forest". Thus, in modern Hindi, the w-sound and the v-sound belong to the same phoneme, although, again, they are quite different phones. (In fact, some native Hindi speakers confuse these sounds in other languages as well, and may order "wedgies" in English at a restaurant, when they mean veggies!) More bizarrely in Hindi, the ph-sound and the f-sound are also phonemically equivalent; thus, one can say phal or fal and still be understood as meaning "fruit". Again, any universal script-must be able to clearly indicate so.

NAVLIPI claims to be the world's first, and, as of the date of this writing, the only script conveying phonemic as well as phonetic information. It is the only script that specifically and expressly conveys phonemic information. It is the only script in which phonemic information is embodied in its letters (glyphs).

One may ask, why is conveying phonemic information in a script important at all?

We have already cited some reasons above: The ability to convey that p and b in Mandarin, p and ph in English, and v and w in Hindi, are the same phoneme in these languages, and can be freely interchanged without altering the meaning of words.

More generally speaking, if one wants to read a different language in the same, universal script, one needs to understand the unique, phonemic vagaries of that language. Thus, a

native English speaker, when reading Mandarin common speech in a universal script, needs to know that he/she can pronounce p as b and vice versa without any effect. Or the same English speaker needs to be able to understand, from the script alone and without being explicitly told so, that there is no p sound in standard Arabic, and so everything is pronounced with a b sound.

Another reason that conveying phonemic information is important is that it becomes hard to write different languages which have such different phonemes, such as English and

Mandarin, in a single, universal script. Even the IPA alphabet, that darling of phoneticists, has no way of conveying such phonemic information. This becomes important in national unity projects, such as a single script for all languages of India:

North Indian languages such as Hindi phonemically distinguish unaspirated and aspirated sounds (phones) such as p and ph, whereas South Indian languages such as Tamil do not,

and also frequently confuse aspirated and unaspirated sounds. It is thus almost impossible to write both Hindi and Tamil in the Latin or Dewanaagari scripts.

Yet another reason for conveying phonemic information is that being able to garner phonemic information on a language while reading it in a common, universal script greatly helps greatly in learning or comprehending that language. Thus, such a universal, phonemic script can greatly help in language learning in the world.

How Does NAVLIPI Transcribe and Convey Phonemic Information?

NAVLIPI is based on the 26 letters (glyphs) of the modern Roman (Latin) alphabet as used for English or Italian. (Other languages that use this alphabet as basis add additional letters, usually designated with diacritics, to designate sounds specific to their languages, yielding Latin-based-alphabets with more than 26 letters, as in the letters *å* and *ç*.)

The Latin alphabet was chosen as the basis of NAVLIPI because, quite obviously, it is the predominant script in the world as of this writing (2016). (In the original NAVLIPI

publications, NAVLIPI scripts based on other alphabets, e.g. the Dewanaagari, were also presented as an exercise.) NAVLIPI does not use diacritics (accent marks, usually placed over or under letters, e.g. *á*, *â*, *ã*, *ç*), so as to make writing, keyboarding and letter-recognition easier.

Now how does NAVLIPI transcribe phonemic information? How it does so is best illustrated by the following examples:

- *po* (the letter *p* with a subscripted little-circle) is used to represent the /p/ phoneme of English (see description above), i.e. both the *p* and the *ph* phones (sounds). That is to say, *po* = *p* + *ph*. This tells the non-English-speaking reader who may be reading English in the NAVLIPI script that this sound can be uttered as either *p* or *ph* and it would not make a difference to the meaning of English words. More generally speaking, the subscripted little-circle is the post-op for (unaspirated + aspirated). In English transcribed in NAVLIPI then, the words put and spy, would be written *pouto* and *spooa*,

- *b∞* (the letter *b* with a subscripted infinity sign) is used to represent the /b/ phoneme of Mandarin common speech (see description above), i.e. both the *p* and the *b* sounds. That is to say, *b∞* = *p* + *b*. This tells the non-Mandarin-speaking reader who may be reading Mandarin in the NAVLIPI script that this sound can be uttered as either *p* or *b* and it would not make a difference to the meaning of Mandarin words. Now the reader may ask, why is this not written as *p∞*? The answer is simple: This Mandarin phoneme is more commonly pronounced as *b* rather than as *p*. Thus, one more commonly hears *bu* rather than *pu*, although both mean the same thing in Mandarin (“no, not”). More generally speaking, the subscripted infinity-sign is the post-op for (unvoiced + voiced).

- The uvular-*r* + rolled-*r* phoneme of Parisian French (see description above) is written as two letters (a digraph), *xr*, showing that one could pronounce this either as the uvular fricative *x* or the rolled-*r* *r*. This tells the non-French-speaking reader who may be reading French in the NAVLIPI script that this sound can be uttered as either *x* or *rr* and it would not make a difference to the meaning of French words.

- The *w* + *v* phoneme of Hindi (see description above) is also written simply as two letters, *vw*. This tells the non-Hindi-speaking reader who may be reading Hindi in the NAVLIPI script that this sound can be uttered as either *w* or *v* and it would not make a difference to the meaning of Hindi words.

3. Endangered Languages in the News

Graphic design and scripts for endangered languages

We sat down with recent Chelsea College of Arts graduate Irina Wang at the Tate Modern to discuss her work in two distinct communities. Her account outlined the marriage of two disciplines that, at first glance, appear to be worlds apart: graphic design and language revitalisation. This is her story, as reported by Hayley E. Ferguson.

“I didn’t go into a career in graphic design with endangered language revitalisation in mind, but I had always been interested in linguistics.

The thing that I love about typography is its intertwinement with language. It’s about letterforms and sentence structure, and the way that words look on a page. It was always kind of baffling to me, as a graphic designer, that there wasn’t more of an overlap between linguistics and typography.

The more I learned about graphic design, the more I wanted to apply my work to social issues. The industry can often be quite commercial, when in actuality, design is about all kinds of problem-solving. I thought there had to be problems out there that actually *needed* solving – something that a typographer could approach from a unique angle.

Our final project at university was an open brief – they didn’t give us a prompt. At first, I wanted to invent a new language and design an orthography. The more I did that, the more I thought: ‘This is pointless, I don’t have anything specific to say.’ I wanted to find a project that had a real-life impact, instead of inventing my own problems to solve for their own sake.

I realized that there are countless languages without any kind of orthography at all, making it easier for them to disappear. I thought I would try to apply design sensibility to a language that was already in use and needed further attention or revitalisation.

Most grassroots organisations don’t have a lot of funding, time or manpower. I’ve found that if they don’t know exactly what you can do for them, they’re not going to spend time carving out a niche for you. Because the fields are traditionally separate, many of the academic linguists I approached seemed unsure about how graphic design could help their research or field work..

Chittagong Hill Tracts

I eventually ended up talking to Tim Brookes, the founder of the Endangered Alphabets Project. He’s a wood carver by profession, and a publishing professor. He also had these overlapping areas of expertise. He was able to encourage and facilitate my interests, eventually putting me in contact with Maung Nyeu, who grew up in the Chittagong Hill Tracts .

In the Tracts there are a number of minority languages that are linguistically and culturally isolated from Bengali, the majority language. One of those is Marma. Country borders are

drawn politically, and these cultures really don't have much in common. The Hill Tracts people are often looked down upon, and their language is not considered as valuable as Bengali. Any education offered in Bangladesh by the government is taught in Bengali, so teachers don't speak Hill Tracts languages or have any desire to integrate them into the curriculum; Children can even be actively reprimanded by teachers for speaking in Marma.

Traditional textbooks and materials used in Chittagong Hill Tract schools are also created in Bengali and are culturally inaccessible for the children, with images of cityscapes or trains—they may never have seen before.

Going into the education system for a Hill Tract child is like an English-speaking child stepping into a class taught in Icelandic. You don't have the opportunity to foster a love for learning, or any kind of academic curiosity, if you can't understand what's going on in school. If you're punished for speaking the language with which you identify, it creates a psychology of inferiority and the feeling that you're considered to be subordinate by positions of authority. The dropout rate in the Chittagong Hill Tracts is therefore extremely high, and only a small percentage of these students go on to higher education.

Our Golden Hour

Maung was one of these anomalies. He made it all the way to Harvard for a degree in engineering, then returned home to work with local monasteries in setting up a new school system for Hill Tract children. He's back at Harvard now, getting a PhD in education so he can figure out how to set up a successful minority language curriculum for these schools. He travels back and forth, but it's quite dangerous, because the area is militarised. Despite that, the schools have grown a lot in the last few years. His organisation is known as Our Golden Hour – a reference to the window of opportunity for growth in a child's development.

The problem is that, as Marma is an endangered language, there's no existing curriculum. Maung's generation, which speaks fluent Marma, were never taught how to write the language as it has been phased out of the formal education system, and sociocultural currency. There are plenty of ancient texts in Marma, though. The script, which is based on Burmese, is beautiful. Old texts filled with cultural material are becoming incomprehensible to speakers of the language whether it's an annotation of local medicinal plants or an ancient folk song, the wisdom passed down from their ancestors over so many generations could be lost forever.

That's just an illustration of what happens when you lose a language. It's more consequential than just having to learn a more 'convenient' majority language. These texts are more than folklore. When a civilization develops, its identity – on both a tribal and an individual level – is forged by shared communication, manifested in written and oral language.

I aimed to do as much as I could to help Maung develop educational materials for his curriculum. I focused on simple tools like handwriting books. I can't speak Marma, so the simpler my contribution was, the more effective it could be. I didn't have to deal with syntax or grammar, just single words and

letterforms. As a typographer trained to analyse letterforms and their components, it was really quite systematic for me to look at the Marma alphasyllabary and understand how their strokes evolved.

Burmese (the ancestor of Marma's alphasyllabary) was originally written on palm leaves. The leaf would tear if you made straight lines, so strokes have evolved to be written in circular forms. Understanding how the strokes are written directionally and combined structurally. I was able to create some tools, charts and workbooks. It's the same principle for the Roman alphabet.

Celebrating culture

Another part of this project was to show these kids that their language is beautiful that it should be played with and celebrated.

We have countless fonts for the Roman alphabet. You can download so many free ones, some truly ugly ones, and you can pay £500 for some really well-designed ones. There's a range of ways we can interpret and express our own language, and that's something I fully appreciate because it's how I came to love typography in the first place.

A huge part of celebrating language is being able to play with its letterforms – the subjective and artful side as well as the functional side. There's a reason calligraphy is a respected and elevated craft in so many civilizations. I designed playful compositions with overlapping letters and textured brushstrokes, demonstrating different ways that the children could draw, represent and own their language.

A lot of field linguists told me their main priority for preservation and revitalisation was recording, which is very important. Their output would be a dictionary or an audio archive. I think because they're focused on that, they don't always have the time or inclination to prioritise the more subjective side of preservation. That's why Tim Brookes has focused on wood-carving, and on making these languages valuable in an artistic way. Seeing the name of your household carved into a slab of beautiful wood and mounted over your door instils the sort of personal pride that you can't get from dictionaries.

I wish could have been more hands-on working with Maung. So I applied for, and was awarded, a Mead Fellowship grant after I finished the degree-oriented portion of my project. I was planning to go out there, to meet with the teachers and see what they needed so that I could do some more site-specific work. That was around the time ISIS started to infiltrate Bangladesh and Maung advised us to avoid the area altogether.

In efforts to channel the grant money into another project with a similar overarching purpose, I reached out to many grassroots language revitalisation organisations around the world. That's how I ended up working with the Aleut people in Alaska.

Unangam Tunuu

It was based on the same idea – using design skills to help maintain an endangered language, Unangam Tunuu. There are only about 85 speakers left, but their community is fierce. They're actively fighting back against monoculture, and as American citizens they don't suffer from the same level of existential danger as the Hill Tracts people.

St Paul Island has a very active community leader, a handful of fluent elders, and a group of teenage language learners. The programme has to differ from Maung's in that way. There's a community mediator, as well as a couple of language strategists who have been hired externally. The programme is essentially aiming to "hunt and harvest" language from the elders and creating an organic curriculum. The teens are trained to simultaneously teach what they themselves are newly learning, because soon, they'll have to pass the language on; all the students must be teachers as well.

The language learning strategy is focused on seeing the worldview of a different linguistic group. The students learn how to participate in real-life situations without learning vocabulary lists, and it's less assuming than the way language is traditionally taught in Western schools.

I didn't really know what to expect when I showed up on the island, as the only passenger on a tiny plane that took my body weight and luggage weight in order to balance the cargo! That's the exciting thing about working as a designer – you have to be flexible and enjoy the fact that you don't know what to make until you understand the audience and their specific needs. These two projects were so different, because the context of their language loss is so different. The Aleuts' focus wasn't on how to write letterforms, or on vocabulary lists. I spent weeks living with them before deciding the direction my project would take.

Once they understood what I was there for, and after I had seen how they were working, we decided the best use of time would be to help one elder in particular, Iliodor. Elders don't necessarily have the same level of language proficiency as one another. They're all conversationally fluent, but Iliodor is their scholar and uses much of his time to transliterate.

The Indication

The history of Aleut orthography is really interesting – much of its literary legacy started when Russian missionaries from the Orthodox Church sailed over in the 19th century. Often, missionaries are portrayed as culturally destructive and imperialistic, imposing foreign languages on these communities. But one priest, Ivan Veniaminov, insisted on learning the local language. He became fluent in Aleut, and started using the Cyrillic alphabet to write in it. This has since been modernized into a Roman-based alphabet with a few extra characters, which is much more easily digitised. To keep their culture's oldest literature relevant, Iliodor is working to convert texts from Cyrillic into modern orthography. In particular, he is transliterating Veniaminov's original essay, *The Indication of the Pathway into the Kingdom of Heaven*.

The Indication is a short booklet, originally written in Cyrillic. It's a lyrical, high-level piece of writing and it's also a very important part of the island's religious history. There's not much surviving Unangam Tunuu text that has comparable cultural weight and literary quality, so the first goal is to convert it into the modern orthography and record Iliodor's voice reading it all the way through. In doing that, the different cadences in a complex sentence can be assessed.

My work with Iliodor is to turn this text into a high-level language-learning tool. It does take an editorial eye for that kind of work, and many design decisions to make it useful and accessible to both students and scholars. I'd also like to publish a supplementary introductory text about *The Indication*, stating its cultural significance and the evolution of the text.

I interviewed Iliodor a few times when I was there. I feel it's important to share the profile of a man who dedicated a big part of his life and his skills to perpetuate his own mother tongue. It takes many of these individuals at each stage of an endangered language's life and evolution in order to keep it going.

When I started working on the second project, I was expecting a bunch of bright-eyed, bushy-tailed people excited to learn a language. And of course there were many moments of fun and laughter and goofiness, but it's a heavy task – so much more long-term and wide-ranging than one generation. I think it was important to see the more serious side of it, especially coming off the last project, when I wasn't able to meet anyone. I had the disconnected luxury of completing that one for a graphic design show.

I'm really grateful that I had a chance to be in the field, to understand that designing for social causes is far more than a way to justify my importance as a graphic designer. It's not about flexing your professional muscles or pushing the boundaries of your industry – it's fulfilling enough to use what I know, helping people who want to preserve their linguistic identity. It's just really humbling."

Australian National University's John Giacon: Patji-Dawes award for indigenous language efforts

By Emily Baker, from the Canberra Times, 15 May 2017

John Giacon's decades-long dedication to the revitalisation of indigenous languages has been a sometimes difficult but ultimately rewarding pursuit.

The Australian National University lecturer and researcher's work saw him recognised last week with the the Patji-Dawes Award - Australia's top honour for language teaching.

"I used to be a schoolteacher and I think this is probably way more valuable than teaching people mathematics and coaching football teams," Dr Giacon said.

Dr Giacon first started working on Gamilaraay and the closely-related Yuwaalaraay after moving to Walgett in northern New South Wales in 1994.

With the help and blessing of Uncle Ted Fields, now deceased, the Christian Brother travelled the nearby bush and documented vocabulary lists.

After instituting a language program at a Walgett school with some success, Dr Giacon worked to organise community language meetings in nearby towns where he shared language, teaching strategies and curriculum.

While working in the communities he witnessed the restorative power of language.

"There were plenty of people in Walgett who were punished in schools and in other ways for using language - one person I was talking to one day said 'My father had the choice of keeping his language or keeping his job and feeding his kids'," Dr Giacon said.

"There was active destruction of language. To me, people talk about it being culture, but to me it's more about identity, that it's OK to be black and we can assert blackness in public.

"At one stage I was walking down the street in Walgett and someone said yaama, and the fact that people used an Aboriginal language in public where that wasn't allowed previously, for an Aboriginal person it's an assertion of their identity, for a white person it's a statement of respect."

Dr Giacon later moved to Canberra to further study and teach Gamilaraay.

International, Aboriginal and white students show interest in his classes, with some Gamilaraay students going on to teach the language themselves.

Teaching and researching indigenous languages could be, he said, "a place where things are messy".

There are tensions that come with being a white man of Italian heritage learning and teaching an Aboriginal language.

"Because this is about people's own identity and something that they feel white people took away from them, there's often a tension about a whitefella teaching them the language," he said.

"For me, if I can try to understand where this tension's coming from, I think it makes it easier to work with.

"You've got to say this is the reality, this is how Aboriginal people have been treated, this is cross-generational trauma."

Ted Fields jnr, Mr Fields's son, last week approached Dr Giacon to develop a new language program aimed at making Gamilaraay more accessible to Gamilaraay people.

Mr Fields jnr paid tribute to the dedication of Dr Giacon in revitalising the language.

"In an ideal world we wouldn't have to go through this," Mr Fields jnr said.

"It takes a lot of effort and a lot of time and work to be able to use the language.

"It's being widely used and I would say used daily right across north-west New South Wales at least, so that's based on the efforts of John and his collaboration with my dad."

The ANU's ARC Centre of Excellence for the Dynamics of Language director Nick Evans described the revitalisation of Gamilaraay - documented in a Gamilaraay learner's guide, dictionary, picture dictionary, teachers' resource books and song books, as "a significant part of [Dr Giacon's] life's work".

"He continues to inspire other teachers of Gamilaraay who pass the language on to the next generation," Professor Evans said.

Mohawk's moment in parliament

By Julien Gignac, from the Guardian (UK), 29 June 2017

A Quebec member of parliament has addressed Canada's House of Commons in Mohawk, in what is believed to be the first time the indigenous language has been used officially in the legislature since it was established in 1867.

"I stand here to honour the Mohawk language and I pay my respects to their people. Hopefully it will help us to become better friends," said Marc Miller at the start of Canada's National Aboriginal History Month.

"I also hope that we will hear the Mohawk language a lot more often here and that more Canadians will be proud to use it to speak to one another."

Miller, who is a non-Indigenous politician from Quebec, has been studying Mohawk since the start of the year at a language programme run by Six Nations of the Grand River, Canada's largest reserve, about an hour west of Toronto, Ontario.

Miller, who is bilingual in English and French, said he decided to learn an Indigenous language when he saw English-speaking colleagues in Quebec attempting to learn French.

But he was also motivated by the precarious state of Canada's 60 or so indigenous languages: "The elders will tell you that within a generation there will only be four or five [Indigenous] languages that will survive if we don't do anything."

Miller added that demand for Indigenous language teaching is over-subscribed and underfunded in Indigenous communities he has visited. Of Canada's 35 million people, about 213,000 describe an Indigenous language as their mother tongue, according to 2011 census data.

Seventh Cambridge Conference on Endangered Languages

By the Editor

On 4th July 2017, at the Faculty of English at the University of Cambridge, the seventh in the series of annual conferences on Endangered Languages was held. Your Editor was lucky enough to attend it. Though it is always a one-day event, it has now become one of the major fixtures in the annual calendar of our field, thanks for the persistent efforts of Prof. Mari Jones and Dr. Damien Mooney in securing a consistently interesting international roster of speakers on the most geographically and thematically diverse topics. The event has come to be traditionally preceded by a one-day Workshop, organized by a small and dedicated team of postgraduate linguistics students, equally packed with speakers and equally diverse. This year's keynote speaker at the workshop was our own Chairman, Dr. Nicholas Ostler.

Ladino, language of Spain's exiled Jews, to be honoured by academy

By Sam Jones, from the Guardian (UK), 29 July 2017

More than five centuries after King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella expelled Spain's Jewish population, the exiles' still-spoken language is to be honoured by the country's leading linguistic authority.

The Spanish Royal Academy has announced plans to create a Judeo-Spanish branch in Israel that will sit alongside the 23 existing academies dedicated to the Spanish languages across Latin America and in countries such as Equatorial Guinea and the Philippines.

The academy's director, Dario Villanueva, described Judeo-Spanish – or Ladino – as “an extraordinarily important cultural and historic phenomenon” overdue its own academy. “The Jews who were expelled in 1492 dispersed around Europe and the Americas, taking with them the Spanish language as it was spoken at the time,” he said. “There's literature, folklore, translations of the Bible and even modern newspapers written in Ladino.”

Not only did Ladino preserve many archaic Spanish words, Villanueva said, it was also influenced by the languages of the countries in which the refugees settled. Nine Ladino specialists have been appointed to help pave the way for the new institution. “We can now [lay the foundations] for a Judeo-Spanish academy to be based in Israel, just as we did in the 19th century with the Latin American academies,” he said. “The idea isn't to absorb Ladino into modern Spanish, it's the opposite: to preserve it.”

Isaac Querub, the president of Spain's Federation of Jewish Communities, welcomed the move to recognise what he called the “rich and profound cultural legacy” of Ladino. “It's the language that mothers have used to rock their babies to sleep with for more than five centuries,” he said. “It's the language that's been used to pass down recipes and the one that is spo-

ken in the intimacy of the home. Even after all these hundreds of years.” Querub said the move was one of the encouraging steps that Spain had recently taken to make up for the injustices of 1492, but he said he would prefer the institute to be based in Spain rather than Israel.

Shmuel Rafael, director of the Salti Centre for Ladino Studies at Bar-Ilan University in Israel, said the language represented a “culture and an identity” for the Sephardic Jews whose community developed on the Iberian peninsula before 1492.

He estimated there were 400,000 people in Israel with some knowledge of the language. “It depends on what you consider a ‘speaker’ to be: someone who knows a few words of the language, or someone who can read and write the language,” he said.

Two years ago, both Spain and Portugal brought in laws to help allow the return of the descendants of the thousands of Jews who were forced from both countries at the end of the 15th century.

The Spanish government said its offer of citizenship was intended to correct the “historical wrong” in which the country's Jewish population was banished, forced to convert to Catholicism or burned at the stake. Portugal said that although it was impossible to make amends for what had been done, the offer of nationality represented “an attribution of a right”.

Endangered Alphabets board game

By Tim Brookes

[Editor's note: Readers will remember Tim Brookes' artistic and calligraphic works on wood using Endangered Alphabets, which was made into an attractive book (for sale through FEL). Now Tim takes his interest a step further, with the Endangered Alphabets Board Game, using tiles representing various alphabets, not necessarily endangered but unique to particular languages, which he introduces here.]

As many of you know, the Endangered Alphabets Project is a non-profit that tries to reverse the effects of the loss of traditional cultures all over the world, mainly by creating artwork out of their wonderful and unique writing systems.

Every culture has its own spoken language, and many have their own written languages, too—languages they have developed to express their own beliefs, their own experiences, their understanding of their world. What they have collectively written in those languages is the record of their cultural identity: spiritual texts, historical documents, deeds, letters between family members, poems.

In scores of countries, though, those minority languages are untaught, unofficial, suppressed, ignored, even illegal. Children sit through classes listening to teachers they can barely understand; adults have to speak a second or even a third language to get social services or deal with the law.

Denying members of a minority culture the right to read, write and speak in their mother tongue defines them as inferior and unimportant, and leaves them vulnerable, marginalized, and open to abuse. The extent and quality of education go down, while levels of homelessness and incarceration, and even suicide go up—the kind of

situation that has led to the endangerment or eradication of hundreds of Aboriginal languages in Australia and Native American languages in the U.S.

My next tactic to reverse this grim trend is to create games.

In some countries with endangered alphabets, the traditional script is actually taught for a few years, usually in elementary school, but is then abandoned and forgotten. Games, on the other hand, are played for fun, by choice, rather than imposed as part of a class—and are played over and over, both inside the classroom and out. They may even be played in the home with other family members, spreading the learning into other generations.

We're planning card games and jigsaw puzzles, but the first game is simple and familiar: each kid has a random batch of wooden tiles, each of which bears one letter, and aims to combine some of those letters to make a word and place it on a board, connected to other words already on the board.

You can see the point right away: the younger kids get to learn the letters of their alphabet, which is no longer taught in schools and may even be suppressed; the older kids learn spelling, and think of letter combinations in more agile ways, helping to develop their brains; and their parents, who likely didn't learn their own language in school, learn and play together. It's the beginning of the re-creation of a language community based around their own culture.

No commercial game manufacturer will make such a game for a minority culture, or, as they would say, market. In a way, that frees us up. We can create games that the children learn, road-test, and quite likely adapt to their own cultures values. And the kids we're starting with are the indigenous children of the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh. (You can read more about them via our sister-non-profit at www.ourgoldenhour.org.) You may already have heard about or even supported our project to create and publish a picture-book dictionary in their own endangered languages, which is at the printers as I type these words. Now we want to send them games.

The initial cost of design, development and manufacture will be high, especially as manufacture will (a) take place in the U.S. and (b) lack the economies of scale. If a game catches on, though, it can subsequently be manufactured in greater quantity and at far lower cost in India or Bangladesh. And as with everything the Endangered Alphabets does, we hope to offer ideas to others across the world who are likewise trying to revive their traditional languages and cultures.

It will be a fine day, in my opinion, when every culture has a board game that uses the characters of its own writing system. Just to be clear: many cultures don't even have books in their own scripts, or they only have ancestral books that almost nobody can read.

Tim Brookes

Founder, the Endangered Alphabets Project

[Postscript from Tim, 17 August: we ran a successful Kickstarter fundraiser and now we have nearly \$10,000 to design, test, manufacture and distribute the first couple of Endangered Alphabet games].

A beginner's guide to the Endangered Alphabets Board Game tiles

Sinhala

Apart from being one of the most beautifully ornate scripts in the world, Sinhala is the script that gave me the idea for this project because it has a traditional number system that has been replaced by Western-style numbers. I have become accustomed to thinking in terms of endangered alphabets; I had never thought of endangered numbers. Consequently for these carvings I chose only written languages that have their own number systems.

The letter is pronounced as what we would call a long E. I find it graphically so beautiful and strange I would love to carve a large three-dimensional version of it as a stand-alone sculpture.

The number system is as wonderful as the rest of the script. This is the numeral we write as 9. I confess there is no equivalence whatsoever, in this project, between how frequently a letter is used and its numerical value, as there is in Scrabble. I simply chose the letters and numbers I found most elegant and fascinating.

Pahawh Hmong

Pahawh Hmong is the only writing system to have the sad distinction that its author was killed for creating it. For centuries, the Hmong were a repressed minority throughout Southeast Asia and southern China, and when Shong Lue Yang invented their own writing system, it made him a hero, almost a messiah, to them. It also gave the Hmong such an enhanced sense of their own worth that the governments of the region reacted with alarm. Shong Lue Yang was arrested several times, ultimately fleeing to Laos. By 1971, his religious and cultural influence among the Hmong had grown simply too strong for the Laotian government's liking, and soldiers were sent to assassinate him.

Pahawh Hmong being a syllabary rather than an alphabet, this tile represents the sound *ntau*. I gave it the value 8 just because.

Mongolian

One of the challenges facing anyone trying to make a Scrabble set for the Mongolian script, which dates back to the days of Chinggis Khan, is that the same letter is executed differently depending on whether it falls at the beginning of a word, in the middle, or at the end. The medial-position versions tend to be simpler, while the initial and final versions are more elaborate—a quality I actually admire, as it means that each word has a certain calligraphic flourish both as it starts and as it ends.

This letter is the equivalent of the Latin letter T, which by contrast with its Mongolian counterpart seems so plain. Even though the Mongolian script has suffered at the hands of both Latin and Cyrillic, it is undergoing something of a revival, and the work of emerging Mongolian calligraphers such as Ganzorig Alyeksandr and Sukhbaatar Lkhagvadorj is well worth checking out.

The numeral is *tabun*, or 5.

Manipuri

Manipuri is one of the official languages of the state of Manipur in northeast India, and the Manipuri script is a shining example of how a traditional script can be revived if sufficient energy and intent is devoted to the process.

The Manipuri script was created during the 11th century, but in the 18th century was displaced by the Bengali alphabet. For more than 250 years the old script languished, but in 1976 a conference of scholars determined to reconstruct their traditional script and update it to accommodate changes in the spoken language. Even though language policy in India in general is an uncertain work in progress—hardly surprising when you consider the country has some 400 indigenous languages—education in Manipuri is now available at schools and universities in Manipur.

The letter is *sam*, equivalent to the Latin S, and the numeral, which everyone tells me reminds them of either a cat or a monkey, is *ahum*, or 3.

Cherokee

The Cherokee script is as heroic and tragic as Pahawh Hmong. The only coherent and complete writing system to be created by an indigenous American, the remarkable Sequoyah, it was recognized as such an achievement that Sequoyah was awarded a medal and a place in the National Statuary Hall. The Cherokee learned it so swiftly and effectively they may have achieved literacy more rapidly than any nation in history. Yet almost immediately the Indian Removal Act of 1830 made it legal to drive the Cherokee from their homelands, and the Cherokee language and script were driven underground.

Now, thankfully, Cherokee (like several other Native languages) is undergoing something of a revival. I chose this syllabic character, *ma*, because it displays traces of both Sequoyah's original cursive script and the subsequent, more Latinate, printed version. The Cherokee number system is fascinating because it is based on 5 rather than 10. This is, in fact, the equivalent of 10.

Balinese

Indonesia is home to more endangered alphabets than any other country, perhaps as many as 20. The cause is geopolitical convenience: when it became a new nation after World War II, Indonesia was an aggregation of so many islands with their own cultural and linguistic histories the government decided to adopt a single official language and a single official script. Schools abandoned the traditional scripts and within two generations the average Balinese-on-the-street could no longer read several centuries of writing, the accumulated documentation of an entire culture.

I chose two glyphs that illustrate the beautifully flowing quality of this endangered script. The letter is *nna*; the numeral is *tiga*, which we would call 3.

Lanna

Lanna is one of the minority scripts of Thailand. It's another challenge to someone trying to create a Scrabble-style game that whereas English (for example) has opted to go for a small number of letters many of which can be pronounced in multiple ways, other languages have chosen to have a written form for every possible sound. For tonal languages, this can result in all manner of embellishments and diacriticals, and thus a page of Lanna can look like a pond of koi.

To be entirely honest, I have no idea what this letter is. I found it in a page of printed Lanna posted on Flickr by the typographer Ben Mitchell, and was so captivated by it I adopted a policy of carve first, ask questions afterwards.

The number is also fascinating, as Lanna has two sets of numerals, one used for everyday purposes, the other, called *Lek Nai Tam*, for spiritual purposes and religious texts. This is one of the latter; we would call it 5.

Western Cham

Champa was a kingdom of Southeast Asia, corresponding roughly to modern-day central and southern Vietnam, that flourished from roughly the 2nd to the 19th centuries. Over the past two centuries, though, the Cham people were steadily dispossessed and ousted until they now find themselves scattered, not only throughout that region but also overseas. This has led to a dispiriting (but all too common) loss of unity and identity, and their language has likewise disintegrated.

This is an example of Western Cham, the script found more commonly in Cambodia and along the Cambodia-Vietnam border. I chose it because it is one of the very rare examples of a letterform that is also a numberform: the vowel I is identical to the number 3, distinguished only by context.

Sundanese

Another of the traditional scripts of Indonesia, Sundanese (from the western end of the island of Java) is so endangered it took me six years to find someone who can still read and write it. Even an expert on the language, at a university in California, admitted he knew the spoken language but not the written. The first signs of revival are in the air, though, not only in Sunda but throughout Indonesia. Whether those involved in these cultural revitalizations efforts—or in fact their fellow-devotees anywhere in the world—will succeed to any extent is still a matter of conjecture.

The letter is the vowel-sound *eu*; the numeral is *tilu*, which we would write as 3.

Vai

The Vai script (for the Vai language, spoken mostly in Liberia) has a wonderful creation myth. According to second-hand reports, a Liberian named Dualu Bukele invented a writing system for the Vai language around 1820 as the result of a dream "...in which a tall, venerable-looking white man, in a long coat, appeared to me saying, 'I am sent to you by other white men.... I bring you a book....'"

According to this account, the white man revealed a written script that, on waking, Bukele couldn't remember. Given this impetus, though, he called in a number of friends and together they created the symbols that made up the Vai syllabary.

Modern-day scholars suspect that many of the Vai symbols were in use long before 1820, and suggest that Bukele's genius was to organize and phoneticize them. All the same, the Vai script survived for a range of reasons that show how important a written language can be, especially for an indigenous people in a time of colonialism.

A whimsical inclusion in the Endangered Alphabets Board Game, this tile displays not a letter but—a question mark. Forms of punctuation also become extinct. Sinhala used to use an amazing piece of punctuation called a *kundaliya* that looked like the roof of the Sydney Opera House. Now it has been replaced by the dull, unimaginative full stop. Oh, and the number value for the Vai question mark? Zero. I love the idea of being able to add a question mark to a word someone else has already laid out on the board, but you can hardly claim it's worth many points.

Ar fheabhas! President praises volunteer Duolingo translators

By Éanna Ó Caollai, from the Irish Times, 23 November 2016

President Michael D. Higgins has called on senior officials in the public service to uphold legislation guaranteeing the right of Irish speakers to interact with the State in their own language.

President Higgins made his comments during an address at Áras an Uachtaráin on Friday honouring the volunteer efforts of seven individuals who have built the Irish language edition of popular language learning app Duolingo (www.duolingo.com).

Mr Higgins, who earlier this year stated his concern at the lack of visibility of Irish in usage at the highest levels of the public service, said the push for Irish language rights remains an “unfinished project”.

“Those of us who have been interested [in the Irish language] . . . have simply been asking for a basic right. That is, the right of people who wish to speak Irish, to do their business with the Irish State [in Irish]. This is an unfinished project,” Mr Higgins said.

Referring to the Official Languages Act 2003 which sets out the duties of public bodies regarding the provision of services in Irish and the rights of the public to avail of those services, Mr Higgins said the legislation should be put into practice.

This, he said, must be done “particularly by those who are in senior positions within the Irish public service” and they in turn “must be given leadership” by those who believe in honouring the rights of Irish speakers.

Commenting on the merits of multilingualism, Mr Higgins spoke about the first President of Ireland and founder of Irish language rights group Conradh na Gaeilge, Dubhghlas de hÍde.

“The first President of Ireland spoke seven languages. He didn't find that speaking Irish interfered with his ability to speak German to his wife, to speak Hebrew, to be familiar with Latin and Greek texts [or] to speak French.

“The notion that participation in the modern world – being a brilliant scientist or technologist or travelling in any part of the world – [and] that you are enormously enhanced by being a monoglot is far closer to one of the grosser assumptions of imperialist superiority than it is to anything democratic,” Mr Higgins said.

Alex Burke, Gabriel Beecham, Oisín Ó Doinn, Dylan Mac Lochlainn, Laura Doherty, Noah Higgs and Eimear Galvin all contributed to the Duolingo project that, to-date, has seen 2.3 million downloads.

Commending their efforts, Mr Higgins said their contribution was “an act of both national and global citizenship”.

Thanking them for “putting their skills at the service of the Irish language,” Mr Higgins said they had proven “in one significant gesture” that “it is possible, for a vast number of people to become quickly competent in all of the basic words in Irish and grammar and syntax . . . that can be used in any part of the planet”.

“I see this as something very, very significant,” he added.

Commenting on the international nature of the Duolingo audience, Mr Higgins said it was “fascinating that three quarters of the Duolingo Irish students are from outside of Ireland”.

“This fact alone will be of interest to the State's language strategists and to bodies such as Conradh na Gaeilge in terms of how to tap into this interest among both the Irish diaspora and those with Irish heritage with an interest in engaging with the language.”

Figures show that 53 per cent of those learning Irish are based in the US, 23 per cent are in Ireland, 10 per cent are in the UK and 5 per cent are in Canada.

“It is the language of one of the great migratory movements of the 19th century and that is why it is so significant that it's being accessed through this new means in the United States” Mr Higgins said.

President Higgins said he was looking forward to the publication of the Government's forthcoming digital plan for the Irish language and added that he hoped they “take account” of the success of the Duolingo project as “an example of what can be achieved quickly”.

Duolingo's Karin Tsai said the success of the app showed the widespread interest in the language internationally.

“We were extremely excited and happy not only for our Irish contributors but for the entire Irish community. It is fantastic to see that not only interest for it but that we can help in the revival of the language and expose it to more and more people. Certainly we have shown here that there is a large interest globally in the language.”

Duolingo, a Pittsburgh-based company, launched its Irish learning course in late August 2014 with just 6,000 signed-up users. In just over two years, more than 2.3 million people have downloaded and used the Duolingo app to learn Irish and it is now ranked as the ninth most popular language offered by the company.

Karin Tsai said the success of the app was in part due to the science-based and interactive nature of the software.

“Duolingo is currently the most popular way to learn a language online. We have over 150 million registered users now. What sets it apart from other language learning platforms is that we found a way to make learning a language fun for people.”

ple. It is interactive and it is also science-based in that we use a lot of data to personalise the learning experience for users."

Welsh-only teaching – a political tool that harms children?

By Louise Tickle and Steven Morris, excerpted from The Guardian (UK), 20 June 2017

Debate rages over whether it's right to use schools to try to bolster a minority language

"We've been told we are anti-Welsh bigots and even fascists," says Alice Morgan in her soft Welsh accent. The comments she is talking about began when she and other parents raised objections to a plan to turn their primary school in the village of Llangennech into one that teaches only in Welsh. They are worried that some children used to being taught in English won't cope.

Feelings are running high. On one side are those who want to increase the number of Welsh speakers in the country. On the other are campaigners who say the evidence shows this method is futile and that children's education is being sacrificed for politics.

One mother said she was now too frightened to walk down to the Co-op in the village to buy a loaf of bread. "It's got that bad. Perhaps I'm being paranoid but I'm really scared at the moment. I'm not sure it's good for the reputation of the Welsh language."

While a Labour councillor described the move as a form of segregation or apartheid, some supporters of it have said that those who didn't want to live in a Welsh-speaking village could always move out. The decision, voted through in January by Carmarthenshire council, will mean Llangennech school will join 479 others – just under a third (31.9%) of all school in Wales – that teach exclusively in Welsh.

The change will come into operation for reception pupils in September and has delighted those who believe it will help revive the declining fortunes of the Welsh language. But opponents say it could damage the education of children whose first language is English and will force some parents to send their children outside the village or county for their education.

Diagnosing and assessing the vitality status of the Chaoui mother tongue in Algeria

The case of Batna, Khanchela and Oum El Bouaghi

By Baatchia Kahina, University Mohamed Ben Ahmed (Algeria)

Could we consider that language life cycle is similar to the human's, in other words; language can be given birth, feeds, grows, blossoms, and dies! It is quiet true to say that language is strongly linked to human beings i.e. if the human feed to survive and to keep being alive so it is the case for language where the loyalty of its speakers is the secret raspy of its lengthy life and keeping to be vital. By saying so, all the nations

over the world nowadays are facing one shared threat which is language endangerment and this latter is becoming a serious matter with a great concern because languages' worldwide are vanishing at an alarming rate.

In the light of this serious issue, most scholars appears to identify one if not all the following indicators as clues of endangerment in the same time they are pursued as reasons to explain why certain languages have disappeared or are in the way of disappearance, we mention: cultural and language bias, socio-economic forces, migration, assimilation, national education policies, globalization, colonization, language ideology, language policy, language loyalty, intermarriage, language attitudes or natural catastrophes...etc.

In the case of Algeria, most of its spoken varieties seem to be affected by some of the previous factors, besides the interference of modernization in spreading out broadcasting and communication tools these latter have broken the chain of isolation and permitted the cultural invasion, as well as, the absence of protection these varieties receive have started pushing day by day its speech communities specifically the minorities' ones toward losing their mother tongues and their spoken varieties.

As far as, the minorities' spoken varieties are concerned, our study aimed to investigate the language choice, use and attitudes of the Chaoui speakers in order to assess its vitality which has been historically affected by contact of languages and populations, changes in power and other sociopolitical factors, besides the communicative behavior of its speakers. The attitudinal study is based on a questionnaire in Modern Standard Arabic established upon the UNESCO's (2003b) scale that is composed of nine separate evaluative factors which was administered to 240 informants during three field trips in 2016 to three provinces where the Chaoui speakers still somehow maintain their mother tongue; that is, Khanchela, Oum El Bouaghi and Batna. Also, the respondents have been selected from both rural and urban areas through which we have seen that respondents in rural areas tend to maintain somehow their mother tongue, whereas the ones centered in the urban areas have shown a tendency to assimilate, adapt or shift to the use of the other existing languages.

The Chaouis people of Algeria, located primarily in the region of the Aurès Mountains in eastern Algeria, they are an indigenous group of Berber people who lived in the historical region of Numidia, an area encompassing a large part of North-Eastern Algeria and into modern-day Tunisia between 202 BC and 46 BC. Etymologically, the term Chaoui/Shawi derives from the word Ic "horn", allegedly a reference to the national god of the Numidians, Amun, who is depicted as a human head with the horns of a ram¹.

After the independence of Algeria, the Chaouis have remained mainly in the region of the Aurès Mountains – an extension of the Atlas mountain range. Ibn Khaldun documented his belief that they are connected to the medieval Berbers, along with the Senhaja and Masmuda of the Middle Maghreb, with their common ancestor being the patriarch Medghassen. Modern

¹ <http://www.algeria.com/blog/the-chaouis-of-algeria>.

historians rank this Berber region within the group of Numidians and Gaetuli or the more ancient such as Meshwesh, Maesulians and Mazaxes, from whom formed the Zenata, the main inhabitants of the Aurès in the Middle Ages. Chaoui clans known by Ibn Khaldoun were the Ifren, Maghrawa, Djerawa, Abdalwadides, Howara and Awarba.²

The spoken variety of this particular ethnic group is Shawiya, also spelled Chaoui (native form: Tacawit [θaʔawiθ]), which is a major Algerian Zenati variety of the Berber language. The Shawia people call their variety, also known as Numidian Berber, Tacawit (IPA: [θaʔawθ] or [hθawθ]). The French spelling of Chaoui is commonly seen, due to the influence of French conventions on Algeria. Other spellings are "Chaoui", "Shawia", "Tachawit", "Thachawith", "Tachaouith", and "Thchèwith". In Shawiya, the leading /t/ - pronounced [θ] in that phonetic environment - is often reduced to /h/, so the native name is often heard as Hašawiθ.

Shawiya Berber was, until recently, an unwritten variety, its complexity and the diversity within the scope of this dialect is because of the long and rich history that this minority has undergone for its development, as well as its members' contact with many civilizations, from the Phoenicians and Romans to the Vandals, Byzantines, Arabs, Turks and French. This raises Also the issue of ethnic diversity that adds to the Amazigh component Semitic components and European once. The Chaouis are categorized into two main groups:

1. Arabized Chaoui; found at the Algerian border with Tunisia and in the seam with the Hadra Kabylie; which is called in Algerian Arabic "qbayel el hedra" that crosses the cities of: Mila (Teleghma, Chelghoum Laid,...) Constantine (Aïn Abid, El Khroub,...) Sétif (El Eulma,...) Annaba, El Tarf, M'sila, El Oued "Oued Souf".
2. Conservatives Chaouis (in which the Chaoui language is still used): these are found in the below provinces: Souk Ahras , Tebessa , Guelma , Khenchela, Batna , Biskra. Oum el Bouaghi.

Another significant division to the Chaoui ethnic group was provided by Ernest Carette in which he divided the Chaoui speech community into two major tribes:

3. Houara tribe (هواره): Including, El Hraktha (الحراكثة), El Hnancha (الحنانشة), El Nmamcha (النمامشة), El Sakniya (السكنية) and El Amamra ... etc. They are generally in the area from El Tarf and Annaba in the north to Tebessa, Khenchela and Ain El Baida in the south, and from the Tunisian-Algerian border eastward to the municipality

Taoseant (تاوزيانت) West, and from the border of El Oued with the province of Tebessa and the state of Biskra with Khenchela province south to the South of both provinces, El Tarf and Annaba in the north.³

4. Zenata (زناتة): It includes, Beni Oujana (بني وجانة), Aith Daoud (ايت داود), Aith Bou Slima (ايت بوسليمان), Aith Abthi (ايت عبيدي), Teleghma (تلاغمة), Beni Yafran (بني يفرن) (Wlad Daraj and Bawazid بوازيد و بلاد دراج: Wlad Ahmed Ben Bouzid) which are arabized nowadays.⁴

Consequently, the findings of our conducted investigation on the Chaoui mother tongue in Algeria and the analysis of the results have revealed that the vitality of Chaoui variety is poorer than it was assumed, in addition although the statistics of Chaoui speakers isn't yet known, notwithstanding basing on S. Chaker's (2006) censuses, we find that they are around one million, however, this number according to the results obtained has kind of decreased in the light of the spreading of Algerian Arabic over the Algerian territory and the use of French in most of the governmental and administrative sectors.

Accordingly, nearly all the Chaoui speakers keep their variety just for home use i.e. private settings, in which the youngest generations are somehow obliged to learn it so that to create a relaxed atmosphere and to pursue sustained discourses with their parents and grandparents only. Thus, we denoted that the intergenerational language transmission has started breaking up. Also this latter hasn't been introduced in any new domains; however it is broadcasted for a limited period of time (not more than 5 hours). In addition, this variety doesn't have a clear official orthography i.e. it is neither codified nor documented and the only recorded tapes are of bad quality. Consequently, it is neither supported by the government, nor by the NGO's so that to maintain or to promote it besides, no strategies or plans have been implemented until now.

From what we considered previously, we can say that the Chaoui language vitality is very sensitive in which, if this further receives no urgent strategies to establish a specific orthography and to start documenting it, besides motivating its speakers to use it more, this variety will face death faster than we estimate. Serious plans must be taken specially that we already know that this latter has started to adopt new changes at the level of vocabulary among the youngest generations; that is to say, the Chaoui used by the young generation isn't much similar to the ones used by the grandparental generations so recording and archiving it has become obligatory before the language is lost with the decay of the oldest generations.

³ Ernest Carette Précis historique et archéologique sur Hippone et ses environs (Paris : 1838).

⁴ Ibid.

² World Heritage encyclopedia.

We have seen during our investigation that most of Chaoui speakers are worried about the future of this variety and they admitted that this latter has started to disappear. Most of the worried respondents were of the grandparental generation in which they declared that their grandsons and granddaughters are shifting to the use of Algerian Arabic and they further predicted that their grandsons and daughters will stop learning and using Chaoui sooner they die because they won't need to keep using it, whereas another part were so ego-defensive in which they stated that this variety will never disappear because it is spoken by many individuals. Finally, for the third part, they see that shifting to the use of another language is becoming necessary since their language has started to lose its domains of use.

Greece's disappearing whistled language

By Eliot Stein, from BBC Travel on-line, 1 August 2017

For some 2,500 years, residents of this mountainous village have used an astonishing language that only they understand. But there are only six people left who can 'speak' it.

Hidden deep in the south-east corner of the Greek island of Evia, above a twisting maze of ravines that tumbles toward the Aegean Sea, the tiny village of Antia clings to the slopes of Mount Ochi. There are no hotels or restaurants within 40km, and the hamlet is so remote that it doesn't exist on Google Maps.

But as you travel here along a dizzying road from Karystos, through a mythical landscape of megalithic 'dragon house' stone tombs and giant Cyclopic boulders, you'll hear an ancient siren song reverberating against the mountain walls. That's because for thousands of years, the inhabitants of Antia have used a remarkable whistled language that resembles the sounds of birds to communicate across the distant valleys.

Known as *sfyria*, it's one of the rarest and most endangered languages in the world – a mysterious form of long-distance communication in which entire conversations, no matter how complex, can be whistled. For the last two millennia, the only people who have been able to sound and understand *sfyria*'s secret notes are the shepherds and farmers from this hillside hamlet, each of whom has proudly passed down the tightly guarded tradition to their children. But in the last few decades, Antia's population has dwindled from 250 to 37, and as older whistlers lose their teeth, many can no longer sound *sfyria*'s sharp notes. Today, there are only six people left on the planet who can still 'speak' this unspoken language – and one of them recently invited me to Antia so I could meet the last whistlers of Greece.

When I arrived, a 45-year-old farmer named Yiannis Apostolou was waiting for me outside the village's lone store. After greeting me in Greek, he gazed out onto the rolling chasm below the village, tucked his tongue under his bottom teeth and fired a fluted melody into the abyss.

"Koula? Tsipas? We have company!" he said, by way of a translator.

Soon, Koula, a slight 76-year-old woman emerged from a stone dwelling high on the mountainside, popped in her dentures and whistled back, turning this jaunty solo into a duet. "Well, what are you waiting for?" she responded over a clanging chorus of goat bells. "Come on up here!"

As two other villagers descended from the hills to join us, Apostolou asked each of us if we'd like something to drink and then whistled a string of chirps toward the store's open door. Moments later, owner Maria Kefalas came out with a bottle of water, two cups of tea and a glass of sour cherry *vissinada* juice – arranging each perfectly on the table in front of us.

No-one can recall exactly how or when the villagers here began using *sfyria* – which comes from the Greek word *sfyrizo*, meaning 'whistle' – to communicate. Some residents speculate that it came from Persian soldiers who sought refuge in the mountains some 2,500 years ago. Others claim the language developed during Byzantine times as a secret way to warn against danger from rival villages and invading pirates. There's even a belief that in ancient Athens, they'd post whistlers from Antia on the mountaintops as sentries so they could signal an imminent attack on the empire. Remarkably, *sfyria* was only discovered by the outside world in 1969, when an aeroplane crashed in the mountains behind Antia. As the search crew went out to look for the missing pilot, they heard shepherds volleying a series of trilled scales back and forth across the canyons and became enchanted by their cryptic code.

According to Dimitra Hengen, a Greek linguist who accompanied me to Antia, *sfyria* is effectively a whistled version of spoken Greek, in which letters and syllables correspond to distinct tones and frequencies. Because whistled sound waves are different from speech, messages in *sfyria* can travel up to 4km across open valleys, or roughly 10 times farther than shouting.

"As a girl, I'd practice deep into the night with my head buried under the covers," remembered Zografio Kalogirou, a 70-year-old villager with lace-white hair. "I used to be able to whistle across the mountaintops when I had my teeth. I was so proud. Now I'm so ashamed. All I can do is eat."

For those with a strong bite or modern implants, this ancient form of wireless communication has remained especially useful over the years in a far-flung place like Antia.

"Roads, water and electricity only came here 30 years ago, and there's still no mobile phone service," said Yiannis Tsipas, a 50-year-old goat herder and the youngest whistler in the village after Apostolou. "Until 1997, Koula had the only phone in Antia, so whenever anyone would go to Athens, they'd call her to say that they arrived safely and she'd whistle the news down to the family."

While I sipped my *vissinada*, Kefalas' face lit up as she told of how *sfyria* can also be used to coyly court other villagers.

"One night, a man was in the mountains with his sheep when it started snowing. He knew that somewhere deep in the mountains there was a beautiful girl from Antia with her goats. So he found a cave, built a fire and whistled to her to come keep warm. She did, and that's how my parents fell in love."

Today there are as many as 70 other whistled languages in the world, and they all exist in remote mountain villages like Antia. After all, it's easier to purse your lips than to scramble up and down the mountainsides whenever you want to invite your neighbours over for a glass of ouzo.

Yet, not only is sfyria believed to be older and more structured than many other whistled languages, it's also the most critically endangered. In fact, according to the UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger, no other language in Europe – whistled or not – has fewer living speakers than sfyria.

"By nature, a whistled language is already much more threatened than a spoken language because it's much harder to reproduce," Hengen said. "Unless something drastic here changes, I foresee sfyria vanishing in the very near future, and it's a tragedy."

While many of the elderly whistlers here have died or lost their teeth, the younger ones have moved to Athens. And today, several of the last whistlers of Antia – like Apostolou – no longer live in the village.

"I tried to stay until last year, but there's no way to earn a living or raise a family here," he said, staring out over a cluster of abandoned homes with roosters squawking on the roofs. "Today, there's only one child left here."

After ringing through the rugged landscape for dozens of generations, sfyria may well fade into the foggy depths under Mount Ochi with the two Yiannis. Apostolou doesn't have any children, and while Tsipias hopes to one day teach his son the unique language of Antia, he lives an hour away by the nearest school.

"When I was a child, we had to learn sfyria with Greek to survive," said Panagiotis Tzanavaris, a soft-spoken 69-year-old and Antia's best whistler. "It's our way of life, and if it disappears, so does the cultural identity of this village."

So, in 2010, Tzanavaris set out on a quest to resuscitate the dying language, establishing the Cultural Organisation of Antia in the village's closed-down, one-room schoolhouse.

Three years ago, he welcomed a team of linguists from Harvard and Yale universities to come record the whistlers' notes for future generations. Last year, he and Apostolou were featured in a documentary that was screened at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art. And most recently, he kindly invited me to Antia.

Tzanavaris has also been doing something previously unheard of with his village's tightly guarded tradition: teaching someone from another town how to whistle sfyria. After seven years

of lessons, the youngest speaker of Antia's ancient language is now a 31-year-old courier who lives 40km away in Karystos.

"For years, the people in Antia have been talking about a disappearing language," Tzanavaris told me. "But with your help, maybe we can start talking about a language that survived."

Canada: Native language features large in Louis Riel production

By Marie White, from www.windspeaker.com web-site, Quebec City

"People are seeking to know the language to have a better sense of their identity because without a sense of identity, you don't feel good about yourself." Manitoba Métis Elder Norman Fleury believed it was likely the first time that Michif was featured in such a major national artistic production.

Fifty years after the original opera by Harry Somers and Mavor Moore, Peter Hinton has directed a revisited version of Louis Riel, which included Native performers for the first time.

It is the result of a major national co-production by the Canadian Opera Company and the National Arts Centre about the Métis leader.

It was commissioned for the 150 anniversary of Confederation. It premiered in Toronto on April 20 went to Ottawa on June 15 and was in Quebec City on July 30 and again Aug. 3.

In Quebec City, the curtain rose on Huron-Wendat Steeve Wadohandik Gros-Louis. He spoke about his nation's history and traditions of the Huron-Wendat that he learned from his Elders. The community is striving to revive the original language through the Yawenda Project.

Founder of the Sandokwa dance group, owner of the Sagamité restaurant, and president of Quebec Aboriginal Tourism, Gros-Louis thanked Grégoire Legendre, general and artistic director of the Opéra de Québec, for honouring his nation in this landmark production.

"At first I was a bit hesitant about my participation in the opera," Gros-Louis told Windspeaker.com, "then I saw the possibility to share my nation's history and culture and I realized it felt good to be here, not so much to celebrate the 150th, but rather to commemorate it."

A four-language opera, Hinton selected Cree and Michif (subtitles) to accompany English and French and sought renowned Indigenous artists from across the land to authentically render Native voices and cultures.

Billy Merasty, Joanna Burt, Everett Morrison, Elisapie Isaac and Steeve Wadohandik Gros-Louis enriched the production, like cultural ambassadors, with their Cree, Métis/Ojibwe, Inuit and Huron-Wendat talent.

The Native presence happened also through the Land Assembly Chorus, the collective conscience in the opera..

Most of all though, it was the inclusion of Cree and Michif in the production that was a remarkable initiative. Russell Braun led the cast as Louis Riel and sang principally in English, then French and some Michif.

There is a particularly uplifting Métis moment when the Land Assembly Chorus clapped as Elisapie Isaac sang in Michif for the Bison Dance.

Windspeaker.com reached Manitoba Métis Elder Norman Fleury, who did Métis translations for the musical drama, at his home in Saskatoon.

"It was a pleasure doing the translations because I was transmitting the Michif language," said Fleury, "and the opera dramatizes our stories and history, which can help everyone to know who the Métis are.

"And it's about asserting our rights, which is still an issue today. Canada needs to recognize the Métis." According to this Michif expert who teaches it at the University of Saskatchewan, there is an increasing interest in learning Michif.

"People are seeking to know the language to have a better sense of their identity because without a sense of identity, you don't feel good about yourself." Fleury believed it was likely the first time that Michif was featured in such a major national artistic production.

Michif had been an entirely oral language until recently. Since the language has not been standardized, there are different forms of Michif in the different Métis communities.

But Fleury, keen to preserve and promote it, and inspired by a world-first 1980s Michif dictionary produced in North Dakota, decided to collect his knowledge into the first ever Canadian Michif dictionary in 2013, *La Laang Michif Piikishkwaywin*.

His dictionary is a major linguistic step in protecting and transmitting this endangered language. He has also developed online material and a Michif app.

Michif carries the components of French culture and heritage, as well as First Nations heritage, cultural knowledge and the development of the country. "The nouns are French with associated grammar, the verbs are Cree with associated grammar and there are borrowings from English," explained Fleury based on Peter Bakker's PhD research.

"I was overwhelmed to see the opera company so well organized and everyone showing so much interest," said Fleury, who worked in Toronto on the Michif text and saw the performance in Ottawa.

"It was amazing for us all to be together, socializing and celebrating the making of this big production."

Fleury feels that the Louis Riel story has evolved greatly since he was young.

"We were embarrassed in school to hear the story, but today we have a Louis Riel Day that we celebrate."

As for the opera's Cree text, it was translated by accomplished Cree actor, singer and playwright Billy Merasty, who has more than 34 years of professional experience.

Merasty is well-known for his acting roles, such as in *Elijah* (Elijah Harper), *Moose TV* and for Quebec's renowned Robert Lepage, as well as his playwright work leading the Indigenous storytelling event at Toronto's Congress 2017 last May.

Nephew to playwright Thomson Highway and dancer René Highway, he received the Order of Manitoba in 2010 (Order of the Buffalo Hunt) as an Aboriginal role model. Merasty, like Fleury, is concerned about the future of his language.

"I know my language is disappearing," he told Ryerson University journalist Will Sloan, adding "If you don't know the language, I think you lose out on the skill of storytelling."

Initially invited to be the Cree diction coach, Métis/Ojibwe singer Joanna Burt was later offered a lead role as Riel's sister, a first for an Indigenous artist in a COC production.

Another professional first came for Inuit singer and documentary filmmaker Elisapie Isaac, 40, making her debut to the opera scene.

"I felt super nervous," smiled Elisapie during the rehearsal phase, adding "I learned so much about music and techniques."

Everett Morrison, born near James Bay and now a professional opera singer in Toronto, told Windspeaker.com he thought Louis Riel was "a great production" and his role was "a dream come true."

A Six Nations of the Grand River choreographer, Tekaronhi-ahkhwa Santee Smith, was also part of the production.

World-renowned linguist David Crystal strongly suggests using endangered languages in artistic oral productions as powerful ways to preserve, protect and promote them.

This may inspire other artists—like the famous Canadian playwright Robert Lepage who attended the Quebec premiere—to also include Native languages in their artistic productions.

As such, Louis Riel may well prove to be not just a timely tale of Indigenous struggle in the Truth and Reconciliation period, but hopefully, also a valuable influence on the life and longevity of Native languages.

Trying to save South Africa's first language

By Pumza Fihlani, BBC News web-site, 30 August 2017

Katrina Esau is working hard to save the language of her childhood from dying out.

At 84, Ms Esau is one of the last three fluent speakers of N|uu, one of the languages spoken by South Africa's San community, also known as Bushmen.

N|uu is considered the original language of southern Africa.

With no other fluent speakers in the world apart from this family, the language is recognised by the UN as "critically endangered".

"When I was a child, I only spoke N|uu and I heard a lot of people speaking the language. Those were good times, we loved our language but that has changed," says Ms Esau in Upington, a town in the Northern Cape Province.

For centuries, the San roamed this region freely, gathering plants and hunting animals to feed their families.

But today the traditional practices of the San have all but died out and their descendants tell me that language is one of the only things left that connects them to their history.

Inside a small wooden hut, she teaches the 112 sounds including 45 distinct clicks of N|uu with the local children.

"I'm teaching the language because I don't want it to become extinct when we die," Ms Esau says.

"I want to pass on as much of it as I can but I am very aware that we don't have a lot of time."

Ms Esau has been running the school in her home for about 10 years.

The people in this community, including Ms Esau now mainly speak Afrikaans, which is related to the language spoken by the Dutch settlers who arrived in South Africa in the 17th Century.

"We would get beaten up by the white man if we were caught speaking our language," she tells me.

"Because of our history, people today do not want to speak the language any more, there is so much pain around it.

"We abandoned the N|uu language and learned to speak Afrikaans, although we are not white people - that has affected our identity," she adds.

Ms Esau's two sisters Hanna Koper and Griet Seekoei - both over 90 - are listening intently as she speaks with bitter fondness of their childhood.

They don't speak much but nod in agreement as she speaks.

Ouma Geelmeid, as she is affectionately known, says she is hoping to remove the shame around speaking N|uu today.

During lessons, with a stick in her hand, Ms Esau points out the N|uu names for body parts on the white board as the students read in chorus.

Like many other African languages, this language had been passed down orally over generations - but this is now threatening its survival.

Until recent years there was no record of it as a written language.

Ms Esau worked with linguists, Professors Sheena Shah from the School of Oriental and African Studies (Soas) in London and Matthias Brezinger of the Centre for African Language Diversity in

Cape Town to create a N|uu alphabet and basic rules of grammar for teaching purposes.

"From the work we did with Ouma Geelmeid's community, we learned that these communities view language as an important marker of their identity," says Ms Shah.

Experts say personal identity is becoming increasingly important in a world that is embracing globalisation.

Language is about more than simply an idea to communicate with one another, it is also tied in with culture and a way of life for a community, the experts tell me.

"When you look at the African languages, you learn that they help communicate different perspectives on life, relationships, spirituality, the earth, health, humanity," says Mr Brezinger.

"There is a wealth of knowledge on survival that has been passed down through the years in indigenous communities that the Western world knows very little about and when these languages die, that unique knowledge is also lost," he continues.

Back in the classroom, there are about 20 children, most of them under 10 years old and a few teenagers.

Mary-Ann Prins, 16, is Ms Esau's best student and hopes to one day teach this class.

"I love learning this language. It makes me feel like I belong, like I am connected to my great-grandparents. I'm told that they used to speak it and today I can be a part of that too," she says with a broad smile.

N|uu is not the only language at risk of disappearing in South Africa.

Three hours away, in the town of Springbok, Nama speakers have been lobbying the government to have their language made an official language.

Despite being historically widely spoken in South Africa, Nama is not recognised as one of the country's 11 official languages.

"It's very sad that our children cannot speak Nama. It breaks my heart that our children will never be able to communicate with their elders in their own language," says Maria Damara, 95, one of the only Nama speakers here.

"What future will they have, what will happen to our culture?"

Community leader Wiela Beker, 56, agrees:

"If you don't have language, you don't have nothing. I'm talking in English to you now but I am not English. I want to speak Nama because that's what and who I am.

"Unless we do something about it, our culture is going to die. We are fighting for our culture when we fight for our language," he says.

But without a shift in language policy and government intervention, this community say they are worried that it won't be long until their language finds itself in the same boat as N|uu - on the verge of extinction.

And so for these communities the fight is for a shared identity, a sense of belonging - and therefore a legacy for future generations.

Australia: Making Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures a curriculum priority

Media release issued 31 July 2017 by ACARA (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority)

Programming humanoid robots and learning about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures are rarely combined into one lesson in the classroom.

But at Maitland Lutheran School in South Australia, students have been learning the Australian Curriculum: Digital Technologies by teaching a humanoid robot how to speak the sleeping language of their local Aboriginal community.

"We have a fairly high Indigenous student population in our school, about 20 per cent," Maitland Lutheran School teacher, Scott Carson, said.

"We decided to do something quite out of the box, in combining Narungga language and culture with a robotics program from the Digital Technologies curriculum."

The school is one of seven featured in a series of short videos, or illustrations of practice, that have been released today by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA).

Funded by the Australian Government Department of Education and Training, these videos show how the Australian Curriculum's cross-curriculum priority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures may be implemented in a variety of school settings.

"The Australian Curriculum is a national curriculum for every child, no matter where they are in the country," ACARA CEO, Robert Randall, said. "There are three main components that make up the Australian Curriculum: learning areas (subjects), general capabilities (such as Critical and Creative Thinking, and ICT Capability) and cross-curriculum priorities. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures is one of three cross-curriculum priorities."

The videos released today feature creative programs incorporating learning areas such as History, Languages and Science, in metropolitan and rural schools with high, medium and low percentages of Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander students.

"These illustrations of practice are a valuable resource for all teachers from any school – whether urban or remote – and for all students," Mr Randall said.

"Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students should be able to see themselves, their identities and their cultures reflected in the Australian Curriculum, just like their non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander peers, to fully participate in the curriculum and build their self-esteem."

This is certainly one of the benefits of the robotics program at Maitland Lutheran School, which partnered with local community member Tania Wanganeen (the only fluent speaker of the Narungga language in the world). Ms Wanganeen taught the students basic words and phrases that were used to program the robot to speak Narungga.

"When I go into a classroom and I'm seeing Narungga kids sitting there, I make them feel more important too because 'this is your language'," Ms Wanganeen said. "It's something that's been missing, and the pride and the cultural empowerment that happens in children and adults is amazing to watch."

For Mr Carson, the robotics program has also had a positive impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student attendance at the school. He recalls one student whose absent days reduced significantly when the program was running at the school.

"That's a really tangible success story that we can celebrate ... and a direct result of the ownership that that particular student has taken in learning about his culture and language."

Among other illustrations of practice videos are Year 8 students from Queensland exploring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' skills in fire-making; and Years 3 and 4 students exploring the impact of colonisation on Tasmanian Aboriginal peoples.

To view all the illustrations of practice, or to learn more about cross-curriculum priorities, visit the Australian Curriculum website www.australiancurriculum.edu.au.

4. Places to go on the Web

Tribilingual.com

From the home page of www.Tribilingual.com:

Tribilingual's goal is to preserve endangered cultures through teaching languages. We believe that documentation alone is not enough to preserve intangible cultural heritage. That's why we find speakers of endangered languages – often in secluded areas – to run online courses available to students based all over the world. To us language isn't necessarily an object in itself but a way to understand a community and culture, through the eyes of the native speaker. In this way, new speakers who take our courses help to keep rare languages and traditions from disappearing forever.

5. Obituaries

Veljo Tormis

Estonian composer determined to preserve his nation's folk culture

By Jüri Reinvere, from the Guardian (UK), 23 March 2017

The Estonian composer Veljo Tormis, who has died aged 86, wrote choral works based on the folksong and poetry of languages that are now disappearing or extinct. Those form the Finnic-Ugric family that have established themselves in modern nations – Es-

tonian, Finnish and Hungarian – have flourished, but several related tongues used to be heard on the shores of the Gulf of Finland. The rites, poetry and music of the people who spoke them never attracted attention at a national level: in taking them as the creative basis for his music, Tormis created a personal sound museum of a lost world.

Other composers from the region – most notably Sibelius – have often used folklore from the viewpoint of western musical ideals. Tormis was a pioneer in letting the folklore dictate the course of the music, rather than trying to coerce it into the frameworks of western music. His work is free in narrative fantasy, incorporating such features as the sounds of village life in birdsong, sparse in development and lavish in theatricality. The usual life of a composer, with its symphonies and operas, would have been too limiting. As he put it: “I don’t use folk melody, it is folk melody that uses me.”

He achieved a breakthrough with the release of a double CD on the ECM label, *Forgotten Peoples* (1992), on which the Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir was conducted by Tõnu Kaljuste. The opening track of the first choral cycle, *Livonian Heritage*, depicts birds waking in a dense forest; Livonians lived on the coast of what is now Latvia. Another cycle, *Ingrian Evenings*, recreates a festive evening of songs and dances in a village, and so is often presented as a staged work; Ingrians were Lutheran Finns speaking a south-eastern dialect of Finnish, who by the 17th century had moved to the St. Petersburg region, at the eastern end of the gulf.

A further ECM recording, *Litany to Thunder* (1999), contains *Curse Upon Iron*, a work of symbolic importance for Estonians. It features the shaman’s drum of the Koryak people, living in the northern part of Kamchatka, on Russia’s far east coast, and denounces the destructive military uses of the metal. Tormis was born the eldest son of a Lutheran parish clerk, Riho Tormis, and his wife, Johanna, in Kuusalu, east of the capital city of Tallinn. He was nine when Estonian was annexed by the Soviet Union, and after organ and choral conducting studies in Tallinn (1942-1951) went to the Moscow Conservatoire to study composition with Vissarion Shebalin (1951-1956). When he returned to Tallinn, he quickly rose to prominence as a composer, initially producing works in a traditional vein, including symphonies and an opera, *The Swan’s Flight* (1966). His *Overture No. 2* (1959) was the first work by an Estonian composer to be performed at the Warsaw Autumn Festival, in 1961. Two of the country’s other leading composers, Arvo Pärt and Kuldar Sink, studied with him during his time as a teacher at the Tallinn Music high school (1956-1960).

From the Khrushchev thaw of the late nineteen-fifties, when national music became a secret tool of anti-Sovietism, Tormis explored Estonian folklore, and then in the seventies and eighties that of other Finno-Ugric and Baltic peoples. He produced more than sixty choral cycles, often including the names of names of native peoples in the titles, as with his *Votic Wedding Songs*, *Vepsian Paths* and *Izhorian Epic*, all also to be heard on *Forgotten Peoples*.

His music was taken up not only in Estonia, but in Latvia, Lithuania and other Soviet-bloc countries. Singing in general was a significant factor in public demonstrations in the years leading up to Estonia’s independence from Soviet rule in 1991, and Tormis drew on its power to express the forest pantheism that remains at least as strong in the national psyche as the Christianity that followed it. At the Estonian Song Festival, held every five years in Tallinn – most recently in 2014 – thousands of people in amateur choirs sang Tormis’s works, and he was an avid visitor to schools, keen to reconnect children with their ancient heritage.

Other parts of the world with a strong choral tradition started taking up Tormis’s music, not least as a result of the global tours of the Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir. During the Gorbachev glasnost period of the eighties it found a particular following in the US and Germany, and the ECM releases brought it an audience throughout western Europe.

Tormis’s political concerns extended beyond national independence to environmental issues, social exclusion, and the emptiness of modern politics. In 2000 he retired from composition. A gracious man, he was revered by a nation that loves to sing.

In 1951, he married Lea Rummo, a theatre historian. She survives him, along with their son, Tõnu, a photographer whose work appears on the cover of *Forgotten Peoples* and on many subsequent recordings of his father’s music.

Veljo Tormis, composer, born 7 August 1930, died 21 January 2017

6. Forthcoming events

Australia: Puliima National Indigenous Language & Technology Forum 2017

Puliima 2017, the sixth Indigenous Language and Technology conference, will be held in October 16th-20th in Cairns, Queensland. Puliima is a biennial event aimed at bringing people together from all over Australia and internationally to highlight and share the fantastic work being done in our traditional languages, prominence is given to exploring and sharing pioneering language program work and ideas, exciting products and equipment that can be used in community based language projects. The Forum allows people to network with an inspirational group of people who all share a common ambition of preserving and celebrating the languages of your country.

2017 looks set to be the year where the light shines on our languages, with the theme ‘Our Languages Matter’ to take centre stage for our National NAIDOC celebrations. NAIDOC week will be emphasising and celebrating the uniqueness and importance that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages play in our cultural identity. Puliima will aid in the extension of this spotlight as our languages can, and should be, celebrated all year.

This year Puliima events will run over a course of 4 days and include Keynote Speakers, Panel Discussions, Seminars, Hands-on Workshops, Entertainment and more.

www.puliima.com

7. Book reviews

Fliça: First graphic novel in the Lombard language

By the Editor

Lombard, one of Italy's more widespread minority languages, has been distinguished by the appearance of the first ever graphic novel in the language. *Fliça* is the first of a planned series of six graphic novels, and it is written by Emilio A. Manzotti, designed and drawn by Edoardo Arzani, with contributions from our FEL member Simona Scuri and L.Brasca. The book is published by BookTribu, and more information is available from www.booktribu.com

What's 'dog' in Wendish?

By John Gallagher, from the Times Literary Supplement, 19 May 2017

SMALL DICTIONARIES AND CURIOSITY:

Lexicography and fieldwork in post-medieval Europe

336pp. Oxford University Press. £65 (US \$95).

John Considine

978 0 19 878501 9

How lexicography and ethnography came to meet in early modern Europe

Published some time around 1555, Andrew Boorde's *Fyrst Boke of the Introduction of Knowledge* promised to teach its readers "to speake parte of all maner of languages, and to know the vsage and fashion of all maner of countreys". Among Boorde's doggerel pen portraits of the nations of the known world, he offered one of the earliest printed accounts of the Romani language, teaching readers to say "You be welcome to the towne", "Wyl you drynke some wyne", and "Drynke drynke for god-sake". Boorde's collection of phrases from a little-known language were part of what John Considine calls, in *Small Dictionaries and Curiosity: Lexicography and fieldwork in post-medieval Europe*, "a tradition of curiosity-driven lexicography which was not primarily intended to satisfy the simple demands of the schoolroom, the trading mission, or the work of evangelization".

Work in this tradition ranged from collections of cryptolects such as Thomas Harman's sixteenth-century *Caveat or Warning for Common Cursitors* to influential printed studies such as Michael Richey's *Idioticon Hamburgense* (first edition published in 1743), which recorded the distinctive language used in the free city of Hamburg. These scholars also addressed the rarely considered theme of language death, represented by works such as the late seventeenth-century wordlist of Polabian or "Wendish" (a Slavonic language, spoken in Lower Saxony) made by one of its last living speakers, who began his work with the words "I am a man forty-seven years old. When it is all over with me and with three other people in our village, nobody will rightly know what the name for a dog is in Wendish".

Early modern field lexicographers got up close and personal with their informants. In the 1570s, the German professor Martin Crusius studied modern Greek by reading cheap books in

the language and interviewing native speakers. He made careful notes on those "Greeks, who have been with me (in Germany) at various times, from whose mouths I have noted down what might pertain to the corrupted Greek language of today", recording their appearances and their personal histories alongside their words, so that these speakers – often illiterate or members of the "wandering poor" – lived on through his field notes on their language.

In seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Britain, John Ray and Edward Lhuys, among others, embarked on regional tours during which they collected words, phrases and other oral materials, including songs and ballads, as part of a project that brought together (and advanced) linguistics, botany, folklore, ethnography and antiquarianism. These activities laid the foundations for what would become established fields of scholarly enquiry, as well as acting as the building blocks of later national movements – as in Finland, where Elias Lönnrot combined the roles of lexicographer and figurehead of literary nationalism.

Small Dictionaries and Curiosity offers a panoramic survey of a little-known chapter in the overlapping histories of linguistics, lexicography and ethnography. It is the last in a loose trilogy by Considine: taken together, his three works represent a major achievement and the fullest, most thought-provoking history of early modern European lexicography we have. If there is a criticism to be made, it is that Considine's praise of the curiosity that drove these ventures sidesteps the extent to which the practices of ethnography and information-gathering honed in early modern Europe would underpin colonial and imperial power in these and later centuries: Europe's curiosity would become weaponized.

In the late sixteenth century, the lexicographer Nathan Chytraeus boasted that, in collecting words current in Low German, "we were neither ashamed to learn from peasants, nor from sailors, nor from butchers, nor from workmen of any kind, nor even from the least of women". Considine's work resurrects these almost forgotten practices and their fascinating results, and might even point the way towards a new oral history of early modern Europe.

8. Letters to the Editor

From Prof. Dr. Stefanie Shamila Pil-lai, Univ. Malaya, 17 May 2017

I refer to the article "New initiative promotes endangered Kristang creole in Singapore" by Hayley Ferguson

"Singapore-based language preservation initiative Kodrah Kristang has accomplished a great deal since its launch in 2015. Papia Kristang – better known as 'Kristang' – is listed as a moribund language on *Ethnologue*, and until recently, it was heading straight for extinction. The language, a Portuguese Malay creole, is roughly 500 years old, and with fewer than 100 remaining speakers in Singapore, and several hundred more in Malacca, Malaysia, a group of students at the National University of Singapore took matters into their own hands.

As a member of the Portuguese Eurasian community in Malaysia, and someone who has been working on language documentation and revitalisation of Cristang or Malacca Portuguese, I would like to point out that there are more than "several hundred more (speakers) in Malacca, Malaysia". In the Portuguese Settlement in Malacca, alone there are close to 1000 residents of Portuguese-Eurasian descent who continue to use the language. Walk into the village and you will hear the fishermen chatting away in the creole, neighbours having conversations across fences and parents calling out to their children.

I would also like to point out that the community in Malacca, through the Malacca Portuguese-Eurasian Association, have been working on language revitalisation efforts since 2013. Among the more tangible outputs has been to document prayers and hymn in Malacca Portuguese in the form of a CD and the publication of "Beng Prende Papiá Malaká Portuguese" (Come lets learn Malacca Portuguese). Language classes are also offered at the Portuguese Settlement.

The efforts being taken by the Malacca community is aimed at making sure that the language continues to be used and taught, and to produce resources to support the teaching and learning of Malacca Portuguese. Most importantly, we want to encourage inter-generational transmission of the language.

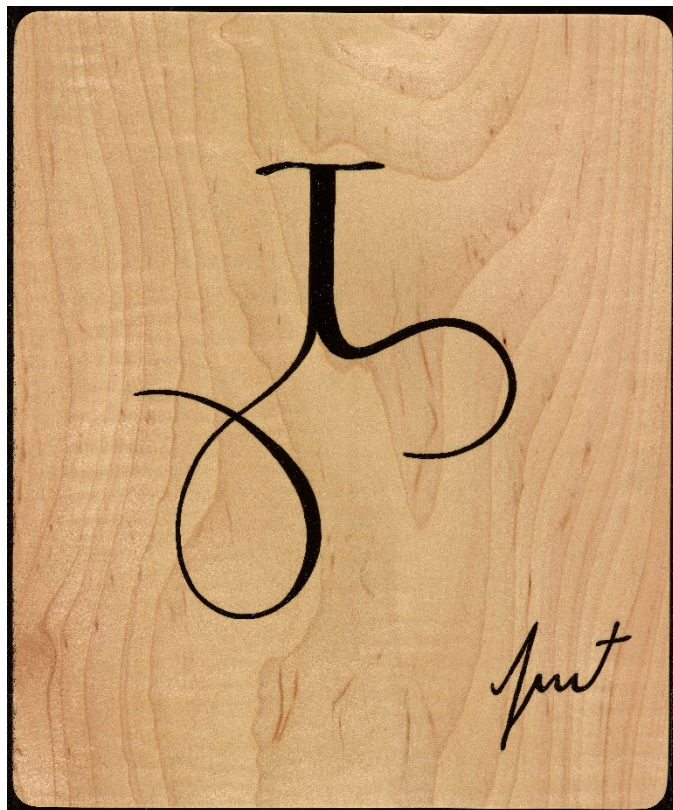
I do not expect anything to be done about the published article, but I wanted to set the record straight about the status of Malacca Portuguese and the efforts that have been taken/are being taken to keep the language alive. Our revitalisation efforts are not done to seek publicity or self-glory but to preserve our heritage language and culture, and to ensure that the community of speakers are treated with respect.

Stefanie

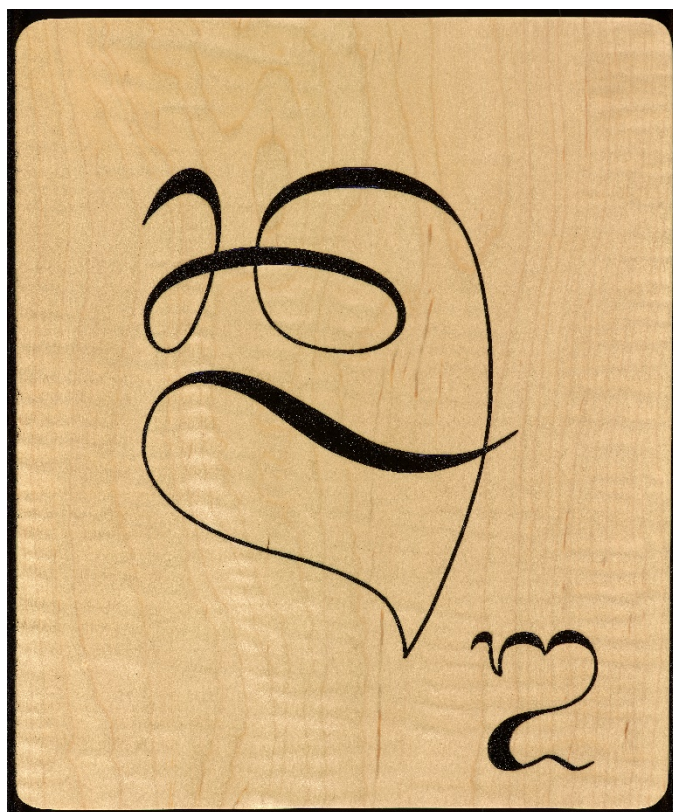
selection of tiles from

Tim Brookes (see a Endangered Alphabets board game

((created by accompanying article in this issue



above: Balinese; below: Cherokee



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