

Preservation of Language

Reference 1:

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/03/15/AR2009031501857.html>

Preserving Languages Is About More Than Words

By Kari Lydersen
Washington Post Staff Writer
Monday, March 16, 2009

The traditional Irish language is everywhere this time of year, emblazoned on green T-shirts and echoing through pubs. But Irish, often called Gaelic in the United States, is one of thousands of "endangered languages" worldwide. Though it is Ireland's official tongue, there are only about 30,000 fluent speakers left, down from 250,000 when the country was founded in 1922.

Irish schools teach the language as a core subject, but outside a few enclaves in western Ireland, it is relatively rare for families to speak it at home.

"There's the gap between being able to speak Irish and actually speaking it on a daily basis," said Brian O'Conchubhair, an assistant professor of Irish studies at the University of Notre Dame who grew up learning Irish in school. "It's very hard to find it in the cities; it's like a hidden culture."

Irish is expected to survive at least through this century, but half of the world's almost 7,000 remaining languages may disappear by 2100, experts say.

A language is considered extinct when the last person who learned it as his or her primary tongue dies. Last month, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) launched an online atlas of endangered languages, labeling more than 2,400 at risk of extinction.

Hot spots where languages are most endangered include Siberia, northern Australia, the North American Pacific Northwest, and parts of the Andes and Amazon, according to the Living Tongues Institute for Endangered Languages, a nonprofit partnering with National Geographic to record and promote disappearing tongues.

Language extinction has been a phenomenon for at least 10,000 years, since the dawn of agriculture.

"In the pre-agricultural state, the norm was to have lots and lots of little languages," said Gregory D.S. Anderson, director of the Living Tongues Institute. "As humans

developed with agriculture, larger population groups were able to aggregate together, and you got larger languages developing."

Languages typically die when speakers of a small language group come in contact with a more dominant population. That happened first when hunter-gatherers transitioned to agriculture, then during periods of European colonial expansion, and more recently with global migration and urbanization. The spread of English, Spanish and Russian wiped out many small languages.

"As long as people feel embarrassed, restrained or openly criticized for using a particular language, it's only natural for them to want to avoid continuing to do what's causing a negative response, whether it's something overt like having your mouth washed out or more subtle like discrimination," Anderson said.

Russian-language-only policies have virtually extinguished many Siberian languages, including Tofa, which lets speakers use a single word to say "a two-year-old male, un-castrated, rideable reindeer."

In the United States and Australia in past decades, the government forced native peoples to abandon their languages through vehicles such as boarding schools that punished youth for speaking a traditional tongue. Many Native American and aboriginal Australian languages never recovered. The United States has lost 115 languages in the past 500 years, by UNESCO's count, 53 of them since the 1950s. Last year, the Alaskan language Eyak disappeared with the death of the last speaker.

Indigenous groups also may abandon localized tongues for a dominant indigenous alternative, such as Quechua in South America. Or they might shift to a pidgin, or hybrid, of various local languages.

Extinct languages can be revived, especially when they have been recorded.

"But when you skip a generation, it's hard to pick a language back up again," said Douglas Whalen, president of the Endangered Language Fund, which gives grants to language-preservation projects. "You need a community that is really committed and will bring children up from birth in the second language, even if they themselves are not the most fluent speakers."

Michael Blake, an associate professor of philosophy and public policy at the University of Washington, said languages have always changed and disappeared over time, and he argues against the idea that all languages should be preserved.

"When we have indigenous languages in danger because of what we've done to these communities, that's the real reason" behind preservation pushes, he said. "But it's a much more complicated argument. It doesn't mean every language now has the right to be immortal."

Preservation proponents say there are cultural and pragmatic reasons to save dying languages. Many indigenous communities have in their native tongues vast

repositories of knowledge about medicinal herbs, information that could provide clues to modern cures. The Kallawaya people in South America have passed on a secret language from father to son for more than 400 years, including the names and uses of medicinal plants. It is now spoken by fewer than 100 people. Preserving languages is also key to the field of linguistics, which could offer a window into the workings of the brain.

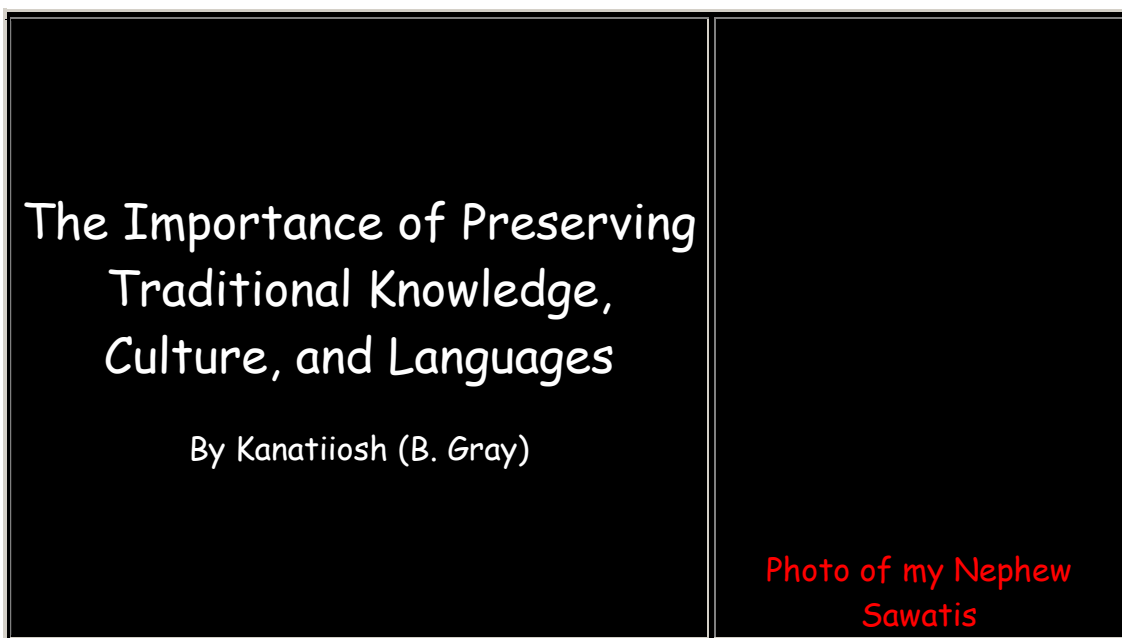
The Living Tongues Institute recruits youth who are not fluent in their traditional tongue to become "language activists," using digital equipment to document their elders' voices and learn the language themselves. This creates a record and builds pride in the language.

Such pride has been key to a modest popular resurgence of the Irish language. Paddy Homan, an Irish musician and social worker who immigrated to Chicago two years ago, thinks the 1990s' "Celtic Tiger" economic boom was a major boost for Irish.

"It used to feel like a sin to speak the Irish language; the English made us feel bad about ourselves, like we were just a nation of alcoholics," said Homan, 34. "Now we feel proud, and speaking Irish is the fashionable thing to do."

Reference 2:

<http://www.peace4turtleisland.org/pages/preservingtradition.htm>



Onwa wenhnisera:te ionkwakia taro:ron ne iorihwa:ke ne aitewaka
enionnion tsiniiohtonha:kie tsina titewatere ne onkwehshon: a tanon
tsini:iot tsi rokwatakwen ne ohonttsia:ke. Ne ne a:ienre k akwe:kon
skan:nen tsitewanonhton:nion ne tsiniionkwe:take kenhnon:we iahitewaia
taie:ri oni tsi ionkwata kari:te iah thaho:ten tekionkwakia tonkion ne

kanonhwa ktenhtshera. Ne kati ehnon:we iorihwa:ke tsi entewatka we ne
kanonhwaratonhtshera.

(Rokwaho) Kahniakehaka Ohen:ton Karihwaterhkwen

INTRODUCTION:

After numerous years of United States policies to forcibly assimilate the Indians into the mainstream of dominant society, the aftermath of these covert policies can be seen in the number of Onkwehonwe, native people, who have lost their traditional ways and languages. However, there still remains traditional people who practice the ceremonies of their nations, and people who can still speak their languages.

As caretakers of Mother Earth and the Seven Generations to come, it is our responsibility to protect, maintain, and actively practice our traditional ways and languages. If we fail to continue our unique ways of life, we will cease to exist as Onkwehonwe, and the natural and spiritual world will cease to recognize us, for we will have forsaken our original instructions that were given to us by the Creator. Therefore, we must all take affirmative steps to preserve and protect our traditional ways and languages.

In this essay, I will discuss the affirmative actions taken by the Haudenosaunee, People of the Longhouse: The Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca, the Tuscarora joined the Confederacy later in approx. 1714, at Kanatsiohareke and the Akwesasne Freedom School to teach, protect, and maintain Haudenosaunee traditional ways and languages.

Kanatsiohareke

Kanatsiohareke is pronounced, ga na jo ha lay: gay, and it literally translates to mean "The Clean Pot". Kanatsiohareke is located in the Mohawk Valley and consists of approximately 400 acres of fertile farmland, which is part of the traditional territory of the Kahniakehaka (The People of the Flint, which is what the Mohawk call themselves).

Sakokwenionkwas (Tom Porter, Bear Clan) and some other traditional, Longhouse, people decided to return to the beautiful and unpolluted Mohawk Valley in Fonda, New York. This decision to move was not an easy one, but Porter and some of the others felt that the inundation of

pollution from industries surrounding the reservation made it difficult and unsafe to subsist by traditional methods of hunting, fishing, gardening, and gathering of wild plants and medicines. As a result, they returned to their ancestral lands creating the Kanatsiohareke community.

In 1997, the Iroquois Language Conference met at Kanatsiohareke to discuss the proposal of creating a "Carlisle Indian Boarding School in Reverse". For those that do not know, the United States Indian boarding schools were horrible places for the children.

Many Indian children were literally snatched away from their parents, their traditional ways and languages were replaced with English, and they were beaten for speaking their own languages. The boarding schools whether run by the military, or run by religious orders, were funded by the United States Government and were seen as the best way to assimilate the Indian into mainstream society. As a matter of fact, Pratt, founder of the Carlisle School said that "taking the Indian out of the child" was the quickest and easiest way to civilize Indian children. Thus, he insisted on forcing Indian children to be taken from their loving families and placed in boarding schools, all in the hope of destroying Indian traditional ways and languages.

The goal of Kanatsiohareke is to create an Haudenosaunee language and cultural immersion program that would work as a reversal of the devastating ill effects that the boarding schools, like Carlisle Boarding School, had on the Six Nations people. When Kanatsiohareke began to look into the impacts of these assimilative boarding schools, the results were astounding.

The following chart was compiled for Kanatsiohareke by George Looney, which appeared in, the Newsletter of Kanatsiohareke Winter 1998, and it is an approximation of the number of fluent speakers:

NATIONS	POPULATION	SPEAKERS
Tuscarora	1,000	12
Seneca	15,000	25
Cayuga	10,000	62

Onondaga	1,200	17
Oneida	14,000	160
Mohawk	35,000	3,433

These statistics made all at the conference realize that actions must immediately be taken to preserve the Haudenosaunee languages. Kanatsiohareke decided to have a whole month that would be dedicated to a "reversal of the Carlisle Boarding School" where Six Nations Indian children, whose parents wanted them to be sent, would go to an immersion program that would teach them their respective Haudenosaunee language.

The response was excellent and children did go and participate in the language immersion program. I heard that those who went enjoyed it very much and learned a lot. I know that in the future, that they are planning to include entire families in the immersion program because in many cases when the children returned home they could not actively continue their new language skills because their parents did not know the language. I have also heard that the particular reservation are thinking about pursuing having language programs at their nations, so families will be able to participate without having to leave their reservations.

Akwesasne Freedom School

Since 1985, the Akwesasne Freedom School, located within the Kahniakehaka (Mohawk) Nation territory, has been running a Kahniakehaka language immersion program. As a matter of fact, this is the first such program in the United States. The Akwesasne Freedom School is an independent elementary school, run by the Mohawk Nation, that teaches classes for grades pre-kindergarten through the 8th grade.

Akwesasne, (land of the drumming partridge), is located near the Saint Lawrence River in Upstate New York and Canada. The School was founded in 1979, by very concerned parents who realized that action needed to be taken to preserve and protect their traditional culture and language, for it was slowly being lost due to the United States policies of forced assimilation and relocation.

The Akwesasne Freedom school teaches the children about their traditional ways and language. They teach by using traditional Haudenosaunee ways by incorporating the Ohenton Kariwatehkwen (the Thanksgiving Address), which literally translated means the words before all else, and teaches respect and knowledge for the entire natural world. They also incorporate the Kaianeraserakowa (the Great Law of Peace) with contemporary academics. This combination of traditional teaching and non-Indian academic skills enable the students to retain their traditional teachings, while also learning how to deal with the non-Haudenosaunee world.

My nieces and nephews attend the Akwesasne Freedom School and they have learned the Mohawk language. Every time the little ones speak the language and participate in the Longhouse (Ceremony), it makes my heart soar to know that the traditional ways and the languages are being continued.

Conclusion

The survival of the Haudenosaunee, our traditional ways, our languages, and our unique way of viewing the world are dependent on preserving the languages and traditional ways. When one speaks in their traditional language, one has a unique way of viewing the world. This unique view along with our traditional ways of life are tied together, and what holds them together is our spirituality, which in turn makes us Haudenosaunee.

Our languages are of great importance to the continuity of this planet, for they make us who we are, they heal, and they protect the people and the Natural World. Our languages enable us to speak with the Creator, and the Natural World. Our languages allow us to offer prayers, to sing, to do ceremonies, and to allow us to be Onkwehonwe, Indian People. Actively practicing our traditional ways and languages are important for the continuity, health, and welfare of our people, our nations, and the natural world, for we are all interdependent on one another for survival.

Without our languages and our traditional ways we cease to live in harmony with Mother Earth, the Natural world, and we fail to protect the future generations to come. That is why it is so important to learn your languages and to continue your traditional ways.

Reference 3:

<http://www2.scholastic.com/browse/subarticle.jsp?id=4398>

Preserving Language & Culture

by Lourdes Diaz Soto, PhD

At a recent workshop, I asked all of the early childhood educators in the audience whose grandmothers spoke a language other than English to raise their hands. A large majority did. Then I asked those people if their parents spoke the grandparents' language. Considerably fewer-although still a large number-did. Finally, I asked all those who now speak their grandmother's language to raise their hands. Only a few hands went up.

Teachers whose early childhood memories include hearing more than one language spoken at family gatherings have expressed sadness that neither they nor their children are able to speak the language of their grandparents. They say they miss the sights, sounds, and tastes of family traditions. There is strong evidence that maintaining family culture has a strong effect on children's social and emotional development. In addition, children with a strong base in the language and culture of their families receive the "intergenerational wisdom" that loving families pass down to them through song, story, music, art, drama, dance, and so on.

The wisdom passed down from generation to generation has a central place in many cultures where the extended family has traditionally played a major role in child-rearing. In my own family-as in many Latino families-my grandmother was the primary figure in my life. She was my reference point-the person I was most eager to make proud. Speaking my native language with her made me feel especially close to my heritage.

When language, along with cultural wisdom and pride, are no longer passed down to the next generation, children-and our society as a whole-lose something. The richly diverse cultural and familial traditions of our own country, and the intergenerational wisdom that is imbedded in them, are all being lost. Yet these could serve us well in our struggle with some of the complex social issues that face us. When language and culture are preserved, and children learn pride in who they are and respect for one another, the collaborative wisdom of our nation's diverse cultures will help us solve problems together for generations to come.

As teachers of our youngest children, there are two basic areas we need to explore in order to help preserve the traditions of all the children in our care. First, we need to examine our own personal attitudes about languages and cultures, since these attitudes will be mirrored in our classrooms. Second, we need to examine our classroom practices to make sure they support the best interests of children from either linguistically diverse or monolingual families.

To evaluate your program's relationship to diversity and language, ask yourself the following questions:

- Am I respectful and accepting of children's culturally and linguistically diverse families?
- Do my literature and classroom environment reflect the languages and cultures of the children?
- Does my program integrate the wisdom and knowledge of these diverse groups, particularly their art, music, games, and stories, as well as their traditions of relating to the natural world?
- Do I invite guests to the classroom or take trips that are culturally and linguistically relevant to the children?
- Do I provide lots of experiential and hands-on learning activities?
- Do I give children lots of language opportunities that include social and informal interactions?
- Do I encourage families to maintain their native languages and cultures?
- Do I give second-language learners the gift of time?
- Do I provide lots of opportunities for children to interact with families and individuals who are like themselves?

Lourdes Diaz Soto, PhD, is an associate professor in the College of Education at Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

Reference 4:

<http://faculty.ed.umuc.edu/~jmatthew/articles/langdiverse.html>

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PRESERVING LANGUAGE DIVERSITY

by H. Russell Bernard

Computers can be a tool for making the survival of languages possible.

The people of the world speak between 3,000 and 6,000 languages. Of these, 80 to 90 percent are spoken by indigenous peoples, representing almost all linguistic diversity today. A few native-language communities, like the Aymara and the Tswana, are large and robust, but most are small and fragile. Only 276 languages are spoken by a million or more people.

Languages seem to be disappearing faster than ever before. I estimate that there are about 15 percent fewer languages now than in 1500 A.D. This is alarming in itself,

but, just as important, the consequent reduction of cultural diversity may threaten humanity's survival. Our adaptive success as a species--with over 5 billion people in such diverse environments as jungles, deserts, and the Arctic--is due to "culture," implying the communication of ideas through language. Linguistic diversity relates to adaptational ideas about property, health care, food, children, power, and disputes. The loss of language diversity diminishes our ability to adapt because it decreases the pool of knowledge from which to draw.

The existence or disappearance of languages has particular political and economic implications for native peoples themselves. Consider language-related politics in India, Belgium, Canada, Lithuania, and Estonia. Cultural uniqueness--ethnicity-- reinforces claims to a share of political power, land, jobs, and other resources in heterogeneous states. Language is a powerful force in legitimating those claims.

Conversely, not speaking its own language can hurt a group's claim to special ethnic status. A group of Mexican Indians recently sued a power company that had received funding to build a hydroelectric generator and dam. The lake resulting from the dam would flood thousands of acres of ancestral Indian land. The Indians argued that not only was the company offer to pay for the land inadequate, but also that the land was important to their identity. Company lawyers noted that only a few elders spoke the Indian language, and none of the younger generation were learning it. How could Indians expect special status if they didn't speak their own language?

Computers can help preserve both vanishing native languages and language diversity. First, native peoples can use computers to write in previously nonwritten languages. Authors seeking readers can help teach their people to read. Second, computers can reduce the cost of publishing in native languages. Books, pamphlets, articles, letters, and so forth can help spread literacy. Third, computers can be a tool for creating dictionaries that may be more extensive than those produced by linguists. A linguist can compile a dictionary of perhaps 5,000 words over a decade. After a two-week seminar with computers, five Kom speakers in Cameroon produced a 2,000-word dictionary from a 25,000-word body of literature they wrote in those two weeks.

Tribal languages are disappearing

A few indigenous groups have literary traditions that flourished in the past or flourish now--Zulu, Xhosa, and Luo in Africa; Cherokee and Navajo in North America. Quechua and Aymara in South America. However, most native languages lack "popular literacy"--many people reading and writing regularly and authors writing books in their native language. Without popular literacy, all but a few languages will soon disappear.

It's not for lack of writing systems. Virtually every indigenous language has an alphabet or some other writing system. Most of these have been created by missionaries and linguists over the past 500 years. A great many peoples even have two or three books in their native language: a grammar, a dictionary, a translation of the Bible.

Nor is it for lack of bilingual education programs that teach children to read and write in their first language and the major language of their country. Children typically learn to read primers and occasionally the Bible in their native language. However, they rarely grow up to write books. In most cases, these programs don't produce popular literacy in the native language, and the tribal languages of the world remain largely unwritten.

Moreover, many books go unpublished because the costs of printing are high. One copy of a 200-page book in a Mexican native language may cost 45,000 pesos (about \$9)--two days' wages for a rural laborer.

Nevertheless, there is no more potent force for literacy than authors who want others to read their work. Computers can help preserve language diversity by enabling native authors to produce literature in their own languages.

Acting on this reasoning 20 years ago, I taught Jesus Salinas Pedraza, a Nahnu Indian from Hidalgo State, Mexico, to read and write his own language. We used a modified version of an alphabet developed by missionary linguists some years earlier. Several years later, he authored a description of his culture, which I translated into English, annotated, and typed into a computer. This collaboration resulted in two Nahnu English books that Salinas and I co-authored, *OTOMI FOLK TALES, PARABLES, AND JOKES* and *THE N!CHN!U*, an ethnography of the Nahnu people.

Problems arose with adjusting the Nahnu alphabet to make it possible to write text on a computer. The alphabet contained several symbols not on a standard computer keyboard. Salinas and other Nahnu educators didn't like the compromised writing system that I'd concocted, and they balked at the limited keyboard letters available. They insisted technology should serve their needs. They were right, although the wisdom then current in linguistics was to construct writing systems from characters available on standard keyboards.

To answer Salinas's criticism, we switched to an Apple II word processor called Gutenberg. This made it possible to fashion new characters and print them exactly as they appeared on the screen. For example, the letter "e" in Nahnu stands for the sound of "a" in the English word "cat." In the 1970s we used a "w" for that sound. The "w" is close to the "e" on a standard keyboard, and "w" is not needed elsewhere for writing Nahnu. Gutenberg and the Apple II let us design an "e" for both the screen and the printer.

With Gutenberg, Salinas could write the characters of Nahnu by 1981. He later wrote a 250,000-word work, *NATIVE ETHNOGRAPHY: A MEXICAN INDIAN DESCRIBES HIS CULTURE*, which I annotated and translated. It was published in 1989.

Extending the technology

As early as 1984, Salinas was so comfortable writing Nahnu on the Apple II that it was possible to consider extending the technology to Mixtec, Tsotsil, and other languages. That led to the establishment in 1987 of the Native Literacy Center to enable Indian people to learn to read and write and publish books in their own

languages using computers. Four organizations sponsored the center: the National Directorate for Indian Education (the part of Mexico's Ministry of Education in charge of Indian- Spanish education programs), the Center for Advanced Studies in Social Anthropology (CIESAS), the Interamerican Indian Institute, and the University of Florida Anthropology Department. In 1988, the center opened at the Oaxaca headquarters of CIESAS. Seven language families are represented in the state of Oaxaca, with 16 major Indian languages.

In the first phase of the project, ending in 1991, Indians spent up to three months at the center. Mostly bilingual school teachers, the trainees were literate in Spanish but needed to learn to write in their native languages. They found this easy, once they learned to use a word processor that produced the necessary characters. Mixtecs used a Mixtec-Spanish word processor, Chinantecs used a Chinantec-Spanish word processor, and so on.

The Oaxaca native literacy project has been using Gutenberg and Apple IIs, but it is changing to IBM-compatible equipment, capable of handling all the characters needed. The technology has become relatively inexpensive, and Word Perfect now allows people to define most characters they need for text. As Windows programs become more popular, many more ways to fashion new characters should become available. (Many people have pointed out, of course, that it would be far easier to create and print special characters with a Macintosh than with IBM-compatible machines. The decision to use the IBM-compatible format was entirely a matter of practical convenience: when we began the project, there was no Macintosh repair facility in Oaxaca.)

The Native Literacy Center is now becoming CELIAC, the Centro Editorial en Lenuas Indigenas, A.C., or Indian Language Publishing Center. The A.C. at the end of the name indicates that the center is a non-profit corporation. It can enter into contracts, receive grants, train authors, and publish native- language works.

So far, 52 people speaking a total of 12 Mexican languages have trained at Oaxaca. They have produced works in Nahuatl, Mixtec, Mixe, Zapotec, Chinantec, and Mazatec. Books in other languages are in the works. The participants have produced original prose and poetry, ethnographies, and biographies. In each case, these authors have written directly in their own languages.

In the second phase of the project, now underway, the center is editing and publishing these literary works and distributing them to the various language communities. There are plans to expand a few works, translate them into Spanish, and publish bilingual editions for wider distribution. The author/teachers will use their books to help adults and children in their home regions learn to read.

While the computer has not made it possible for most Indians to afford books, it has made it clear that many native people want to write them. The same is proving true in South America. After Salinas and I presented our work to the Society for Applied Anthropology in 1989, Norman Whitten, an anthropologist at the University of Illinois, arranged for Alfonso Chango, a trilingual (Shwara-Quichua-Spanish) teacher from Ecuador, to visit Oaxaca. During his three-month stay at the center, Chango wrote 50 pages on Shwara culture in Quichua, a language spoken by about 5

million Ecuadorans. In 1990, he acquired a computer and began teaching others to read and write Quichua and Shwara.

Extending the technology to Africa

In July 1988, Salinas and I demonstrated our project at the Twelfth International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences held in Yugoslavia. Paul Nchoji Nkwi, an anthropologist at the University of Yaounde in Cameroon and a member of the Kom people, suggested that the technology might help his people write in their own language, too. About 127,000 people speak Kom and almost all are bilingual in English and Kom. According to Nkwi, many would read Kom books--if any were available.

In 1989, with a grant from the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, I spent two weeks training five Kom speakers to use a computer and write in their native language. The five participants included two bilingual teachers, a lawyer, an anthropology graduate student, and a Catholic priest. All knew the Kom alphabet developed by German missionaries in the 1880s, but none had written a substantial text in it.

The task was to transfer their skill in writing English to writing Kom, but an immediate problem arose with tones. Kom is a tonal language, with three tones. The Kom speakers had learned to mark tones so others could read their work. However, if people have to mark all the tones, they often don't write at all.

To enable the Kom to write tones on the computer, I programmed a character set that included all the vowels with the tones. However, the system was cumbersome and required learning the placement of more than a dozen extra keys. By the third day, four participants had abandoned the tones, although one teacher persisted in marking tones to the end. He felt it was more correct to do so, according to what he'd been taught by linguists.

In two weeks, the five trainees produced 25,000 words of casual, adult, literate Kom. It was casual in that each participant would turn on the computer in the morning and start typing. Anything they could say, they could write. It was adult, not the simple sentences in school primers. It was literate: flowing Kom text, organized around a theme, went on for pages. For example, the lawyer had recently married and wrote an essay about Kom marriage contracts.

The evidence indicates that Kom people don't need to mark tones in writing. At the end of the training, the group held a ceremony and invited two dozen other Kom. The priest wrote a speech in Kom about the training, and he didn't mark any tones in the text. One of the teachers presented the speech orally, without difficulty, after just one preliminary reading.

Leaving out tone or accent marks is happening in other languages as well. Many contemporary Spanish writers leave out accent marks out of convenience. This may not replace the tradition of accenting, but native Spanish speakers don't need to see accents to read their language fluently. Modern Hebrew is written entirely without marking vowels.

In other words, people can tolerate a great deal of ambiguity in writing. Word processing made it possible to test this in Kom, as it had in Mexico earlier.

Word processing has also helped the Kom people hasten the development of a Kom orthography. Like most nonwritten languages, Kom has an alphabet but little else in the way of rules for writing, such as for spelling, syllabification, and punctuation. The size of an orthography depends on the amount of literature in a language. English orthographic rules developed in part out of the large body of English literature.

Just as the Kom participants changed the rules about marking tones, word processing affected other aspects of Kom orthography. For example, the writers developed rules of punctuation because they wanted the computer to produce justified text, which looked attractive to them. Since Kom's long words left big, ugly spaces in justified text, the cure was a clever use of hyphens. The participants worked together to hyphenate text, discussing how to hyphenate certain words and whether some words should be hyphenated at all. In some cases, they decided that long words were really composed of two words. The participants thereby squeezed decades of convention building into two weeks.

Creating opportunity

Teaching people to read primers and Bibles doesn't produce authors; it produces readers. Printing presses and publishing houses produce authors, and teaching a few highly motivated people to write and print their own books can help many people become literate. This is no different today than it was in medieval Europe.

The computer-based ability to publish such books raises a question, however. While few native-language communities can afford computers and desktop publishing systems, the technology is not too expensive for government agencies, development agencies, foundations, missionary groups, and community self-help groups, or even wealthy native individuals. But should such agencies invest in publishing systems for native-language communities? The technology could irrevocably transform a people and culture, and scholars like Etienne Verne warn that insisting on the importance of written literature may lead native people to shun their oral tradition. Walter J. Ong and others respond that people must give up the beauty and power of the oral world to gain the power of literacy.

Both arguments are wrong. Oral traditions remain strong in the most technologically advanced societies, through plays, movies, television, music. And if literacy does fundamentally alter a culture, it is arrogant for Westerners to decide that a particular transformation should or should not happen to preliterate peoples.

Whatever the consequences of literacy, I'd still choose to preserve language diversity over just preserving oral tradition. In Australia, the lack of native-language literacy contributed to reducing the number of Aboriginal languages from 260 to only 40 or 50 in daily use in the 1970s.

This is not to argue that native authors should feel compelled to write in their native languages. Instead, potential authors need the opportunity to write. Computers

help create this opportunity, providing many people with the tools to write and print books. While this won't guarantee language survival, it will make it possible. The richness of human knowledge is at stake.

How you can help

The Native Literacy Center in Oaxaca, Mexico, has become a nonprofit corporation called CELIAC, the Centro Editorial en Lenguas Indigenas, A.C. CELIAC publishes books in Latin America's indigenous languages and trains indigenous people from around Latin American on how to write and publish books in their own languages. Some CELIAC books will be bilingual--in Spanish and the indigenous language of the author.

You can support CELIAC by purchasing the books they produce or by asking your library to do so. Tax-deductible donations can be made to the University of Florida Foundation, Inc. Equipment donations are also welcome.

For more information on how to help or become involved in the project, contact H. Russell Bernard, Dept. of Anthropology, 1350 Turlington Hall, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611; fax: (904)376-8617.

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Reference 5:

<http://www.debate.org/debates/Preserving-Endangered-Languages-is-More-Important-Than-Spreading-Major-Language/1/>

Hello, and thank you for taking the time to read my very first debate topic on Debate.org.

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Definition of an endangered language;

<http://en.wikipedia.org...>

I believe that preserving languages of the world is a worthy task, that would both preserve culture and heritage of people all across the earth.

Some points to be considered;

The debate with Traditional and Simplified Chinese characters has been raging for decades; unfortunately, the Chinese government has taken the side of Simplified Chinese, enacting a fine if one were to use Traditional characters in place of Simplified Characters. Though the Chinese language is certainly not endangered, it gives one insight of what could happen if a powerful government were to enforce a specific writing system.

Source = <http://en.wikipedia.org...>

Code talkers have been used by the United States government to ensure secure communication of messages without risk of the enemy deciphering the message. Navajo, Choctaw, Cherokee, and Comanche code talkers have been used in World War I, World War II, and Vietnam to ensure safe transport of messages without risk of being understood by the enemy. Endangered languages can play a similar role in the future.

Source = <http://en.wikipedia.org...>

Language is a unique system that often has deep relations to the people who speak it. Preserving these languages can preserve historical heritage.

I look forward for someone to accept my challenge.

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Con

I thank my opponent for posting such an interesting topic. It is actually something I have considered before, and I look forward to sharing my thoughts on the subject.

Before addressing my opponent's specific points I would like to offer a definition of the word language, as I think it will be illuminating.

Language:

any system of formalized symbols, signs, sounds, gestures, or the like used or conceived as a means of communicating thought, emotion, etc.

<http://dictionary.reference.com...>

Though there are many options listed, I chose this one because I think it most accurately encapsulates the purpose of languages: communication between individuals. This communication lends itself handily to almost every human endeavor. Without the efficient sharing of information, through either speech or the written word, the modern world would grind to a halt.

Now, Westpaw argues first that in China the government is pushing the citizens to adapt simplified Chinese characters rather than traditional ones through the use of fines, and that this is undesirable. While true, the tyranny of the Chinese government over its people is not a model for most modern language death, and thus is not relevant to the issue at hand. Generally people simply find it more prudent to adapt the language of the wider culture around them, as it allows expanded opportunities for communication and greater ease in daily living. { 1 } There is nothing of force involved in this process.

Next, my opponent brings up the Native American code talkers in WW2, who were instrumental in preserving the secrecy of military communications. I have two counters to this claim:

1. a dead language needn't be entirely forgotten, and can still be used for such a purpose. As an example, take Latin. While it is indeed considered "dead" in the technical sense, as it has no native speakers, many high school and college students study the language extensively. It is still known. Thus I argue that language death does not necessarily imply a complete loss.

2. Encryption is no longer the complicated problem it once was thanks to computers. Complicated algorithms that were difficult to implement with the technology of the 1940s are incredibly simple given modern processing power. Indeed, the field of military encryption is alive and well.{2}

Finally, my opponent claims that:

"Language is a unique system that often has deep relations to the people who speak it. Preserving these languages can preserve historical heritage"

without providing any real reason as to why preserving cultural heritage is desirable.

The argument that languages have deep relations to those who speak them is irrelevant, since languages only die when all their native speakers disappear. If it is importance to such people that matters, this statement has no bearing on the issue of preserving languages.

Because language is about communication, preserving those that no longer serve that purpose except in extremely limited settings seems like a waste of effort and time, and my opponent has yet to offer any compelling reasons why people should do so.

As for spreading a major language, having a universal tongue in which people could communicate internationally would be immensely beneficial. The range of information that would be available to individuals directly would increase dramatically, as would the frequency of communication between different cultural groups, since such acts would no longer need to be adjudicated by a translator. Additionally, it is a fair bet that misunderstandings between people of formerly different native tongues would not need to worry about their meaning being lost in translation.

Also do note that I am not advocating "linguistic imperialism" or anything of the kind. I negate the resolution because I believe both preserving language diversity and spreading a major language are equally unimportant. Language is constantly adapting and changing to suit the purposes of those who use it. To try to preserve it in a freeze frame or prescribe certain changes is to interfere with a finely honed process that really doesn't need our help. There is a whole field of evolutionary linguistics to track and explain the changes:

<http://en.wikipedia.org...>

and a language tree with the most well known language family we have studied: indo-european.

<http://dericbownds.net...>

It is simply not in the nature of languages to stay the same, regardless of what we

would prescribe for them.

1. <http://en.wikipedia.org...>

2. <http://www.objs.com...>

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Pro

My opponent has brought up some very good points, though I am going to dissect these points to the best of my ability to further my own cause.

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"Generally people simply find it more prudent to adapt the language of the wider culture around them, as it allows expanded opportunities for communication and greater ease in daily living. { 1 } There is nothing of force involved in this process."

My opponent brings up an excellent point on the use of widespread language. However, one needs to note that my topic relates to that of culture, which is in itself useless.

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"As an example, take Latin. While it is indeed considered "dead" in the technical sense, as it has no native speakers, many high school and college students study the language extensively. It is still known. Thus I argue that language death does not necessarily imply a complete loss."

Latin is also used in Science and Law. Belle's point can actually be considered to further my own, considering the contributions that a language with no native speakers can affect so much.

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"Encryption is no longer the complicated problem it once was thanks to computers. Complicated algorithms that were difficult to implement with the technology of the 1940s are incredibly simple given modern processing power. Indeed, the field of military encryption is alive and well."

My opponents argument regarding technology can also be enveloped to suit my own purpose; with access to technology that can essentially interpret and translate languages, my opponents point that large languages can provide ease of communication is becoming increasingly null. One can already use software to translate hundreds of languages on the computer, allowing for global text communication. My opponent also seems to think that because of modern day technology, minor languages would be much less important to the military. Any type of knowledge that the military has includes a possibility that it can be used for a useful purpose.

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"Language is constantly adapting and changing to suit the purposes of those who use it. To try to preserve it in a freeze frame or prescribe certain changes is to interfere

with a finely honed process that really doesn't need our help. There is a whole field of evolutionary linguistics to track and explain the changes."

The same can be said about tradition and lifestyle.

"Tradition and lifestyle is constantly adapting and changing to suit the purposes of those who use it. To try to preserve it in a freeze frame or prescribe certain changes is to interfere with a finely honed process that really doesn't need out help."

Even because of this fact, however, there continues to be Renaissance faires, reenactments, pow-wows, and cosplay events. Also note that none of these events are in a freeze frame, per se. One would be hard pressed to find one of these events that last more than a few days.

<http://www.cosplay.com...>

I have not even hinted that I propose to freeze frame languages. Instead, cultural and historic events can play an essential role in getting individuals interested in the language preservation process.

However, "Freeze framing" could also be beneficial in a historical context. From poems and legends to proverbs and jokes, documented languages can be useful to decrypt both carvings and paintings alike. The loss of languages is also detrimental to humanity's grasp of biodiversity, as humans transmit much knowledge about the nature and the universe.

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Final Points:

Around 50 to 90 percent of all languages are at high chances of becoming extinct within a hundred years.

[http://www.thelancet.com...\(01\)06332-2/fulltext#](http://www.thelancet.com...(01)06332-2/fulltext#)

In the same link, my central proposal resides. It is unrealistic to expect people to learn full languages, reaping little tangible benefits. Language documentation is a wonderful alternative.

There is no way I can provide my opponent with proof that language is an essential part of cultural identity. I also cant provide my opponent with any evidence that clothing is an essential part of cultural identity. This is up to the interpretation. What I can provide however, are examples of people actively engaged in preserving languages. In fact, I estimate that one can find more organizations attempting to preserve endangered languages than I can find organizations attempting to preserve historic clothing.

<http://www.native-languages.org...>

<http://www.nativelanguages.com...>

<http://www.rosettaproject.org...>

<http://www.uaf.edu...>

<http://www.savenativelanguages.org...>

<http://www.sciencedaily.com...>

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Con

"My opponent brings up an excellent point on the use of widespread language. However, one needs to note that my topic relates to that of culture, which is in itself useless."

Absolutely not! While some aspects of culture are probably useless, many others are not. The technology to build the computers we are using to communicate for example. Or the language in which we do so. These two cultural items alone have proved extremely useful to me over the course of my life.

"Latin is also used in Science and Law. Belle's point can actually be considered to further my own, considering the contributions that a language with no native speakers can affect so much."

Hardly. No one attempted to preserve Latin over and above other languages, they simply found it useful. Additionally, one language out of hundreds, if not thousands, having some use is no mandate to save the languages for the sake of diversity or culture.

"My opponents argument regarding technology can also be enveloped to suit my own purpose; with access to technology that can essentially interpret and translate languages, my opponents point that large languages can provide ease of communication is becoming increasingly null."

Unless and until we have a babelfish sort of technology than can be implanted in the ear and instantly translate whats heard, communication barriers do make a difference, even if that difference is smaller than it has been in the past.

"My opponent also seems to think that because of modern day technology, minor languages would be much less important to the military. Any type of knowledge that the military has includes a possibility that it can be used for a useful purpose."

That doesn't mean the Military should invest in a department of astrology to better predict the best days to start important campaigns. While knowledge is important to the military, simply advocating they amass as much as possible because they "might need it" is inefficient.

Even granting your premise that rare or obscure languages can be useful to the military, it doesn't follow that such languages need any native speakers to be known or useful, as the example of Latin is meant to demonstrate.

"Even because of this fact, however, there continues to be Renaissance faires, reenactments, pow-wows, and cosplay events. Also note that none of these events are in a freeze frame, per se. One would be hard pressed to find one of these events that last more than a few days.

<http://www.cosplay.com.....>

I have not even hinted that I propose to freeze frame languages. Instead, cultural and historic events can play an essential role in getting individuals interested in the language preservation process."

So what? If people want to indulge in cultural habits of the past there is no reason to stop them. There is also no reason to encourage such activities, or be worried when languages start going extinct. If individual people think a language is worth saving they will do so. If they do not, then so what? Why should "strangers" to the language, with no interest in it whatsoever, work to preserve something that is found to be of no value to anyone?

"Around 50 to 90 percent of all languages are at high chances of becoming extinct within a hundred years.

[http://www.thelancet.com.....\(01\)06332-2/fulltext#](http://www.thelancet.com.....(01)06332-2/fulltext#)

In the same link, my central proposal resides. It is unrealistic to expect people to learn full languages, reaping little tangible benefits. Language documentation is a wonderful alternative."

If the language isn't benefiting anyone, why are we keeping it around again?

"In fact, I estimate that one can find more organizations attempting to preserve endangered languages than I can find organizations attempting to preserve historic clothing."

Irrelevant. Just because a lot of people want to preserve languages, that doesn't mean that we all should want to do the same, nor does it make preserving languages at all important.

And again you refer to cultural identity and again I ask you- if a language is going extinct then that means it is losing native speakers- IOW it is part of very few people's cultural identities and will cease to be part of anyone's once it is extinct. Given this, how does it make sense to panic about people losing their cultural identity? It doesn't! The only cultural identities that are ever really threatened are those of people already dead.

Reference 6:

<http://www.questia.com/googleScholar.qst;jsessionid=LptchGDJ2Fqc0Wp0sy7NJtzRt1Pg71GLh7kP9m5MYJr6bDhhh2bW!-184007008!-1828655400?docId=5008438746>

Preserving Endangered Language Heritage Project

Journal article; Australian Aboriginal Studies, Vol. 2002, 2002

Journal Article Excerpt See below...

Preserving Endangered Language Heritage Project.

Since September 2000, the Institute has been in receipt of an ATSIC grant to undertake much-needed technical work and documentation of the recorded sound collection. The unit has two staff: Marisa Harris, who is the Language Archive Researcher and also Manager of the project, and Mark Campbell, the audio technician.

Initial consultations with FATSIL (The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation of Languages) resulted in priority being given to those languages for which there is strong community interest. The project has therefore been largely driven by requests from Indigenous individuals and organisations. To date, 680 preservation copies of language tapes have been made, 306 tapes have been documented and approximately 80 client requests for language recordings have been facilitated.

One particularly valuable outcome of the project has been the creation of ten sets of compilation tapes. Most archive tapes in the AIATSIS collection contain a range of different speakers and languages, and clients wishing to access 'everything' relating to their language often have to sift through hours of irrelevant content to access the material they want. There is also a considerable cost involved in having irrelevant materials copied or in needing a large editing job. From the Institute perspective, large editing jobs are very time consuming and inefficient, especially if the same language is requested some time later or repeatedly. The benefit to clients from the production of these compilation tapes is manifold: requests can be fulfilled quickly, clients receive only relevant materials and, as Mark Campbell is creating the compilations digitally, they can be delivered to clients in either analogue or digital format.

We have created compilation tapes for several languages for which we have received numerous requests, including Butchulla, Dhanggatti, Mirning, Yidiny, Wargamay, Dharawal & Dhurga, Waka Waka, Yugambah, Wangkumara and Murawari. Initially, it was hoped that all the material relating to a particular language could be edited onto a set of tapes. We have since opted to only choose material of reasonable quality (where available) which includes a variety of speakers and a range of material including lexical and grammatical elicitation, narratives and songs. The largest compilation created so far was for the Murawari language, spanning 62 tapes and representing approximately one-third of the Murawari material in the collection.

To complement the compilations, comprehensive lists have been compiled of all available audio material for the relevant languages. These lists are sent to clients in case there is a particular recording they would like that was not included on the compilation. It is estimated that at least eight more compilations will be created within the duration of the grant. Preservation copies of compilations are now being stored on CD.

Another recent development in the recorded sound collection which has resulted from a collaboration between the Preserving Languages Project, the Digitisation Project and the Archive staff has been a review and streamlining in the procedures for documenting and cataloguing archive tapes. In the past, tapes have been catalogued as a whole collection, which might encompass hundreds of tapes in one record, then individual tapes have been catalogued in

small sequences, which represent a portion of a tape, in some cases less than a minute in duration. The slow procedure for creating records representing very small sequences of sound has slowed the documentation and cataloguing work considerably and resulted in a diminishment in the quality of the service that can be offered to clients.

The improved methods for documentation and cataloguing will mean more material is documented and therefore much more accessible, and will ultimately allow a link between the catalogue record, the detailed summary sheet relating to a tape, and the relevant recording held in digital mass storage. It is hoped that, in the future, clients will be able to download non-restricted audio material by clicking on the 'electronic access' link on an item-level catalogue record.

To view an example of a tape collection that has had new item records created, visit the Mura catalogue (at <http://unicorn.aiatsis.gov.au/index.html>), search the Recorded Sound Archive and type in TRYON_D01 in the 'words or phrase' field; neither documentation nor audio is yet attached to the record.

The Preserving Endangered Language Heritage Project has been very successful in making language audio materials more accessible to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and in assisting communities in the establishment of their own local archives. The project is advertised through attendance at language forums and through the FATSIL newsletter Voice of the Land. Many communities and individuals are taking advantage ...

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