



## FORUM REPORT : WORKSHOP REPORT

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<b>EVENT NUMBER</b>	182	<b>DATE</b>	October 7 2008	<b>TIME</b>	11:30 - 1300
<b>ROOM</b>	119				
<b>TITLE</b>	The World's Cultural Diversity: New Measurements Show What's Happening and Why it is Important to Conservationists (Aliances Workshop)				
<b>ORGANIZER INSTITUTION</b>	Terralingua				

<b>MODERATOR</b>	David Harmon
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### WHAT WERE THE OBJECTIVES FOR THIS EVENT ?

Using a "learning meeting" audience-interactive format, this workshop aimed to explore three new tools that measure the status of and trends in cultural diversity on the global and local levels:

- i) The Index of Linguistic Diversity (ILD), which tracks changes over time in the number of speakers of the world's languages;
- ii) The Linguistic Vitality Test (LVT), which analyzes both current linguistic vitality and the transmission of linguistic knowledge from older to younger generations; and
- ii) The Vitality Index of Traditional Environmental Knowledge (VITEK), which provides locally appropriate, globally applicable quantitative measures of trends in retention or loss of TEK over time.

Participants will have an opportunity to discuss key points with each other and the presenters, and will take home a CD of resources that explore these ideas in depth.

## HOW WERE THESE OBJECTIVES ACHIEVED?

Luisa Maffi (workshop organizer) gave a 10 minute introduction, using PowerPoint on the importance of these three tools. An overview of what is happening with the worlds' languages and, perhaps, also the worlds' traditional ecological knowledge.

A map of biocultural diversity "hotspot" was shown, which shows an overlap of areas of high cultural diversity and biodiversity.

Jonathan Loh presented his graphs on the trends in languages which show the disparity between numbers of people speaking particular languages and the declining role of other languages aside from the main 16 languages.

Margaret Florey presented her research with communities in and to develop the linguistic vitality index.

The third presenter was Stanford Zent with details of how the vitality index for TEK was measured with preliminary field studies underway.

The audience was able to ask questions after each of the three presentations and then at the end as well.

## WHAT NEW IDEAS AND MAIN MESSAGES WERE RAISED AT THE EVENT?

### General

- 85% of the worlds languages are spoken by indigenous peoples;
- Possibly 50% of endangered languages may be extinct by 2010.

### 1. Jonathan Loh:

- Number of speakers of different languages tell us something about the worlds cultures. Ethnologue data goes back to the 1970s
- 19% of the worlds' languages are in the Pacific (incl Aus) but that is only 0.5% of the worlds' population. Over half of the worlds' population speaks one of 16 languages.
- The global index of indigenous languages shows trends of declining NUMBER OF SPEAKERS of indigenous languages (not declining number of languages).
- There is enough data to look at particular regions, language families, etc. By region (4 political regions), the decline is most rapid in the Americas, followed by the Pacific; then Africa and then Eurasia which looks relatively stable. This is a conservative estimate of decline.
- Global linguistic diversity is a proxy for cultural diversity. CBD has selected "Status and Trends in Linguistic Diveristy" measured by numbers of speakers of indigenous languages as an indicator of progress towards its 2010 target.
- These are largely correlations, and causal trends have not been analyzed.

### 2. Margaret Florey:

- Research is at the community level in Maluku, Eastern Indonesia: what is happening on the ground with small languages:
- There is a global crisis in language endangerment and we need a standardized measure of this.
- Processes of documentation are important because of the generational gap when learning has not been happening. Documenting it to ride this gap makes it accessible to future generations and is not lost in the meantime.
- It is a 3-stage LV tool: lexical recognition, translation, and discourse.
- The findings track 4 languages: find that in all, there is high receptive ability in older generations: "process of tip" occurs with school children who score less than 30% which is chance (guessing);
- One of the 4 has higher retention in younger generations, but the tip does occur as in the others.

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- The tool can be used as a predictive model: the tool uses locally appropriate content; standardized results permits comparison; benefits to both community and policy makers. Assessment of intergenerational transmission is a basis for appropriate intervention and action.

Question from the floor: there are so many dialects within small areas; and living languages (Eastonia, Costa Rica); these are not counted in the global assessment of languages: these can be lost without any formal recognition. Imposition a value judgment over what languages must be used: capacity-building work is done where there is a complex of grief and anger of dispossession and wanting the tools for language revitalization.

Question from the floor: what can be learned from the one language shown on the graph that looks a little more healthy (green line): Answer - conversion to non-indigenous religions: those that converted to Christianity had a more rapid language shift than those that converted to Islam. But since they are all now falling rapidly so there must be common trends – use of Indonesian and location of villages – isolation.

### 3. Stanford Zent:

- The idea is to measure retention or loss of TEK over time and to allow comparison at different scales.
- The general procedure is specifically adapted to fit the categories, values, activities, social contexts and biotic environments that are meaningful and pertinent according to the local groups themselves. Local community members decide and judge what cognitive/behavioral domains and constituent items should potentially be included in the assessment. Has implications for i) practice (Help raise local awareness of the healthy/unhealthy state of their cultural heritage. Enhance local groups' ability to communicate their concerns & needs to outside actors); ii) policy, (Enable aid providers to identify situations where TEK is endangered and therefore target interventions where they are most needed. Provide a tool for monitoring trends in traditional knowledge retention or erosion over time; and iii) research (Analysis of the covariation of TEK vitality and other ecological indicators permits the testing of hypotheses about the relationships between TEK and biodiversity conservation).

### Comment from someone in the audience:

- IUCN has a very ethnocentric view of nature, which is based on the world view of only 3 main languages and so the diversity of cultures is ignored.

### **WHAT CONCRETE ACHIEVEMENTS WERE REPORTED? (PARTNERSHIPS, PROJECTS, SUCCESS STORIES, ETC)**

the push by some communities that Margaret is involved in for schools to have their languages used in them. Also the program in Hawaii – language “nests” are trying to replicate intergenerational transmission; the parent generation needs to speak the language along with their children.

We need to work on the restoration of intergenerational transmission: we need for it to happen in the home first, before it happens in the schools.....

### **WHAT FOLLOW-UP IS EXPECTED?**

Pilot research for the TEK vitality index will indicate what needs to be modified for more field research; continuing research on the language vitality index will establish more trend data. The network of those interested in biocultural diversity will continue to expand.

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**LINKS; URLS; PAPERS, ETC**

CD with references available

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