

TERRALINGUA NEWSLETTER #2
News and Views from Terralingua: Partnerships for Linguistic and Biological
Diversity
December 1996

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ORGANIZATIONAL UPDATE

Work Continues on Attaining Nonprofit Status.
As we go to press, the paperwork necessary to apply for US-government
nonprofit tax status has just been completed and submitted. Although it
takes several months for the U.S. Internal Revenue Service to process its
own (labyrinthine!) application, we fully expect to obtain this status when
all is said and done. Once that happens, contributions to Terralingua will
become tax-deductible for U.S. citizens. Additionally, we will then be
able to apply for numerous foundation grants that are restricted to
recognized nonprofit organizations.

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ACTIVITIES

The UC-Berkeley Conference. The major activity Terralingua has been involved in these past three months has been the conference described below by Luisa Maffi, Terralingua's president.

Language, Knowledge, and the Environment:
Threats to the World's Biocultural Diversity
By Luisa Maffi (U California, Berkeley)

[Report on the working conference "Endangered Languages, Endangered Knowledge, Endangered Environments", held at U California at Berkeley, October 25-27, 1996. Revised draft no. 2, December 14, 1996, submitted to "Conference Call" column, Anthropology Newsletter.]

On October 25-27, 1996, an international group of scholars, professionals, and activists came together at U California, Berkeley for the working conference "Endangered Languages, Endangered Knowledge, Endangered Environments". This event was the first joint meeting of experts from an array of disciplines in the social, behavioral, and biological sciences ranging from linguistics to anthropology, ethnobiology, cultural geography, economics, cognitive psychology, biology, and ecology, along with natural resource conservationists, cultural advocates, and representatives of indigenous peoples. The meeting was called to explore the complex connections between cultural and biological diversity, the interrelated causes and consequences of loss of both forms of diversity, and the role of indigenous and minority languages and of traditional knowledge in biocultural diversity maintenance and the promotion of sustainable human-environment relationships. Participants also discussed plans for integrated research, training, and action in this domain.

Diversity Loss on Earth

In their respective fields, these various communities of researchers and activists have been calling attention to the dramatic effects of rapidly occurring global processes of socioeconomic and ecological change on the very objects of their concerns: human cultural and linguistic groups and their traditional knowledge; biological species; and the world's environments. An ever-growing body of literature on endangered languages, vanishing cultures, biodiversity loss, and ecosystems at risk is accumulating, attesting to the perceived gravity and urgency of such issues. Underlying these concerns is a common interest in the future of humanity and of life on earth. However, communication all across these fields of endeavor has been slow in developing. The conference was conceived to begin to fill this gap.

Links Between Biological and Cultural Diversity

Conference participants first established theoretical common ground by considering notions of biological diversity and diversification, on the one hand, and linguistic and cultural diversity and diversification, on the other, and outlining analogies and discrepancies between these different manifestations of the diversity

of life. They heard reports about the comparable magnitude and pace of the current extinction crises affecting biological species and human languages, and examined evidence of remarkable overlaps between global mappings of the world's areas of biological megadiversity and areas of high linguistic diversity. The possible factors accounting for these correlations were discussed in light of issues of human-environment coevolution and in terms of various ways that have been proposed by ethnobiologists and human ecologists in which cultural diversity might enhance biodiversity or vice versa. In this perspective, the need to address the foreseeable consequences of massive disruption of such long-standing interactions was stressed, and the converse correlation between low-diversity cultural systems and low biodiversity was noted.

The notion of endemism emerged as of particular relevance in talking about both biological and linguistic diversity, from the point of view of the especially threatened status of species or languages endemic to a single region--or even worse, a single country, making them extremely vulnerable to the vagaries of national sociopolitical and economic processes. Linking the two forms of endemism, a notion of "ethnobiological endemism" was proposed, underscoring the local nature of traditional environmental knowledge and its comparable vulnerability by those same processes. Also centrally relevant to the conference's perspective was evidence concerning indigenous and local peoples' knowledge not only about natural kinds, but also about ecological relations. The need to systematically and comparatively study this ecological knowledge and how it correlates with reasoning about and action vis-a-vis the environment (as in the extraction and use of natural resources) was affirmed.

In describing the structural and functional deterioration that characterizes processes of language loss, linguists pointed to the various levels at which such processes can and do affect the maintenance of traditional environmental knowledge--from loss of biosystematic lexicon to loss of traditional stories and other forms and contexts of communication. The role of various factors of cultural change and acculturation, such as schooling and migration, were explored. Cognitive psychologists provided new evidence about processes of folkbiological knowledge devolution in societies that have moved away from direct contact with nature, although such processes were shown to be less straightforward than earlier studies had suggested.

Numerous case studies were presented on issues of language and knowledge loss and the interactions between cultural and biological diversity, spanning Africa, Asia, Oceania, and the Americas, and covering both indigenous and other local groups, such as migrants, and exemplifying a variety of linguistic stocks and of modes of subsistence, from hunting and gathering to agriculture. Several presentations also illustrated patterns of cultural and linguistic resistance and knowledge persistence, as well as efforts to revitalize languages and cultures that had gone extinct, with a special focus on maintaining or recovering and newly applying knowledge about traditional resource management practices. Finally, a set of presentations was devoted to both grassroots and international initiatives aimed at biocultural conservation, as well as to issues of

indigenous land rights and traditional resource rights, that were seen as inextricably linked to the viability of local communities and their languages and cultures. New economic models, based on a coevolutionary social and ecological framework, were proposed as the context in which humanity at the end of the millennium could strive to achieve sustainability and maintain biological and cultural diversity.

=46uture Directions

While participants agreed in recognizing the interconnectedness of biological, cultural, and linguistic diversity, a shared need was felt for better, more fine-grained ways to define and identify diversity, especially linguistic and cultural diversity. As measured in broad outline, as is traditionally done in the mapping of the languages and culture areas of the world, the two forms of diversity do not yield a good fit, although linguistic diversity is often used as a proxy for cultural diversity. Contradictory results are thus arrived at when biological diversity is cross-mapped onto one or the other. The consensus was that a much higher level of resolution, at the level of individual communities, or even subsections of communities, is required to identify cultural variation relevant to the study of biocultural diversity correlations, i.e., variation reflecting specific local adaptations; and that comparable detailed work needs to be done on linguistic variation. The crucial importance of working in close contact with other colleagues in interdisciplinary teams was stressed, as was the need for interdisciplinary teaching and training. Issues of funding for interdisciplinary research, as well as for applied work aimed at returning the results of research to local communities and at fostering grassroots biocultural conservation efforts, were also discussed. A "white paper", containing conference participants' recommendations at these various levels, is in preparation, as are one or more publications based on the conference, and an informational/educational video (in collaboration with documentary filmmaker Steve Bartz). An extensive set of background readings, prepared by the conference organizer, is also available upon request.

[The conference was organized by Luisa Maffi (Institute of Cognitive Studies, U California, Berkeley), and funded by the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, the UNESCO/WWF-I/Kew Gardens "People and Plants Initiative", and UC Berkeley's Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research, Office of the Deans of Letters and Sciences, and Institute of Cognitive Studies. It was sponsored by the NGO "Terralingua: Partnerships for Linguistic and Biological Diversity", and co-sponsored and hosted by UC Berkeley's Department of Integrative Biology and University and Jepson Herbaria. Participants were: Scott Atran, William Balee, Herman Batibo, Benjamin Blount, Stephen Brush, Ignacio Chapela, Greville Corbett, Alejandro de Avila, Margaret Florey, David Harmon, Jane Hill, Leanne Hinton, Eugene Hunn, Dominique Irvine, Willett Kempton, Manuel Lizarralde, Ian Saem Majnep, L. Frank Manriquez, Gary Martin, Douglas Medin, Katharine Milton, Brent Mishler, Felipe Molina, Denny Moore, Gary Nabhan, James Nations, Johanna Nichols, Richard Norgaard, Christine Padoch, Andrew Pawley, Mark Poffenberger, Darrell Posey, Eric Smith, D. Michael Warren,

minority language can be turned into an important device for international communication if it is used as a basis for learning a related language in a neighbouring country. Minority language speakers may end up as much-needed interpreters, and multilingualism within the ethnic macrogroup will also strengthen own ethnic identity. Thus, both active and passive bilingualism should be taught.

The right to positive identification with own ethnic identity

School education in and on one's mother tongue is more and more seen as a part of linguistic human rights. In addition to that, I will emphasise the right to learn the language of one's ethnic group, also when it is no longer the mother tongue for the pupil. This is of central importance for the self-identification of the pupil.

Dictionary FROM the majority language

Every minority language should have a dictionary from the majority to the minority language, a dictionary giving the speakers back words in exchange for all the words that are stolen as a part of assimilatory language policy. Such dictionaries will provide a (common) vocabulary for phenomena outside the domestic and traditional sphere, and they will function as guidelines when borrowing new concept from the majority language. Today, minority language dictionaries are all too often made by linguists in order to understand collected text material, thus, they are FROM the minority language, they contain only words found in the text collections (hence no neologisms), and they are typically not written in any official orthography.

Not only small languages are threatened

=46or us, as linguists, the "worst case", is when the last speakers (of a lg without close relatives) dies. But large-scale language shift can as well start on million sized languages (the Mordvinian languages of Russia are a bad example), and happen more or less simultaneously (and fast). Shifting the perspective to the speaker, it is sad to loose the lg of the community, even though it is spoken by a Diaspora group some hundred kilometres away.

Internet and the number of graphemes in the character set standards

Internet and interactive Text-TV will soon become wide-spread. Radio has proven useful for minorities, it is cheap and does not require literacy. Internet poses some additional problems, that must be addressed by us linguists at once, especially since we are the ones to blame in the first place: Often, we were the ones that invented good, phonemic or syllabic writing systems, utilising a large number of graphemes not contained in the A-Z English (or in the A-JA Russian) alphabet. I prefer the Czech solution (one-phoneme graphemes) to the Hungarian and English one (digraphs) myself, but having invented these graphemes we must now make them available on the net. To do this we need code table standards and information on how to use them. Cf. <http://www.norut.no/barsek/ip/char.html> Work on the S=Elmi languages , especially .<http://www.norut.no/barsek/ip/funny.html> Funny characters on the net. What information technology can (and cannot) do to support minority languages, by Trond Trosterud.

To be specific: We must make sure that every grapheme of every written language of the world (including tone and length diacritics if in use) is found in the 32-bits ISO/IEC 10646-1 standard. There are holes there, and we are the ones that should fill them. Today, 3/4 of the space in part 1 of 10646 (Basic Multilingual Plane, or the first 65536 character positions) are being filled by Chinese characters. After having had their basic (some tenths of thousands of characters) in BMP, the Chinese should be satisfied, and given a whole plane of their own. The BMP should then be reserved AT LEAST for phoneme- and syllabic-based symbols of all the worlds written languages. Raising the number of Cyrillic positions from the current 256 to e.g. 512 would make no difference whatsoever to the space consideration of Chinese, but it will solve ALL problems for the Cyrillic-based scripts (today, not even the stress-marks of Russian are included, which will come as a great surprise to text book providers). Also, minority languages should have local 8-bits standards while waiting for 10646-1 to be implemented. In the Saami community, it has been (and still is) hazardous to transfer electronically (by exchanging discs, sending e-mail..), thus making all publication and communication slower and more expensive. When minority languages are claimed to be =ABdifficult=BB to read or write (even though we as linguists know that their orthography are incredibly much better than the ones of e.g. English or Norwegian), it is due to the fact that their languages are never seen in print. This is one of the most important ways of making them visible.

Minority language road signs

Road signs and public other public sign in the minority language is a very important measure, as seen by the strong reactions of the majority population against them wherever they are introduced. Sometimes minority group members that have lost their language are among the strongest opponents to introducing minority language signs, perhaps because they in a way feel betrayed by the country administration to whom they gave their language loyalty. Making minority languages visible is the most important effect of these signs, but they also teach how to write local place names, and they show the official name of public institutions in the minority language.

Heritage

As a result of the work of philologists and comparativists, huge bodies of fairy tales, mythological texts, legends on the creation of the world, etc., are compiled and published, often with a parallel translation. These text should be translated from the phonetic transcription they probably are written in, and into the official orthography that hopefully exists for the language today, and then published. Simultaneously, the syntacticians among us get searchable, machine readable corpora to work with. Thus, such work can be financed by university grants. The publications will tell about traditions before the cultural suppression set in, and it give the peoples in question back their own cultural heritage. Linguists visited the peoples and got their stories, now is the time to give them back.

Passive bilingualism in families

Many parents that otherwise are motivated to pass their language to the next generation will eventually give up speaking their mother tongue to their children when the children (always/of-ten/more and more) answer them

Measures for the graduate students

At the moment, there are 8A graduate students at the faculty. They are a very important group, as they represent such a rare thing as scholars of endangered languages having the language in question as their mother tongue. Their main problem (apart from daily concerns linked to the financial situation) is a lack of contact with the general scientific community, partly the Russian one but especially the international one. Lack of reading ability in languages like English, Finnish, German and Hungarian also makes it difficult for them to follow the international scientific debate.

Measures:

- * Grant program for these students so that they can take parts of their education at foreign universities
- * Language courses so that they can improve their foreign language abilities (e.g. for students of Uralic languages the summer courses in Hungary and Finland are relevant), possibly combined with scientific summer schools of the type that have been arranged in e.g. Hungary and Poland during the last few years.
- * Visiting scholars giving introductory and/or advanced courses, possibly as part of exchange programs.

Measures for the students at the ordinary courses

The students at the ordinary courses are in a key role when it comes to language maintenance, since they are becoming mother tongue teachers. To have them see their work in a broader perspective, and to make them get to know fellow students elsewhere, excursions to relevant sites should be arranged. A further possibility is to support work done for the benefit of their mother tongues.

Measures:

- * Visiting trips, e.g. to their fellow students at the Finno-Ugric departments at nearby Helsinki or Tartu, or to other colleges training indigenous language teachers, e.g. Guovdageaidnu, Norway.
- * Small grants, either linked to special year courses (x roubles for all the last-year students), or given only to some of the students, one could e.g. let them apply for money to specific projects to document or preserve their own mother tongue (collection of vocabularies, texts, documentation of sociolinguistic situation, or linguistic case studies).

Measures for the teachers (pedagogical support)

Research on both bilingual and minority language teaching has made great progress during the last decades, and it would be of major importance for the teachers at the FNKS to get familiar with this work. Representing one of the institutions with the longest tradition in the field, the FNKS teachers undoubtedly also has important contributions to the discussion. Travel grants should thus be provided to facilitate such an exchange of experience.

Measures:

- * Seminars at FNKS with visiting scholars talking about methods for teaching minority and endangered languages, and about linguistic human rights
- * Possibility for FNKS teachers to participate in exchange programs

Measures for the administration

The daily work of the administration is made difficult by the lack of efficient office equipment. such as computers. Too much time is spent on trivial routines, and an efficient contact with related institutions both abroad and within Russia is hampered by the lack of telefaxes and of electronic mail.

Measures:

- * Help to facilitate administration: computers, faxes, copy machines, other equipment. The operative system of the computers should be in Russian, and the computers should be able to handle the letters of the extended Cyrillic alphabets that are used for the languages taught at the department.

Measures for the faculty as a whole

Most suggestions contained in this program will be facilitated by formalising the co-operation with other institutions.

One part of the faculty deserves special attention, and that is the library. A functioning reference library located at the institution is of uttermost importance to all parts of the faculty. Today, the library needs improvement.

Measures:

- * Make co-operation agreements with related institutions, such as The Saami Regional College in Guovdageaidnu, Norway (cf. list below).
- * Invite the librarian(s) to related libraries in e.g. Finland
- * A survey should be made of the needs of the library, and measures should be made to complete it.

How to implement these ideas

General

- * Co-operation agreement should be made with related institutions abroad. The reason why this has not already taken place (contact is restricted to foreign Uralists visiting the Faculty and interviewing the students) is probably that the activities of the Faculty are poorly known, especially outside traditional Finno-Ugric departments. The Faculty should, e.g. in co-operation with the initiators of this programme, make an information leaflet about itself, and present it for possible contact institutions dealing with Uralistics and other relevant language programs, Arctic research, Circumpolar co-operation, and research on indigenous peoples.

- * The administration of the Faculty should carry out an analysis of status quo and of the need for technical and practical support, so that possible aid measures could meet the actual needs.

- * List of possible institutions for scientific co-operation and financial support:

Department of Finno-Ugric Studies (Kafedra finno-ugrovedenija) at the University of Helsinki (to some extent co-operating already)

The Finno-Ugric department at the University of Turku

The department for Finnish and Saami studies at the University of Oulu

The Saami College in Guovdageaidnu

Troms=F6 Museum, University of Troms=F6

School of Language and Literature, University of Troms=F6

School of Social Sciences, University of Troms=F6

The Regional College in Alta

- * The scientific study of endangered languages
- * Support of native community attempts to maintain an endangered language's viability
- * Dissemination of the results of those efforts both to the native communities and the scholarly world

The Board of Directors consists of:

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Languages have died off throughout history, but never have we faced the massive extinction that is threatening the world right now. As language professionals, we are faced with a stark reality: Much of what we study will not be available to future generations. The cultural heritage of many peoples is crumbling while we look on. Are we willing to shoulder the blame for having stood by a done nothing? The tide is too large to turn back completely, but the Endangered Language Fund is designed to do what we can.

The Fund will support communities that are trying to teach dying languages to a new generation. Many languages have skipped a generation, and extraordinary methods are needed for the language to have any hope. Other languages would be helped immensely by even traditional aids such as grammars and dictionaries. Modern language teaching, including interactive programs, video instruction, and practice tapes can also be of service. Even languages that cannot be revived can be recorded to the extent possible, preserving language in a way not available to previous generations. These and other projects will be supported through the awarding of grants to individuals and language communities. A detailed Request for Proposals will appear this winter. The number of awards that we can make will be directly dependent on the amount of money we raise.

There are four levels of support:

Member: \$50
 Supporting Member: \$100
 Sustaining Member: \$500 and up
 =46riend of the Fund: Any amount

Members will receive our newsletter. Supporting members also receive a discount on one language book (we are negotiating with several publishers on this). Sustaining members will also receive a copy of the language artifact (text, video, tape, etc.) of their choice from the year's efforts.

Many of you reading this have expressed an interest in Terralingua, but have yet to join. Of course, we hope you'll seize the moment now! There are two ways to join:

By Contributing Money. One option--and it's only an option, not a requirement--is to make a Membership Contribution. Any amount is welcome, but we suggest a minimum of US\$10 for a Regular Membership. You can be a Donor Member by contributing US\$100, and organizations can join for US\$35. Contributions will make you a member through June 1997.

By Contributing Effort. A second option is to join Terralingua by volunteering to do something on behalf of the organization. Like what, you ask?...

- *** By translating Terralingua's Statement of Purpose from English into one or more languages.
- *** By distributing information on Terralingua to local groups, your circle of friends, your family--to anyone who might be interested. We can provide you with text and/or a master copy of introductory material on Terralingua that you can reproduce and distribute locally.
- *** By sending us the names of people or organizations we can contact to further our work.
- *** By contributing one or more items to this newsletter.
- *** By contributing to the Terralingua Web site.
- *** By working on Terralingua committees (as they are formed).

Anything you do along these lines qualifies you for Regular Membership through June 1997. All you have to do is contact us with what you have done or plan to do, and we'll convert your name from "Interested Person" to "Regular Member" on our list. It's as simple as that!

Special Note to Supporters Outside North America. We have heard from a number of you about how difficult (and outrageously expensive!) it is to send US dollars for a membership contribution. Some of you, through heroic effort, have managed to surmount these obstacles and send contributions anyway, and for your interest and effort we are truly grateful. As far as we can tell, the only relatively inexpensive ways to send contributions internationally are through a credit card or by our opening depository accounts in banks in various regions around the world. At some point down the road we hope Terralingua will be able to use such methods. In the meantime, please don't let these difficulties deter you from joining--just send us a note and we'll enroll you as a Regular Member. We don't want to exclude anyone who wants to join, so let us hear from you!

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THE NEXT NEWSLETTER

Terralingua Newsletter #3 will come out in March 1997. The deadline for items is March 1. Help us make this a real forum for news--let us know what is happening in your area! Send your items to Terralingua at the address below--either regular mail or e-mail is fine.

That's all for now. Thanks, and, as always, best regards to you all!

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Terralingua
Partnerships for Linguistic and Biological Diversity
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E-mail: gws@mail.portup.com
Web site: <http://cougar.ucdavis.edu/nas/terralin/home.html>

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A nonprofit international organization
devoted to preserving the world's linguistic diversity
and to investigating links between biological and cultural diversity

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If appropriate, please pass this information from Terralingua on to others--
especially those without e-mail--or send us their postal addresses and we'll
be glad to mail the information to them. We want to make sure we reach
as many people as we can. So, feel free to copy and distribute the
information in this message, but please cite Terralingua as the source.

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