

LinguaPax Conference, Barcelona 2017-11-23

Engaging with revitalisation: academia and beyond

Peter K. Austin
Linguistics Department
SOAS University of London

Outline

- Language documentation – theory and practice
- Revitalisation – theory and practice
- Training for documentation and revitalisation – reorientation via community engagement
 - Sylheti Project at SOAS in London
 - ENGHUM Project via London-Leiden-Warsaw collaboration
- Conclusions and directions for the future

Language documentation

- “concerned with the **methods, tools, and theoretical underpinnings** for compiling a **representative and lasting multipurpose** record of a natural language or one of its varieties” (Himmelman 1998, emphasis added)
- Features:
 - *Focus on primary data*
 - *Accountability*
 - *Long-term storage and preservation of primary data*
 - *Interdisciplinary teams*
 - *Cooperation with and direct involvement of the speech community*
- Narrow view: outcome is **annotated and translated corpus** of archived representative materials on use of a language, cf. DoBeS, ELAR – separate from **description** (language as system)
- Broad view: outcome is transparent records of a language with description and theorisation dependent (Woodbury)

Language revitalisation

- efforts to increase **language vitality** by taking action to:
 - increase the domains of use of a language and/or
 - increase the number of speakers (often in the context of reversing language shift) both adults and children
- older than language documentation (serious work began in 1970s and 1980s among Maori, Native American groups and others)
- Speech/language community members are often more interested in revitalisation than documentation
- Often assumed revitalisation = formal language learning (school lessons, immersion)

Training in academia

- Wide range of knowledge and skills needed for language documentation (Austin 2008) and revitalisation:
 - Project conception, design and management
 - Funding application writing
 - Interpersonal and fieldwork life skills (including health and safety)
 - Media management
 - Data and metadata management
 - Linguistic analysis
 - Mobilisation – applied linguistics: pedagogy, curriculum, policy, materials
 - Team-based skills sharing and knowledge transfer, capacity development
 - Reporting – presentation, writing, communication

Training in academia

- At UK, US, Australian universities few of these skills are taught. A few institutions offer 'Field Methods' but they usually only cover
 - Project conception, design and management
 - Funding application writing
 - Interpersonal and fieldwork life skills (including health and safety)
 - Media management
 - Data and metadata management
 - Linguistic analysis
 - Mobilisation – applied linguistics: pedagogy, curriculum, policy, materials
 - Team-based skills sharing and knowledge transfer, capacity development
 - Reporting – presentation, writing, communication

SOAS postgraduate training

- At SOAS we offer a specialist MA in documentation and language support and revitalisation, covering many areas, except:
 - Project conception, design and management
 - Funding application writing
 - Interpersonal and fieldwork life skills (including health and safety)
 - Media management
 - Data and metadata management
 - Linguistic analysis
 - Mobilisation – applied linguistics: pedagogy, curriculum, policy, materials
 - Team-based skills sharing and knowledge transfer, capacity development
 - Reporting – presentation, writing, communication

Community interactions

- In 2013 *Surma Workers Centre*, Camden (inner London) approached SOAS Linguistics Department through friend networks, concerned about vitality of Sylheti (Bangladesh) in London, especially in 3rd generation – asked for documentation and revitalisation help
- Response 1: engage Centre members as consultants for Fieldmethods course (2013-2016), creating large multimedia corpus
- Response 2: develop activist non-credit student-centred project to work with *Surma Workers Centre* to develop community-based materials through interaction and networking (e.g. participation in women's exercise group, men's card playing, youth activity group, language discussion group, Facebook page, Learn Sylheti classes taught by native speakers)

Sylheti Project

SOAS **সীলটি**
Sylheti Project



Sylheti Language
Society

সীলটি

siloti

سیلٹی

সিলটি



Sylheti Project outcomes

- Sylheti events at SOAS – community participation on campus during *Endangered Languages Week 2014, 2015*
- Videos of food preparation
- Trilingual dictionary database: Sylheti-Bengali-English
- Sylheti language classes on campus – networking with students and staff
- Folk stories – recordings and books. Students had to crowd-source funding, conceptualise product, find and employ an artist and designer, locate printers, arrange distribution and launch events at *Surma Community Centre*
- By engaging with community members students acquired practical knowledge and skills beyond university curriculum, and created valuable community-directed products

Sylheti Project outcomes launch

SOAS সীতহী
Sylheti Project



Artwork © Freya Hartas 2017

Story collection to storybook: Producing community material

28 November 2017
Linguistics Departmental Seminar,
SOAS University of London

Andriana Koumbarou (SOAS), Marie Thaut (SOAS),
Candide Simard (SOAS)

Sylheti Project current work





Engaged
Humanities

Engaged humanities in Europe

Capacity building for participatory research in linguistic-cultural heritage (ENGHUM)



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 692199.

What is the Engaged Humanities project?

- A collaborative project with the Universities of Warsaw (Poland) and Leiden (Netherlands)
- Funded by a grant of 1 million euros from the European Commission Horizon2020 Twinning initiative to support capacity building in former Eastern Bloc universities.
 - At SOAS, Dr Julia Sallabank is Principal Investigator and Prof Peter K. Austin is co-Principal Investigator
 - Bulk of funds for Poland and community-based activities (SOAS gets 20% of grant)

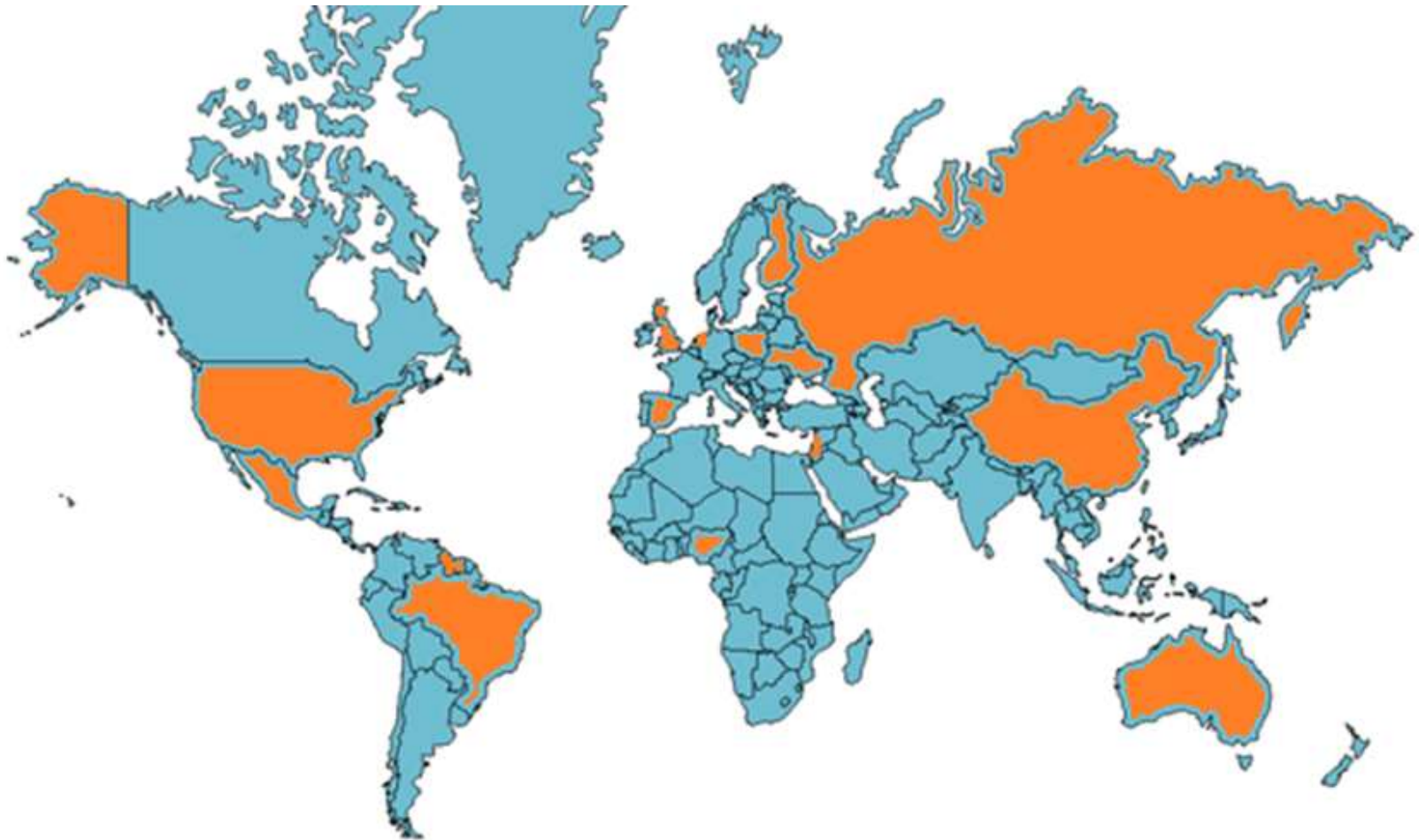
Main objectives

- Multidisciplinary capacity-building: for UW and indigenous communities
- Development of strategies for language revitalization, including curricula and methodologies for teaching minority languages
- Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Community-based participatory research (CBPR) based on direct participation of language communities/ethnic groups as stakeholders and partners
- Creating new collaborative spaces for marginalized groups in Europe and beyond to conduct research and explore their agency

EngHum main activities

- Seminars and workshops in Warsaw (2016-2018)
- Summer school at SOAS (June 2016)
- Wilamowice (Poland) field school (September 2016)
- Report and monitoring by EU – meeting in Brussels
- Summer School in Leiden (June 2017)
- Field school in Tlaxcala, Nahuatl-speaking village, Mexico (September 2017)
- Major international conference in Warsaw, November 2017
- Field visits (Isle of Man & Kautokeino, Sámiland 2018)
- New research grant proposals & joint high-impact publications
- Development of new teaching materials and methodologies

Participants from 15 countries
researching 22 minority languages



Engaged humanities in Europe



Engaged
Humanities



Main minority participants and collaborators

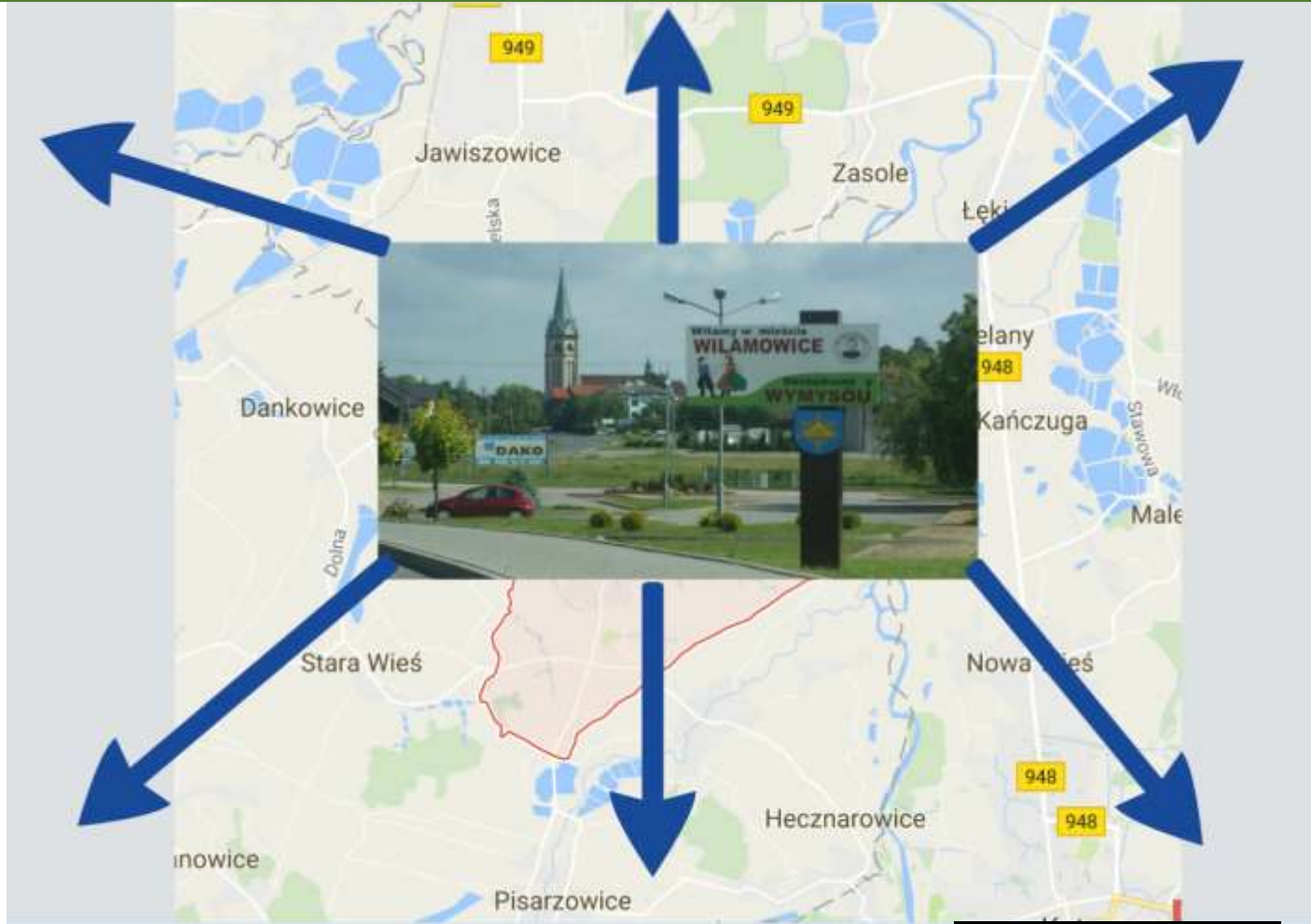
- Wymysiöeryś, Лемківскы/Lemko, Kaszëbsczy/Kashubian and Silesian speakers (Poland)
- Guernesiais (Guernsey)
- Manx (Isle of Man)
- Sámi (Sámi allaskuvla/Saami University College in Kautokeino, Norway)
- Basque/Euskera (Spain)
- Sylheti (Bangladesh/London)
- Nahuatl, Sahan Savi/Mixtec, Ayuuk/Mixe, Yucatec Maya (Mexico)
- Nahuatl (El Salvador)
- Wapishana (Guyana)

I. Summer School in London, June 2016

Theme: “Transdisciplinarity in Language Documentation and Revitalisation”

- Case studies of language, identity and revitalization:
 - Languages and education in the UK (Dina Mehmedbegović)
 - SOAS Sylheti Project (Candide Simard, SOAS students and Surma Community Centre) and community visit
 - Kurdish (Birgul Yilmaz)
 - Senegal (Friederike Luepke)
 - Welsh (Jennifer Needs)
 - Wilamowice, Poland (Justyna Olko)
- Practical training on research methods, audio/video recording and linguistic software

II. Wilamowice Field School, September 2016



Four working groups in the field school

Collaborative fieldwork by international, multi-ethnic/language groups, with the participation of local activists and youths:

1. Field research and documenting Halcnovian
2. Attitude research in villages surrounding Wilamowice
3. Developing educational materials for Wymysiöeryś
4. Developing the concept of a 'living museum' in Wilamowice

Research in villages surrounding Wilamowice



Wilamowice Field School documentary



Dissemination and Communication

Four plays in Wymysiöeryś with Polish subtitles

- Two of them staged at the renowned Polish Theatre in Warsaw:
- "Hobbit" and "Óf jer wełt" (The Next World) based on epic poem by Florian Biesik



III Summer School in Leiden, June 2017



Themes: Language, Heritage, Transdisciplinarity

- Around 50 participants from Warsaw, Leiden and SOAS (and several other universities),
- Linguistics, archaeology, anthropology, pedagogy, history, philosophy, computing sciences, and arts.
- Language revitalization
- Collaborative, ethical research practice.
- Transdisciplinarity as a challenge and as an opportunity
 - diverse disciplinary background of project members and participants.
- Latin American indigenous languages; heritage languages in Netherlands and Suriname; Turkic languages in Ukraine.

Summer School in Leiden: Events

- Lectures by indigenous academics-activists:
 - processes, methods and tools for language revitalization
- Hands-on methodological workshops
 - excursion to the Hortus Botanicus run by SOAS based PAW group
- Lectures on philosophical, ethical, and theoretical issues
 - related to minority and indigenous languages



Summer School in Leiden



- Academic poster exhibition and competition
- Documentary films from Mexico and Poland
- Visit to Ethnological Museum



Mexico Fieldschool

18th – 31st August, 2017



IV Field School in Tlaxcala, Mexico

- Approximately 45 participants
 - 20 from local Mexican communities,
 - 20 from European universities
- Languages of communication: Nahuatl, Spanish and English
- Hands-on fieldwork and language documentation experience
- Discussions and presentations from members of the language community

Aims

- Knowledge transfer between Mexican revitalization initiatives and European ones
 - Audio and video recording techniques
 - Hands-on field based research
- Language documentation for the community by the community
- Creation of public spaces for the use of Nahuatl
- Knowledge transfer and Exchange for local activists at a national and regional level
 - Meeting of indigenous leaders from different backgrounds – Mixe, Maya, Nahuatl, Mixteco
 - Meeting of representatives at a regional level: Mexico and El Salvador

Knowledge Transfer

- Audio and Video documentation techniques
- Teamwork skills, management of groupwork and discussion of ideas and goals
- Creation of multi-modal materials to promote language revitalization
- Discussions of what it means to document and revitalize a language, sharing perspectives from within and outside the language community
 - e.g. challenging assumptions of standardization and linguistic variation



Group work

- 6 working groups; 7-9 people/group
- Themes:
 - Documenting cultural and linguistic heritage x2
 - Linguistic attitudes and language planning
 - Creation of pedagogical materials
 - Theatre for language revitalization
 - Community well-being

Impacts of the ENGHUM Project

Engaged humanities in Europe

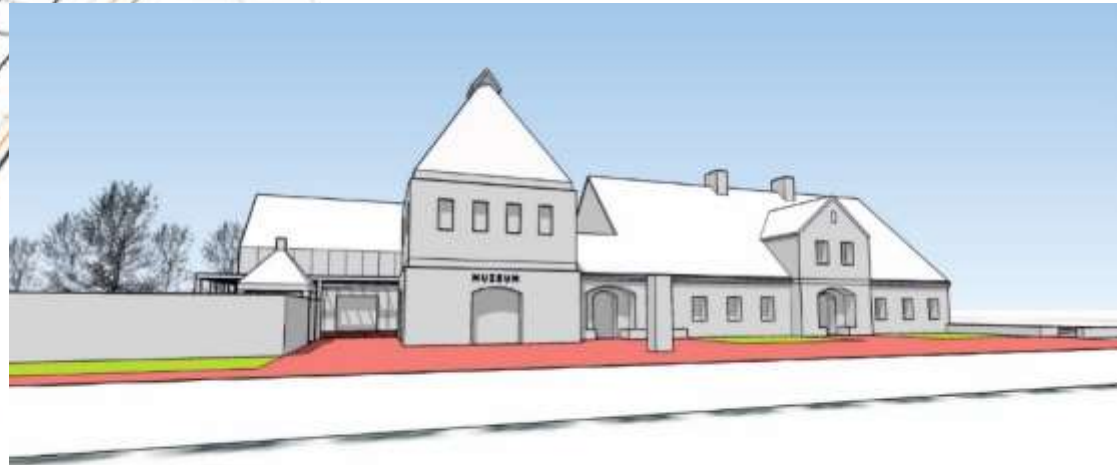


Engaged
Humanities



Impact at the local level

Plans for a 'Living Museum' in Wilamowice – project approved by local authorities following the ENGHUM Field School



PRACOWNIA ARCHYTEKTONICZNA
PROJEKTY PIOTR PUSZCZEWICZ

Impact on the Polish Parliamentary Commission for National and Ethnic Minorities



(1) Special session of the Parliamentary Commission for National and Ethnic Minorities during field school in Wilamowice: evidence from participants and local people

(2) Special Parliamentary session with our expert participation;

- Amendment to the bill on minority and regional languages to include Wymysiöeryś approved (10.05.2017)
 - press coverage in Poland

Impact at the scientific level - Warsaw University

I. Establishing an international Centre for Research and Practice in Cultural Continuity

Five leading research institutions are establishing a new Centre for Research and Practice in Cultural Continuity at AL UW, University of Warsaw:

- University of Warsaw
- School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London
- Universiteit Leiden, Faculty of Archaeology
- Max Planck Institute (MPI) for the Science of Human History
- University of Groningen, Fryslân Campus

Impact at the scientific level - Warsaw University

UW AL has been successful in applying for two large grants:

1. *Language as a cure: linguistic vitality as a tool for psychological well-being, health and economic sustainability*

- Foundation for Polish Science
- 3-year research project with a budget of ~1 mln Euros
 - the only one in the Humanities and Social Sciences in the history of the programme

2. *Minority Languages, Major Opportunities: Collaborative Research, Community Engagement and Innovative Educational Tools*

- EC Research and Innovation Staff Exchange (RISE) Programme
 - 3 year project, total budget 1.5 mln euro
 - Partners: Warsaw, Leiden, Groningen, MPI Jena

How can you be involved?

- Workshop in January 2018 at SOAS
- Field schools in Isle of Man and Kautokeino, Norway, summer 2018
- Training workshops in Warsaw in 2018

Summary

- Experience of Sylheti Project and ENGHUM shows community engagement can have positive benefits within and outside academia:
 - Opportunities for different kinds of training and learning
 - Valorisation within communities and wider society
 - Preparation of language support and revitalisation materials
 - International networking of academics and community members

Thank you.

www.engagedhumanities.org

www.facebook.com/SylhetiProject