Endangered languages and cultures: threats and responses

Peter K. Austin
SOAS, University of London & University of Oxford

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SOAS
University of London

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OXFORD

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Overview

- Global linguistic and cultural diversity
- Threats
- Responses
- Some community perspectives
- Conclusions

Major world languages

Numbers of speakers in millions (from Ethnologue 2019)

		Mother tongue	Wider communication	
1	Mandarin	900	1,120	mostly China
2	English	380	1,130	***multinational**
3	Hindi/Urdu	350	785	mostly India and Pakistan
4	Spanish	460	535	***multinational**
5	French	80	280	***multinational**
6	Arabic	165	275	***multinational**
7	Bengali	230	260	India and Bangladesh
8	Russian	160	255	former Soviet Union
9	Portuguese	220	230	in five countries
10	Malay	50	200	in four SEA countries

Size of languages

- largest 10 languages each have 200+ million speakers and together have 3 billion speakers (40% of world total)
- largest 20 languages have 3.8 billion speakers (> 50% of world total)
- 4% of world's languages are spoken by 96% of world's population, ie. only 4% of world's population speaks 96% of world's languages so there are many languages that are very small (50% have less than 10,000 speakers, 25% have less than 1,000)
- radical reduction in speaker numbers has been recorded in past 40 years for indigenous languages across many regions of the world together with increasing age profiles of remaining speakers — Krauss 1992 "the coming century will see either the death or the doom of 90% of mankind's languages", less extreme estimate is 50% (**only** 3,500!)

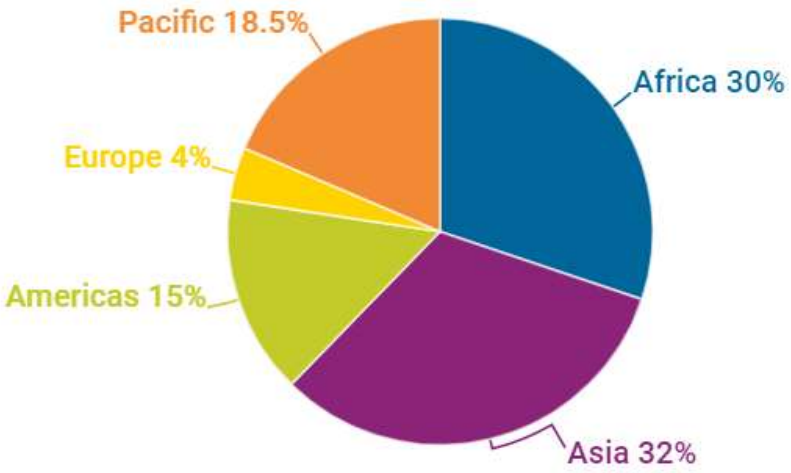
Distribution of languages (Ethnologue)

What continents have the most indigenous languages?

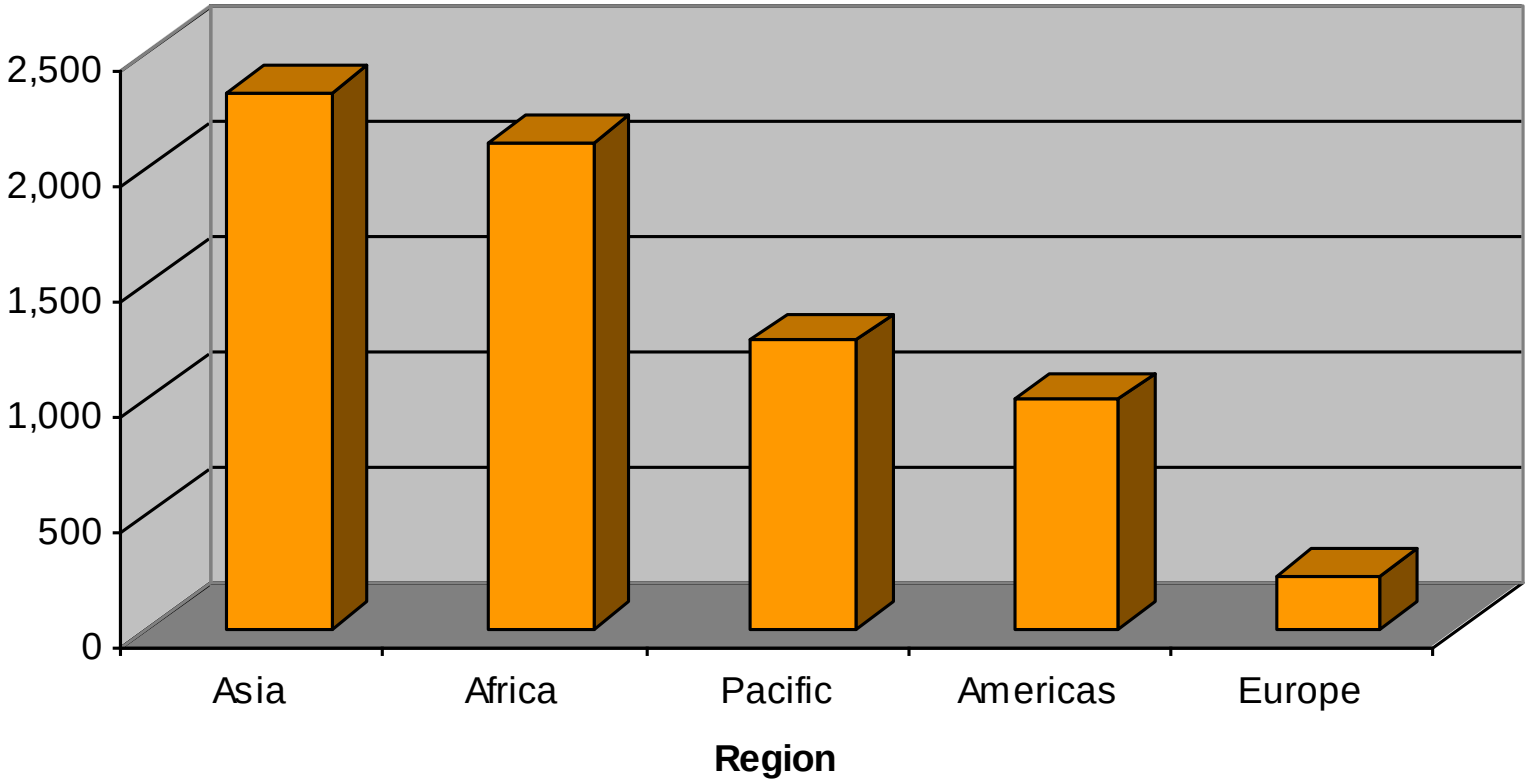
Asia has the most indigenous languages, closely followed by Africa.

Combined, they account for nearly 2/3 of the world's languages. Myriad factors – terrain, cultural history, the spread of ancient civilizations – play into how many languages have originated within a certain area.

Percentage of the world's languages, by region



Number of languages by area

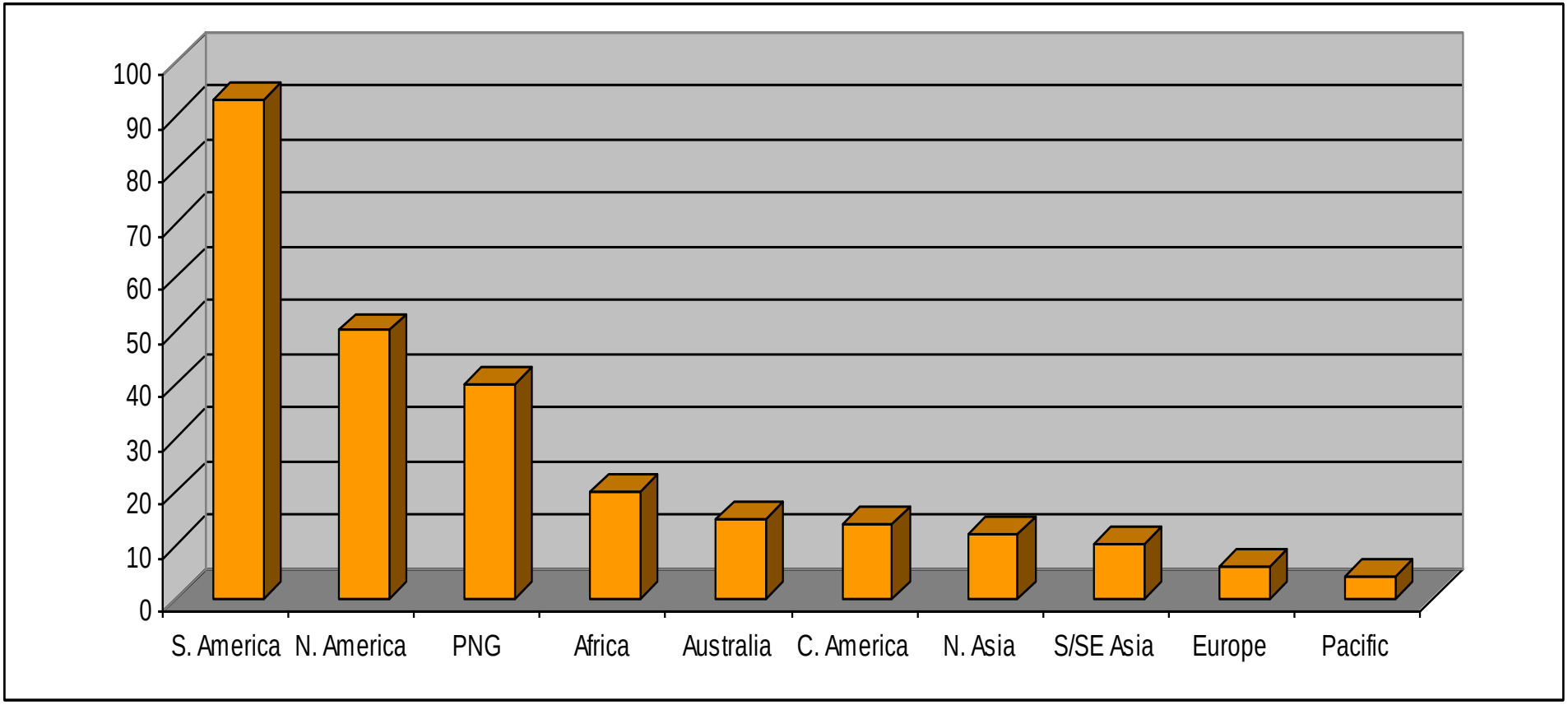


Linguistic genetic diversity

	language groups
S. America	**93**
N. America	**50**
PNG	40+
Africa	20
Australia	15
C. America	14
N. Asia	12
S/SE Asia	10
Europe	6
Pacific	4
World	251

Source: Nettle, Daniel and Suzanne Romaine 2000. Vanishing Voices, p37. Oxford University Press.

Language groups



Speaker community profiles

1. intergenerational language transmission
2. percentage of speakers within total population (**not** absolute numbers)
3. domains and functions of language use
4. language attitudes and ideology of wider community
5. speakers' attitudes toward their own language

Typology of language situations

- **Viable** (**safe, strong**) - spoken by all age groups, learnt by children, actively supported (can be large or small populations)
- **Endangered** - socially and economically disadvantaged, under heavy pressure from larger language, spoken by reducing population and could disappear without community support
- **Moribund** - languages no longer learnt by children with few older speakers, little social function
- **Extinct** - no native speakers

Language shift

- World-wide pattern of language loss - languages move **safe** --> **endangered** --> **moribund** --> **extinct**
- Historical evidence, eg. Italian peninsula: Oscan, Umbrian, Piceni, Etruscan, Gaulish all replaced by Latin
- In last 200 years and especially last 60 years process has speeded up through colonialism, rise of hegemonic nation states (with monolingual ideology) and globalisation

Should we care?

1. **NO** we shouldn't — fewer languages are better — loss of languages leads to mutual understanding and global peace and would be economically rational (but: naive and counter-examples, also whose language will be the chosen one?)
2. **YES**, because we need diversity (ecological analogy)
3. **YES**, because languages express identity
4. **YES**, because languages are repositories of history and culture
5. **YES**, because language contributes to the sum of human knowledge (each language represents a different view of the world)
5. **YES**, because languages have economic value
6. **YES**, because languages are inherently interesting

Is it a hopeless situation?

NO, there is evidence that language shift can be reversed, eg

Welsh now has increased speakers; because of education more children now speak Welsh than past 100 years

Maori, New Zealand - *kohanga reo* ‘language nests’ have created new generation of speakers

Hawaiian - similar model created 2000+ new speakers

Taiwan - reversal of monolingual language policy, introduction of languages in education, training of aboriginal speakers

Peru – last week, 1st ever PhD thesis defence in Quechua link

Responses by academics and organisations

1. Lament loss but do nothing
2. Lament loss, talk a lot about it
3. Document languages urgently for preservation but do not attempt to change situation (DoBeS, ELDP, DEL)
4. Attempt to change situation (“reverse language shift”) by:
    1. Language maintenance efforts
    2. Language revitalisation
    3. Language support

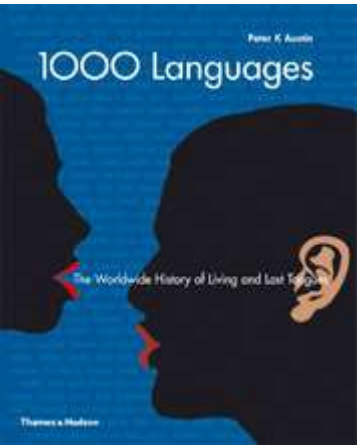
Response 2: Spreading information

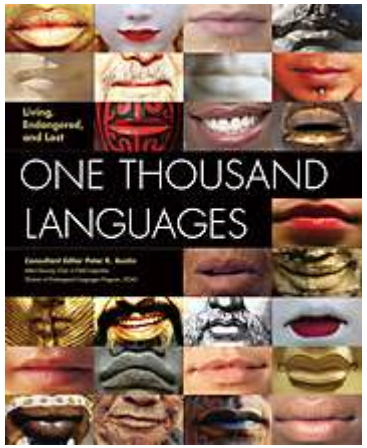
- disseminate information on all aspects of language diversity as widely as possible within the heritage language community and internationally
- raise awareness of endangered languages inside and outside communities where they are spoken through all channels and using the media
- use exhibitions and the arts to promote awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity

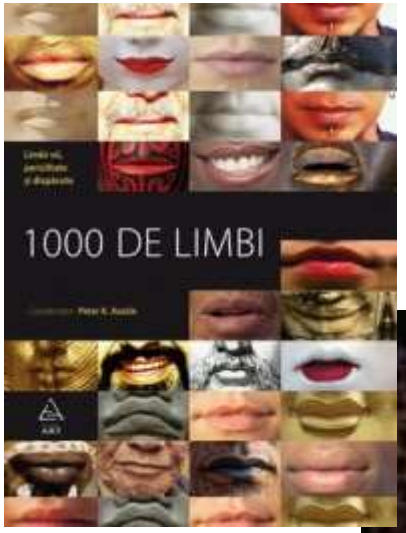
Information sharing

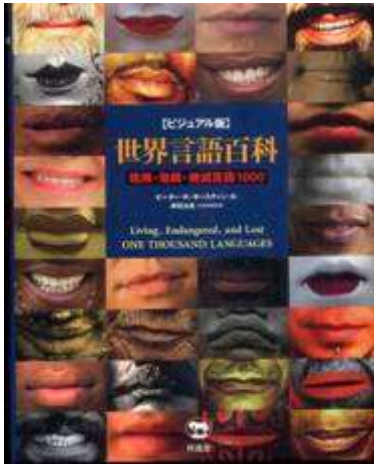
- Books and publications for general public
- Exhibitions and displays (outreach)
- Use of new media (blogs, Facebook, YouTube) and old media (press, TV, movies)
- Training courses – London, Tokyo, India, Ghana
- This can be challenging for academics and researchers not used to having to explain their work in terms that educated ordinary persons can understand

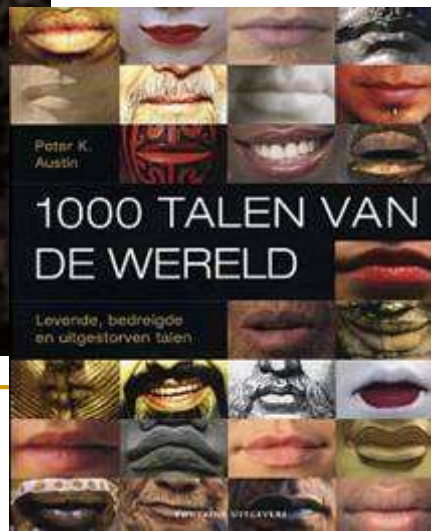
Information sharing









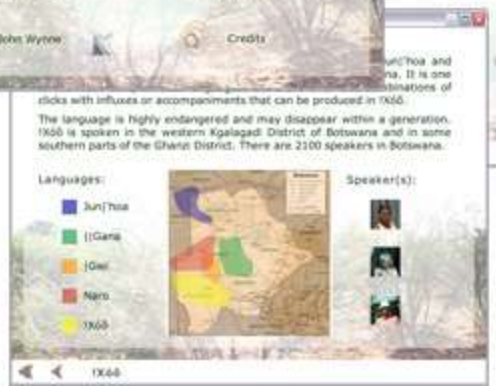


ENDANGERED
voices

LIVING LANGUAGE

HEARING VOICES
LANGUAGES / SPEAKERS
Introduction
Location
Voices
Songs
Khoi and San Languages
Endangered Languages
John Wynne
Credits

Bokamoso Pre-School Training Project Choir


clicks with influxes or accompaniments that can be produced in !Xóõ.
The language is highly endangered and may disappear within a generation.
!Xóõ is spoken in the western Kgalagadi District of Botswana and in some southern parts of the Ghanzi District. There are 2100 speakers in Botswana.
Languages:
Speaker(s):
Jun|'hoa
|Gana
|Gwi
Naro
!Xóõ
!Xóõ

Endangered Languages Week

On-site training courses

Noisy lamentations

- Unesco International Year of Indigenous Languages – lots of international events, workshops, publicity. But how will this impact on language shift?
- Much of this activity uses rhetoric of death, dying, disappearance, loss, ancient languages and cultures
- Tendency to objectification, treating languages (and speakers) as things divorced from their human, social and cultural context – example: Lena Herzog's "Last Whispers" link

Response 3: Documentation

- collect and analyse linguistic, sociolinguistic and cultural data, including audio, video and text materials to create useable corpora
- collect and analyse data on social, cultural and political environment of the community to understand language shift processes
- archive these materials and associated metadata for current and future use

Documentation projects – DoBeS

- DoBeS project funded by Volkswagen Stiftung (Euro 60 million)
- 50 teams of researchers around the world documenting languages and cultures in a wide range of community contexts
- Major archive in Cologne with new software tools and research methods

DoBeS

Kola-Sámi
Nenets/Enets
Tofa
Even
Hocank
Svan/Udi/Tsova-Tush
Beaver
Archive
Gorani
Salar/Monguor
Chintang/Puma
Wichita
Minderico
Tangsa/Tai/Singpho
Lacandon
Semang
Bainouk
Kurumba Languages
Semaq Beri/Batek
Tima
Chontal
Totoli
Bakairí/Mawé/Katxuyana
Oyda
Tsafiki
Bubia/Isubu
Saliba/Logea
Teop
Bakola
People of the Center
Sri Lanka Malay
Wooi
Trumai
Cashinahua
Waima'a
Kuikuro
Baure
Iwaidja
Aweti
Movima
Aché
Jaminjung
Yurakaré
Uru-Chipaya
Marquesan
‡Akhoe Hai||om
Taa
Savosavo
Vurës/Vera'a
Chaco Languages
Tuamotuan
Ambrym Languages

Hans Rausing Endangered Languages Project at SOAS

- funded by Arcadia Trust, based at SOAS, University of London, distributes £1million per year in 4 types of grants
- 350 teams of researchers around the world documenting languages and cultures
- Digital archive at SOAS

Documentation as ‘tongues in aspic’

- Linguists aim to record and analyse language materials and present the linguistic analysis in an archive designed for an audience of Western academics
- Example: Siberian endangered languages link
- Problems:
  - ‘take no prisoners’ interface – available in English only
  - Who are these people?
  - Difficult for users to find what they might be interested in
  - Often need special software to view the materials

Archive content and interfaces

Wasson et al (2016: 669): 'In their presentations, the archivists provided a rich list of problems that might be encountered by users of language archives. The most frequently mentioned items were:

- A lack of contextual information at the deposit level, or metadata
- Incomplete materials—missing annotation, missing translations
- Inadequate search/browse functions
- Problems with the interface/information display
- Users may be frustrated when they don't have access to data; it may be hard for the archivist to get hold of a collection owner to request access for a user
- Technology issues—outdated, broken scripts, Flash/Java problems, etc.
- Interface language(s) may not [be] … spoken by would-be users

For community purposes

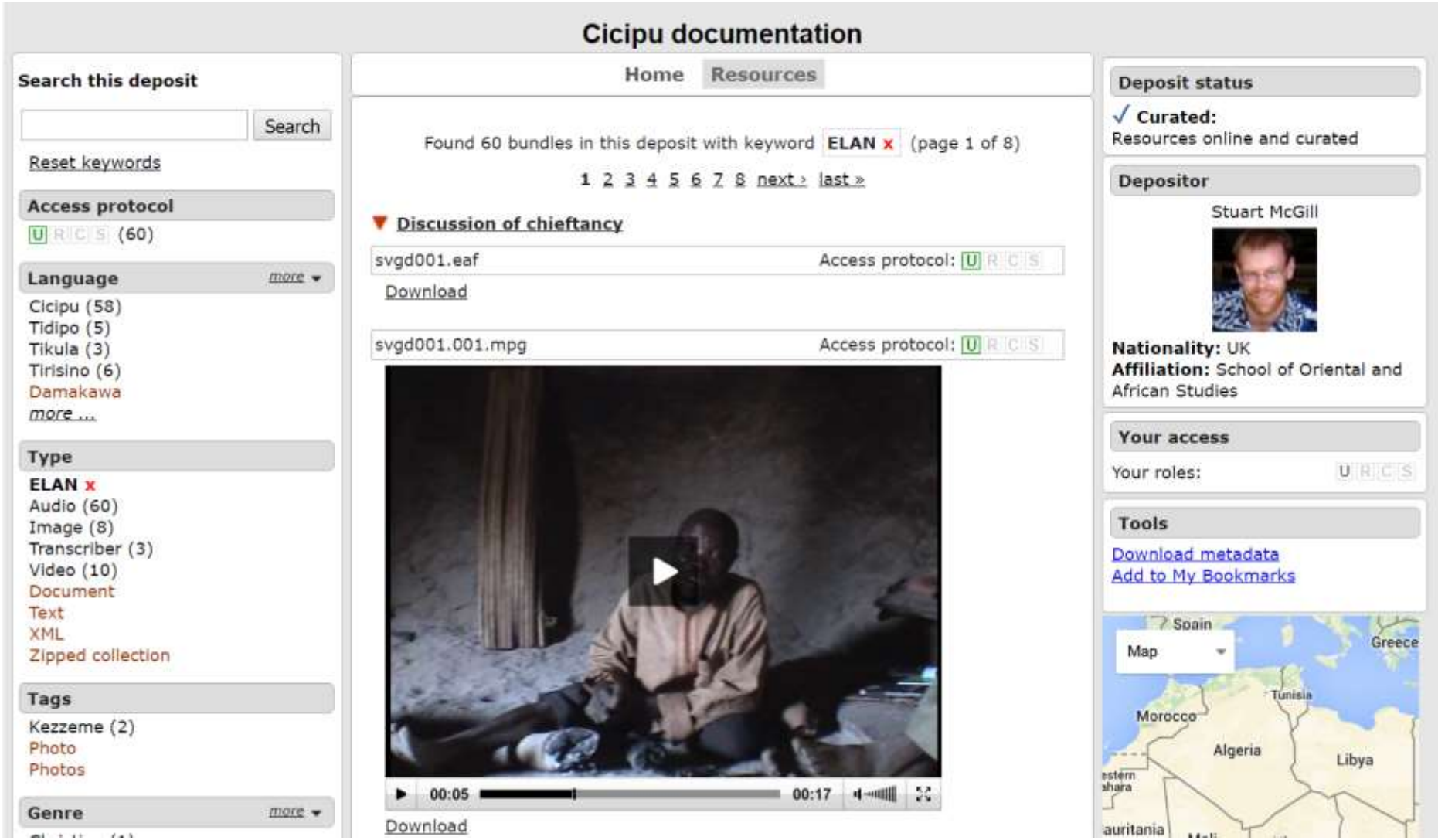
I looked at the collections in ELAR, TLA, AILLA and Paradisec and identified the following additional issues for users interested in community use:

1. Materials are often in a transcription that does not match community orthographies, even when such versions could easily be produced in many cases
2. Special software is needed to view/play materials
3. Materials are not tagged for use in education or for level (cf. Nathan & Fang 2009)
4. Search interfaces on the archives do not return useful results – see Austin 2011b on searching for "Educational materials"

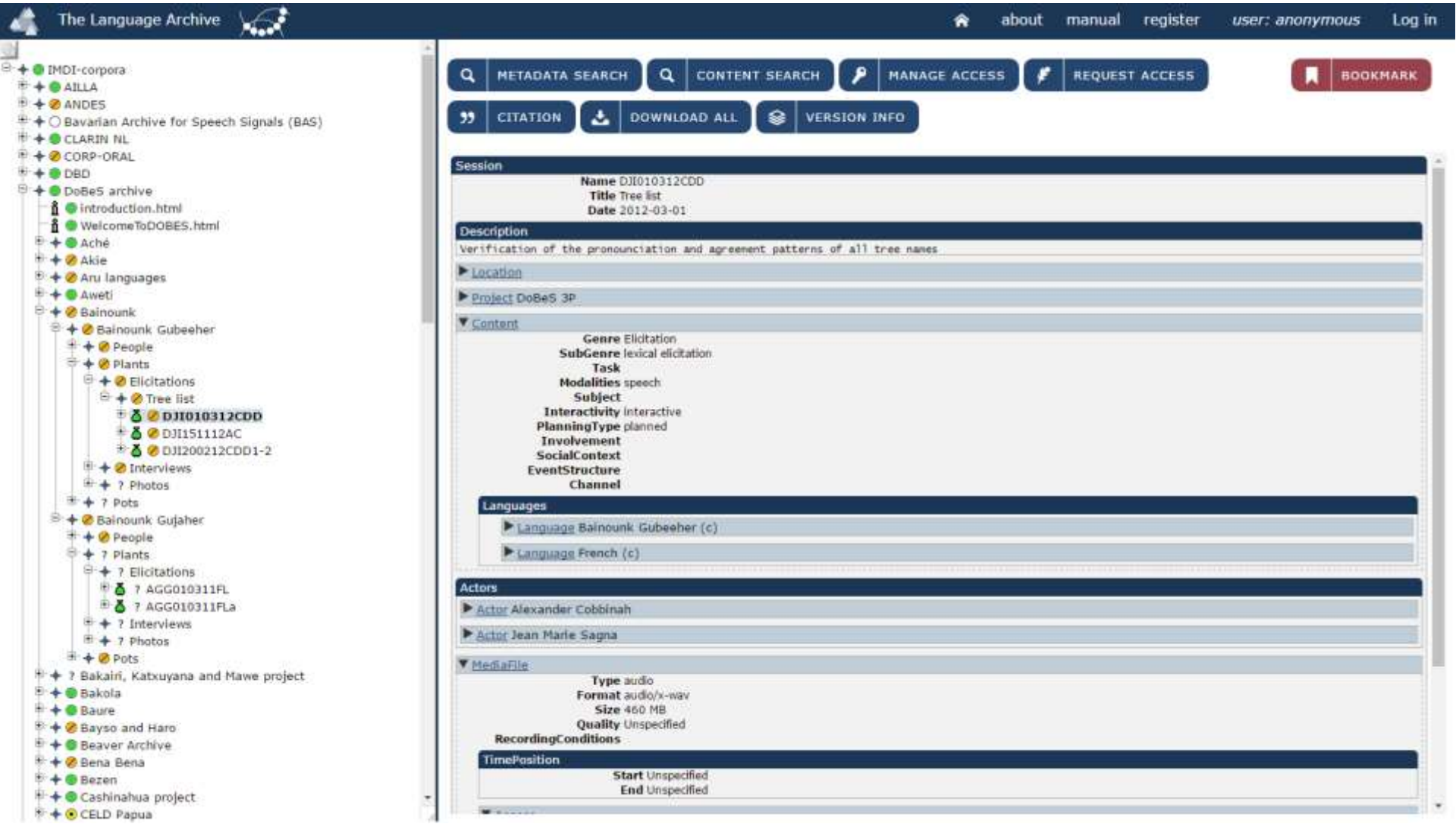
And …

1. Content of materials is often inappropriate for teaching purposes, because of genre, taboo lexicon, etc. but not labelled as such in the metadata (Austin & Sallabank 2017)
2. Materials are culturally and/or pragmatically inappropriate, e.g. recordings of ‘Frog Stories’ while traditional stories, or something more interesting to ordinary users, are missing!

Corpus accessibility – I found it, what now?



Corpus accessibility – I can't even find it



Response 4: Change through 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)
- 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)

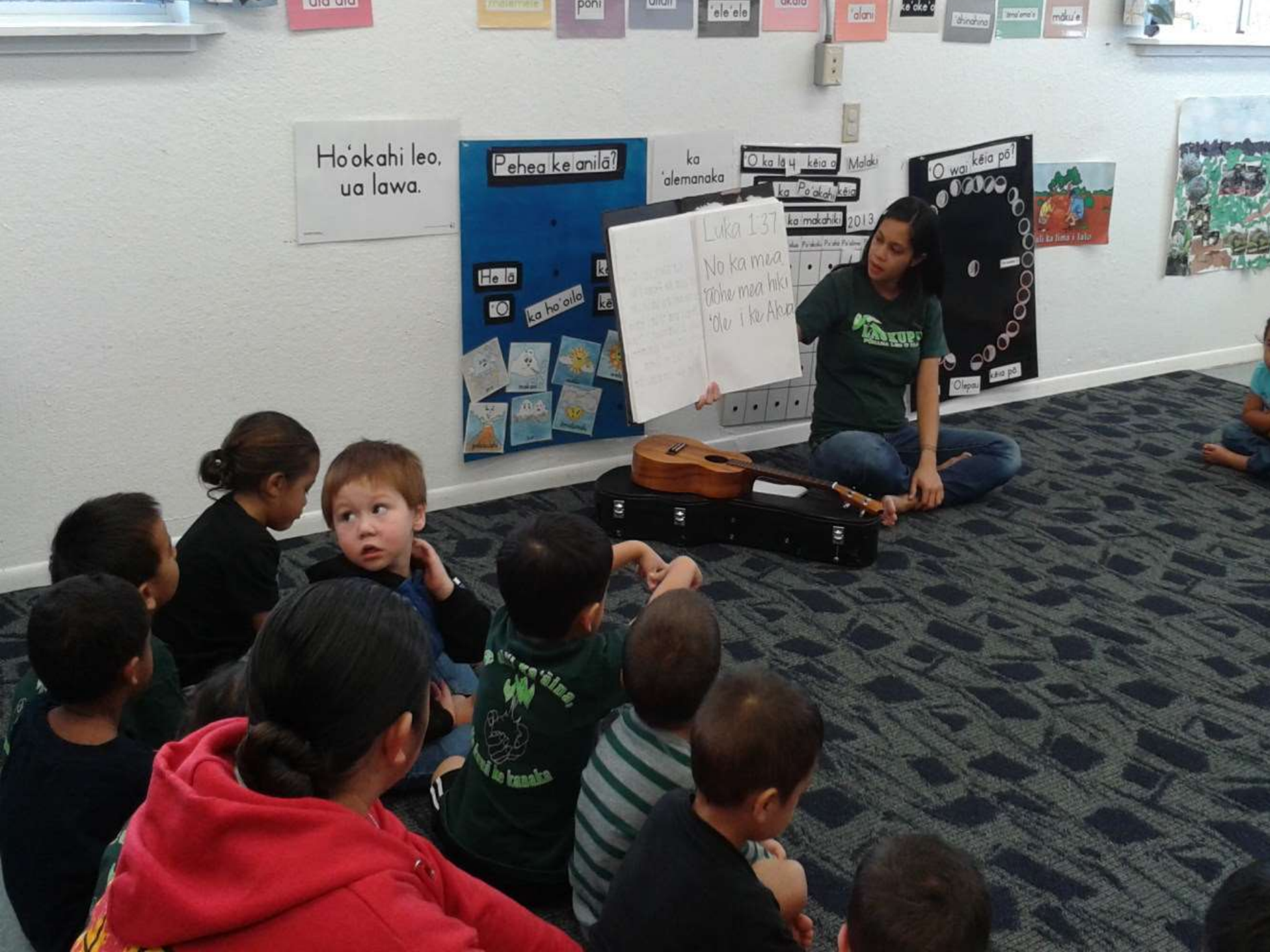
What does revitalisation involve?

- Usually driven by ‘the community’ (who are they?)
- ‘Speakers create opportunities to use the language, and address the social attitudes that triggered the abandonment of the language.’ (Anderson & Harrison 2007)
- Usually involves second language learning
- and ‘the ability to shift the language into new domains of language activity’ (Williams 1992)
  - These are ideologically-based assumptions - may be challenged!
- Is it bottom-up or top-down?

1. “Language nests”

- Translation of Māori ‘Te Kōhanga Reo’
  - originated in New Zealand in 1980s
- Pre-schools in endangered languages
- “Totally immerses children in Māori language and culture in an effort to promote learning within a context/situation that is relevant to the children and which draws on Māori styles of learning and teaching” (http://www.kohanga-reo.co.nz/)
- A replacement for family transmission?
- Tries to engage entire community (*whānau*)
  - e.g. cultural events, adult learning

Hawke's Bay Kōhanga Reo Te Ara Hou children inspect their Worm Farm


Ho'okahi leo, ua lawa.
Pehea ke anilā?
He lā
'O
ka ho'oilo
ka 'alemanaka
Malaki
2013
'O wai kēia pō?
Olepau
kēia pō
Luka 1:37
No ka mea

2. Master (mentor)-Apprentice programmes

- Pioneered by Native American groups in California (Hinton 1997)
- Fluent speakers are paired with learners or latent speakers
- 'Learning through doing': activity-based
- Useful practice for learners
  - may have passive exposure but little productive competence
- Helps older users stay fluent
  - language with a useful social purpose
- Can be combined with documentation
  - learners record sessions
- Simple in principle
  - requires little funding or bureaucracy
  - in America funded programs recompense participants for time
  - training needed for both partners
- Emissaries now visit other groups to help set up programs

3. Increasing visibility ('linguistic landscape')

Street sign in Fuxing, Taiwan: written in Chinese characters and Atayal. The Atayal are the aboriginal tribe that live in the mountainous areas of Northern Taiwan.

(Symbolic and unofficial use: important multilingual signs are in Chinese, English, Japanese, Vietnamese, Thai and Indonesian)

Frameworks for language research

(Cameron, Frazer, Harvey, Rampton, and Richardson 1992)

Ethical research – research **on**

- "… there is a wholly proper concern to minimize damage and offset inconvenience to the researched, and to acknowledge their contributions. … But the underlying model is one of 'research on' social subjects. Human subjects deserve special ethical consideration, but they no more set the researcher's agenda than the bottle of sulphuric acid sets the chemist's agenda."

(Cameron, Frazer, Harvey, Rampton, and Richardson 1992, p. 14-15)

Advocacy research – research **for**

- "… characterized by a commitment on the part of the researcher not just to do research on subjects but research on and for subjects. Such a commitment formalizes what is actually a rather common development in field situations, where a researcher is asked to use her skills or her authority as an 'expert' to defend subjects' interests, getting involved in their campaigns for healthcare or education, cultural autonomy or political and land rights, and speaking on their behalf."

(Cameron, Frazer, Harvey, Rampton, and Richardson 1992, p. 15)

Collaborative research – research **with**

- the use of interactive or dialogic research methods, as opposed to the distancing or objectifying strategies positivists use. Community members participate as agents working together with researchers.

(Cameron, Frazer, Harvey, Rampton, and Richardson 1992, p. 22)

Empowering research – research **by**

“In this model: (a) ‘people are not objects and should not be treated as objects.’ (b) ‘Community members have their own agendas and research should try to address them’ (c) ‘If knowledge is worth having, it is worth sharing.’”

(Cameron, Frazer, Harvey, Rampton, and Richardson 1992, p. 24)

Responding to local needs

- work on **documentation**, **protection**, and **support** of local linguistic diversity in a respectful and collaborative manner
- work with members of language communities, including immigrant groups
- understand language use patterns, language attitudes, and community aspirations for education and language and cultural maintenance
- provide reliable and comprehensible information
- inform relevant stakeholders, including government policy makers and general public

Local community responses

- help communities to understand the situation of their language
- provide research training opportunities to members of the community
- provide language teacher training opportunities for community members
- support communities to foster the position of the language
- support the use of the language in a range of contexts

An education example

Another education example

Sámi allaskuvla
Sámi University College

Ansatte

Hjem | Studier | For studenter | Forskning | Bibliotek | Kontaktinfo | Samiske veivisere | Om Høgskolen

Velkommen til

Sámi allaskuvla
Sámi University College

Sámi allaskuvla / Sámi University College er en samisk utdannings- og forsknings-institusjon, som bevarer og utvikler samisk språk, kultur og samfunnsliv i et allsamisk perspektiv.

Snarveier

>> fronter

Følg oss på Facebook

Find us on Facebook

Starter opp mastergradsstudie i Duodji

Samisk høgskole har fått godkjent søknaden om et mastergradsstudie i duodji. Studiet er planlagt å starte høsten 2012. - Er veldig lettet nå, sier professor i duodji Gunvor Guttorm.

Les mer

Lær deg samisk i Evenes

Vårdobáiki i Evenes kommune i Nordland og Samisk høgskole starter et innføringsstudium i samisk. Innføringsstudiumet består av SAAL 1 og SAAL 2, som hver er på 15 studiepoeng.

Søk

Ledige stillinger

Søk på siden [Søk]

Søk på ansatte [Søk]

Aktiviteter

WIKIPEDIA kursa
11.04.2011 09:00

Samisk høgskoles styremøte
09.06.2011 09:00

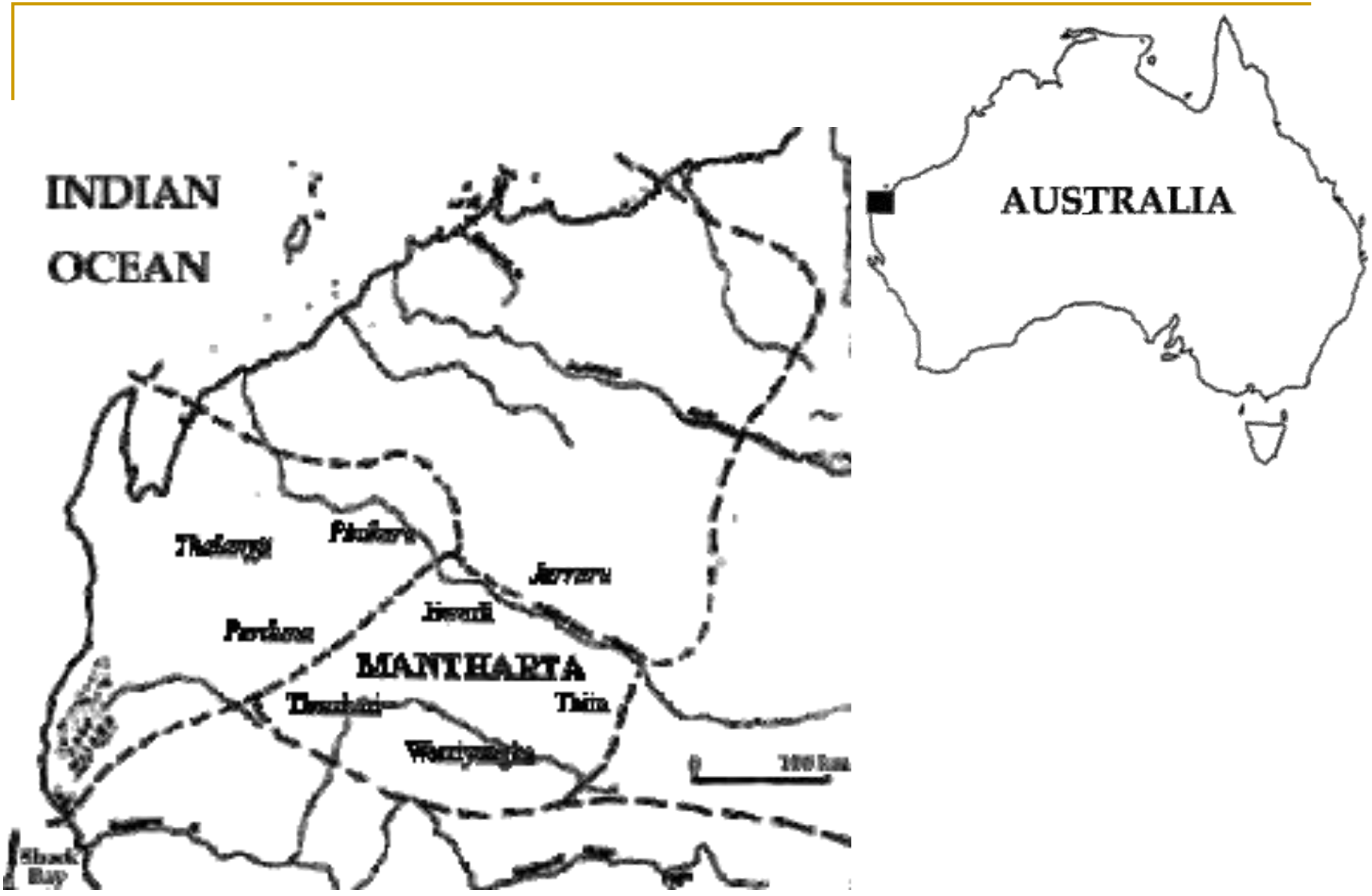
Samisk høgskoles styremøte
14.10.2011 09:00

Samisk høgskoles styremøte
09.12.2011 09:00

Nyhetsbrev

Her kan du abonnere på vårt nyhetsbrev. Registrer deg ved å

A case study: my experiences in Western Australia

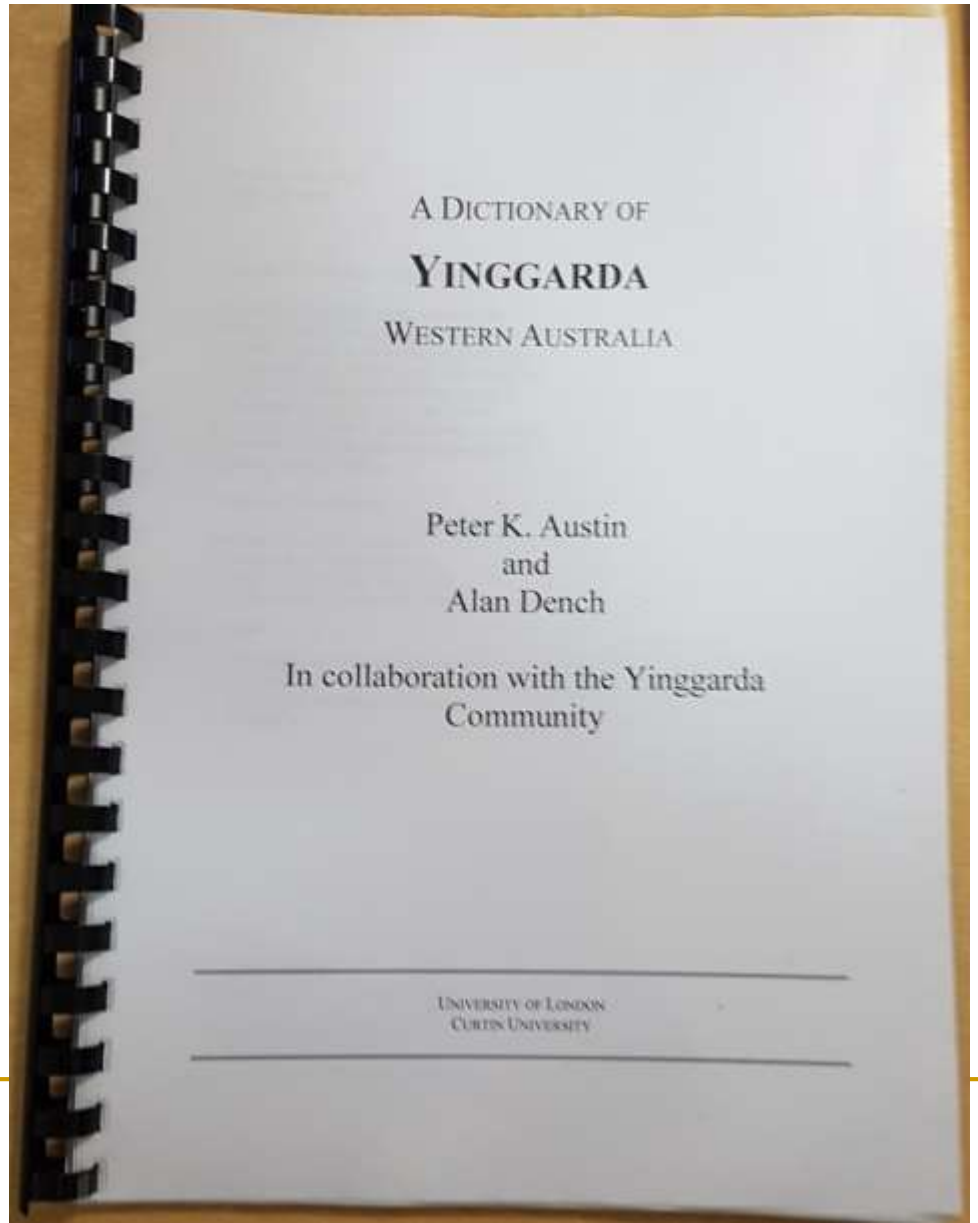

INDIAN
OCEAN
MANTHARTA
AUSTRALIA

From ‘research on’ to ‘research for, with and by’

Kanyara, Mantharta and Kartu languages, northern Western Australia (1978-)

- Reference grammars, historical analysis, texts, dictionaries (published, revised versions in progress)
- Blog
- Grant from AIATSIS Foundation for dictionary
- Collaboration with local artists and photographers, community scholars, school teachers
- Community-based language and culture revitalisation and awareness (2018-)

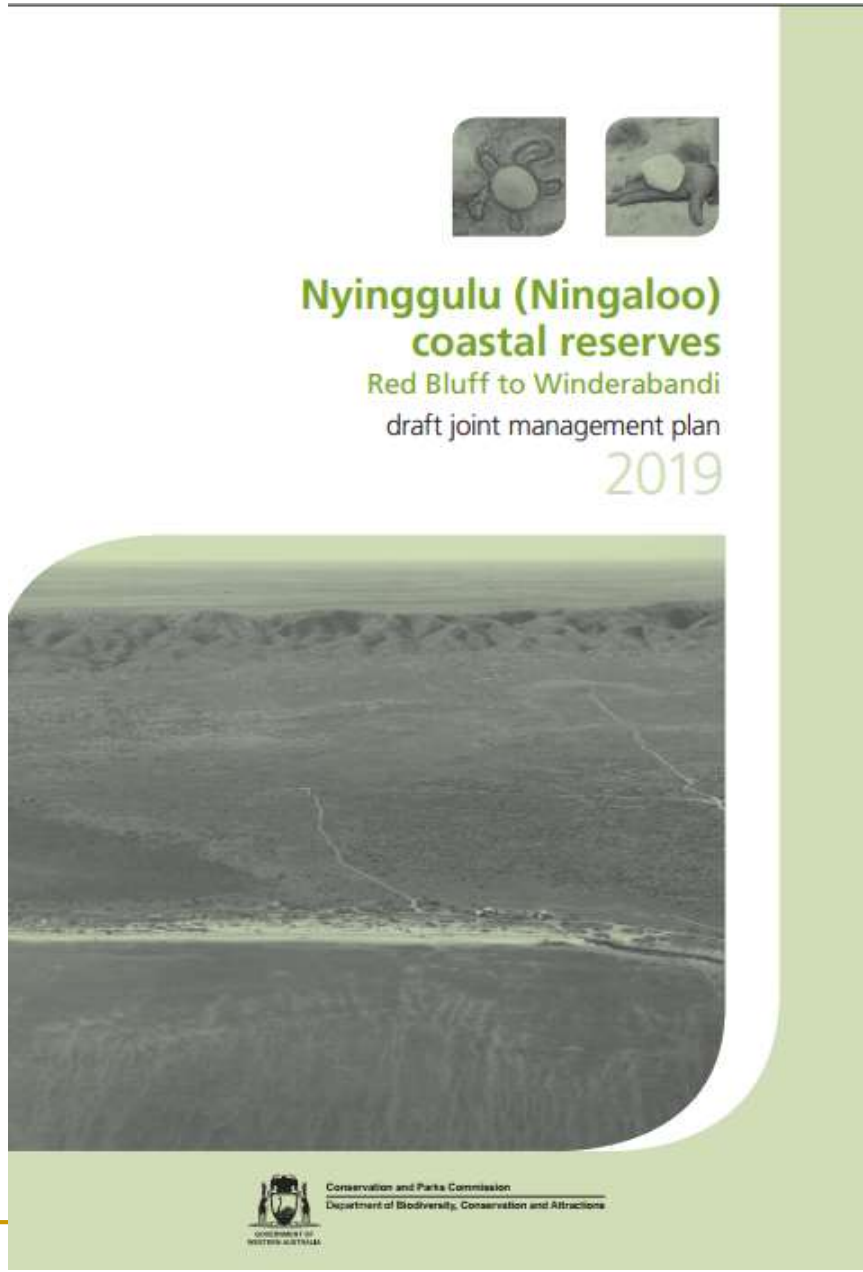
September 2019 dictionary project



September 2019

September 2019

Consultancy with Baiyungu Aboriginal Corporation (traditional owners) and WA Parks and Wildlife Service to help develop a language and culture component of joint the management plan for Ningaloo marine park coastal reserves



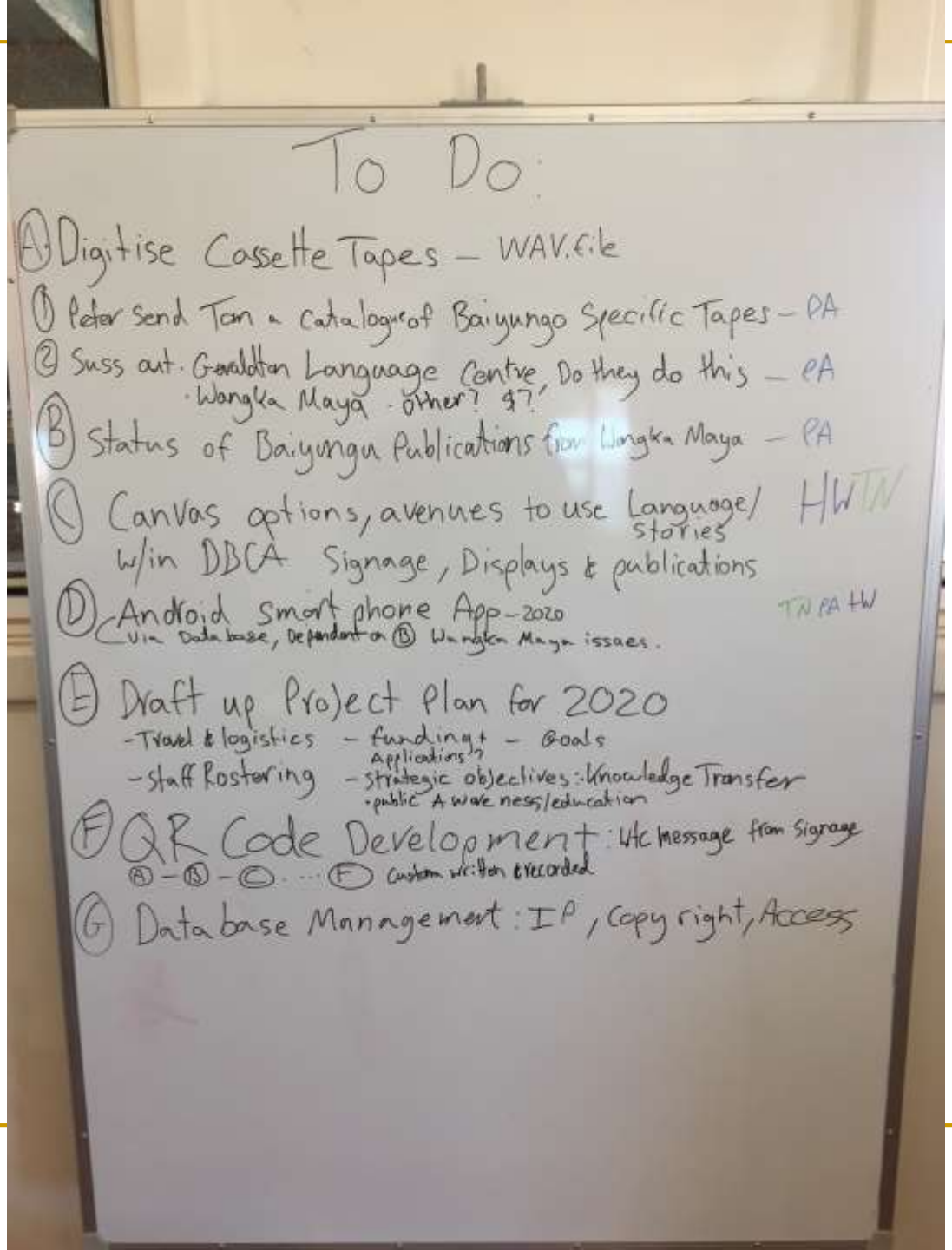
Bayungu country

September 2019

September 2019

WALBAL WARDU
14 MILE CAMP

YALOBIA
POINT ANDERSON
PARKS AND WILDLIFE

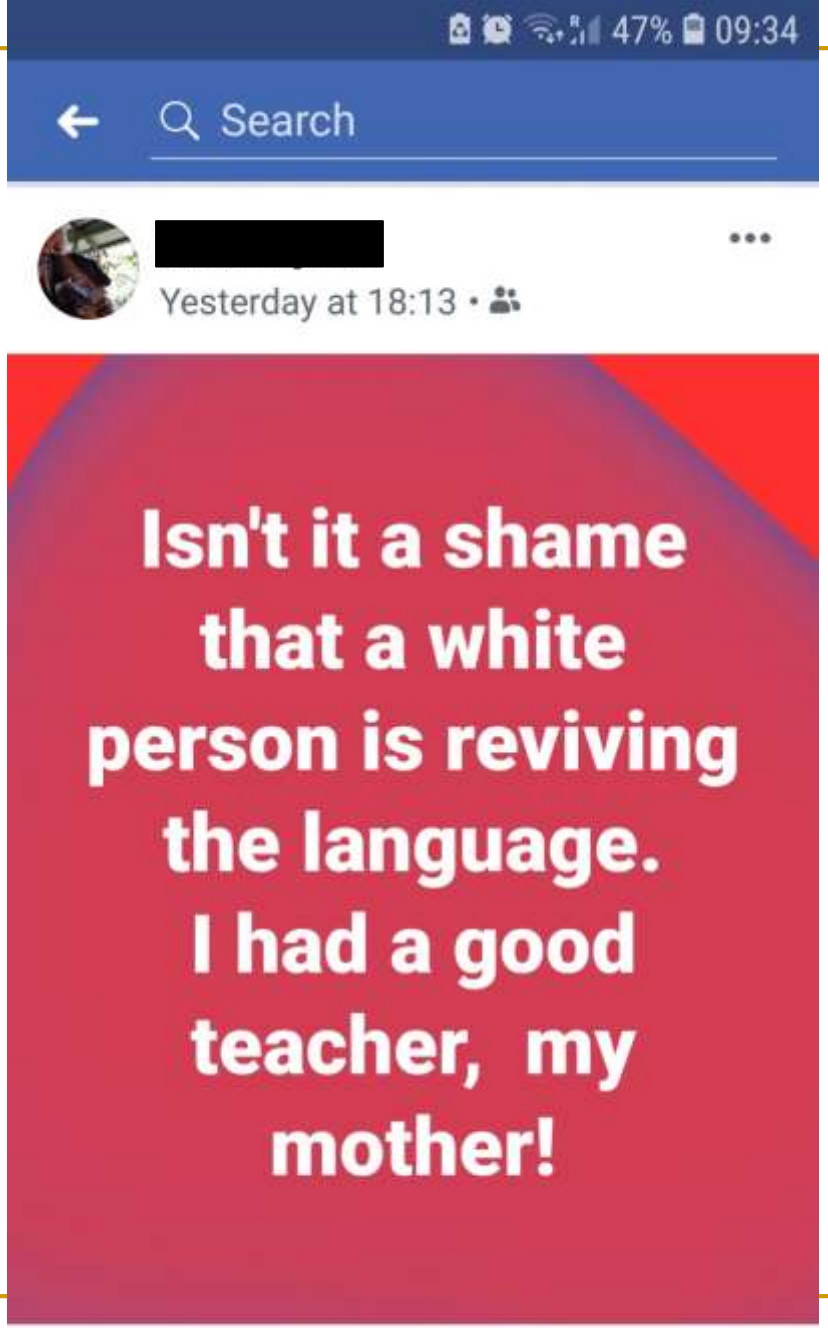

To Do:
(A) Digitise Cassette Tapes – WAV. file
(1) Peter send Tom a catalogue of Baiyungo Specific Tapes – PA
(2) Suss out. Goolalian Language Centre, Do they do this – PA
· Wangka Maya · Other? ??
(B) Status of Baiyungu Publications from Wangka Maya – PA
(C) Canvas options, avenues to use Language/ stories w/in DBCA Signage, Displays & publications HW TN
(D) Android smart phone App – 2020 TN PA HW
Via Database, Dependant on (B) Wangka Maya issues.
(E) Draft up Project Plan for 2020
- Travel & logistics – funding + Applications? – Goals
- staff Rostering – strategic objectives: Knowledge Transfer
· public Awareness/education
(F) QR Code Development: Utc Message from Signage
(A) – (B) – (C) ··· (F) Custom written & recorded
(G) Database Management: IP, Copy right, Access

Conclusions

- There are many challenges facing the world today in terms of linguistic and cultural diversity, both globally and locally
- We need better information about language use, attitudes, ideologies and dynamics
- We need better means of communicating this information to policy makers, educators and the general public
- We need more training at all levels to deal with the socio-politics of language and cultural developments in the rapidly changing world we now live in

What have I learnt?

- Moving from ‘research on’ to ‘research for’ and ‘research with’ can be extremely rewarding and generate insights into language structure and use, both within the community and in the wider academic world
- Revitalisation is only possible if there is a solid documentary and descriptive basis for the work – the size of the corpus is not a determining factor but can impact on possible outcomes
- Revitalisation work involves substantial challenges, including personal, academic, social and political
- It is easy to fall into simplistic “solutions” that do not work, either linguistically or socio-politically (see Wilkins, Amery)


47% 09:34
Search
[redacted]
Yesterday at 18:13 •
Isn't it a shame that a white person is reviving the language. I had a good teacher, my mother!
8

What did I learn?

- Be ready to listen and try to understand what people mean by what they say
- Leave your own politics at the door
- Look for solutions and sustainable outcomes through open and equitable discussions in a realistic context
- Develop concrete outcomes but be careful not to promise too much and raise expectations that cannot be fulfilled and that will lead to disappointment
- Sometimes you just need to shut up and be patient – timing and personalities can be the most important variables
- Be even more patient ☺

Thank you!