ELF Awards 10 Grants in First Year

The Endangered Language Fund's first annual round of grants was completed this past summer. Fifty-four proposals were received, of which we were able to partially fund ten. The proposals were of a high quality, giving us the pleasantly difficult task of choosing only the best. We could easily have spent four times the amount of money available to us. With luck, we will be able to support more proposals next year.

The following sections present, in no particular order, capsule descriptions of the proposals receiving awards. You can also see similar descriptions on our web page (http://www.ling.yale.edu/~elf/projects.html), where we hope to add updates and bits of data as they become available.

Alice Anderton - Television Mini-dramas in Choctaw and Creek.

Alice Anderton is the Executive Director of the Intertribal Wordpath Society, a nonprofit dedicated to the preservation of the Native American languages spoken in Oklahoma. There are 37 tribes in the state, and 27 languages are still spoken, though all of them are endangered. The Society has already produced a series of educational shows about Oklahoma languages for cable television. Alice plans to bring her expertise from that effort into a project aimed more at the native communities rather than the public at large: the production of original dramas in two languages, Choctaw and Creek.

Each of the two shows will be written and acted entirely by native speakers of the language. They will be completely original, born from within the cultures, not translations of non-Indian stories. The exact content will be worked out as part of the project. The Creek segment, to be written by Margaret Mauldin, will probably be a period piece that revolves around an event in Creek history. The actors will be completely fluent in the language. Ms. Mauldin plans to select speakers of a range of ages from a town where everyone still speaks Creek. The Choctaw segment will be written by Leroy Sealy and Marcia Haag, and they have similar goals for the recruitment of actors with native competence in the language. For each of the programs, an all-native-language version with no subtitles, plus another with English subtitles, will be made available to participants and their tribes, so that a wider audience can be served. These shows will capture language in a way that is all too often neglected in formal language classes, and even in samplings by the scientific community—that is, everyday, informal conversation, and its appropriate social rhythms, as one sees in mainstream television, and indeed in everyday life. The dramas produced here will facilitate the study, both by linguists and university and community students, of conversational texts as produced in a natural context.

The tapes will be broadcast on Oklahoma public access cable channels, and will be available on tape to the Choctaw and Creek communities.

Mark Donohue - Wasur Languages: Access and Archive

Mark Donohue, from the Linguistics Department of the University of Manchester, UK, will be documenting the little-know languages of the Wasur region. This area, in far south-eastern Indonesia, contains great linguistic diversity but is still poorly understood. This obscurity persists in spite of its proximity to a major Indonesian city, Merauke.

The area is home to the Kanum, Moraori, Yei and Marind people, and in the last 30 years (since Indonesian take-over) a substantial number of Muyu from further inland, and settlers from Southeast and Southwest Maluku. Unfortunately, the influx of people into the region, the growth of Merauke (now a city of 45,000), and most especially the recent mass movement of people into transmigration camps just north of the Maro river (now home to 30,000+ Javanese transmigrants), have had a severe impact on the local ecology, both natural and linguistic. The area supported a population of around 2,000 nomadic hunter-cultivators; at present, the population is closer to 1,500, with the greatest loss being
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among the older people.

The project funded by the ELF aims at helping local people to take charge of their own lives in a positive way, through community participation in preparing alphabet books and primers for basic and intermediate literacy. This will be accomplished through running on-site community workshops to generate the materials necessary, textual, audio and pictorial, to produce the media that the local Yei, Moraori and Kanum require.

This work will be an extension of the efforts that have recently been undertaken by local people in the area: at the beginning of 1995 the Yei people applied for and received official recognition of their status as a separate ethnic group, and expressed a wish to document and record their traditions, which have been largely lost in the last 60 years. Now, with Simon Gagai organizing local elders to assist in teaching culturally relevant material in the local primary school, a cultural revival is blossoming.

Amongst the Moraori, who number only 200, of whom perhaps only 100 speak the language, Wilhelmus Gebze has, of his own initiative, produced pamphlets identifying local birds with Moraori names, and used these to help Moraori children learn some of their traditions. With the help of the ELF funding, this work will be extended to a more complete curriculum, the nature of which will be dictated by the local community.

Andrej A. Kibrik - Studies in Upper Kuskokwim Athabaskan

Andrej A. Kibrik holds a linguistics degree from the Moscow Institute of Linguistics, Russian Academy of Science, but was a visiting scholar at the University of Alaska when he submitted his grant. He went to the village of Nikolai in the Alaskan interior to study Upper Kuskokwim, an Athabaskan language that is spoken primarily by the older members of the community. Few, if any, fluent speakers are less than fifty years of age. There are about three households where Athabaskan is still used as an important means of communication. This makes it possible to record natural conversation, which is not a realistic possibility with many other surviving Athabaskan languages.

A model of linguistic efficiency, Andrej has already sent us copies of his collected tapes and their transcriptions. Also included in his report are copies of a linguistic attitude survey, with results from 55 of the 63 people polled. Athabaskan ability and attitude toward the use of Athabaskan were assessed in respondents ranging in age from 6 to 76. The results indicate that the community feels that their heritage can and should be preserved via the continued use of Kuskokwim, and that the conditions for its use are now much

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Announcements

REMINDER — AudioForum Discount

Supporting and Sustaining members are reminded that they are entitled to a 20% discount on 77 less commonly taught language courses offered by AudioForum. If you would like the list of languages, or would just like to know if a particular one is eligible, please mail or e-mail (elf@haskins.yale.edu) us, and we will give you the information. We are extremely grateful for this offer from AudioForum. Please take advantage of this benefit of belonging to the Endangered Language Fund.

AudioForum orders can be sent to 96 Broad St., Guilford, CT 06437, or placed by phone, 800-243-1234.

1998 Annual Meeting

Production delays prevented this newsletter from reaching you in time to give advance notice of our annual meeting in New York City. The main news was the grants that were awarded, and these have been detailed throughout this newsletter. Further details will appear in the next newsletter. Also expect to see a review of a linguistic sculpture, which was on view in a SoHo gallery.

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more favorable than they were thirty years ago when the language began to cease being taught to children.

Mary S. Linn - Yuchi Language Project

Mary S. Linn is a graduate student in linguistics at the University of Kansas. After her participation in the Euchee Language Class given in Sapulpa, Oklahoma, she was asked back to help with improvements to the writing system and with making the grammatical descriptions more accessible to second language learners. The grammar will form the basis of her dissertation, while a separate publication will be made available to the language classes. With the money from the ELF grant, Mary purchased recording equipment that would allow her to maintain a better record of the language as it is spoken. These tapes will be of use for grammar analysts studying the language and current language learners who may not have access to the few remaining native speakers.

Ofelia Zepeda - Tohono O'odham Dictionary Project

Ofelia Zepeda has put together an ambitious three year project to take the input from six consultants and produce the best possible dictionary of the language. Two of the consultants are native speakers who have received training in linguistics. The other four were selected for being keepers of traditional knowledge in various fields. Together, this group will give much better coverage than the usual dictionary project is able to afford. The ELF grant assisted with the consultant fees for this project, the result of which will be a cultural prize for generations.

Janne L. Underriner - Preparation of Language Materials in Klamath

Janne L. Underriner is a graduate student in linguistics at the University of Oregon who has been working with the Klamath tribe since 1996. She has been teaching a Klamath language class to interested tribe members, and will use her grant to improve the language materials available. Since there are only two remaining speakers of the language, both of whom are in their seventies, every bit of recording that can be done will be of immense value to those trying to maintain the language traditions. Aspects of the language have been introduced into the Head Start program, kindergarten, the Summer Culture Camp, and evening adult-education classes.

Gary Holton - Tanacross Language Documentation Project

Gary Holton, a Ph.D. student at the University of California, Santa Barbara, received a grant to work with the Tanacross language of interior Alaska. This Athabaskan language is spoken primarily by the elderly members of the community, and it is one of the least well documented of this language family. Gary will be collecting new texts from the current speakers as well as working on previously collected but untranscribed recordings of the Tanacross chief Andrew Isaac. While he has passed on, his sister, Laura Sanford, is available to help with the texts recorded by her late brother. Results of this effort will be of great importance to the Tanacross as they weigh the possibility of reviving the language.

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Ronald Red Elk - Comanche Dictionary Project

Ronald Red Elk is President of Numu Tekwapuh Nomneekatu, the Comanche Language and Cultural Preservation Committee. He recently received copies of an unpublished manuscript, dated 1894 and 1895, of a Comanche word list as spoken by a Comanche man named Powhorneet and recorded by a Charles H. Detrich. This manuscript eventually ended up in the Smithsonian Institution and was only rediscovered in 1996. Ronald intends to corroborate these items with as many of the remaining 800 or so native speakers as possible, and then publish the results in a new, tribally sponsored dictionary that will be used to help tribal members reclaim their language and, through it, parts of their culture.

Robert Pensalfini - Jingulu Dictionary and Texts

Robert Pensalfini, an Australian studying in the US, has worked with several endangered languages already. One, Jingulu, has approximately ten living native speakers, all over the age of 50, with another ten to twenty people who can speak it with varying degrees of fluency, scattered throughout Australia’s Northern Territory from Katherine to Tennant Creek. None of the speakers use the language daily, but their children are eager to have materials, particularly a thorough dictionary and texts, in order to preserve the language for posterity. Rob received an ELF grant to assist with his efforts to enhance the current dictionary (especially with sample sentences to make the entries more useful). The texts will also serve as an excellent source for further theoretical, historical and comparative work.

Karen Somerville - Maliseet Language Teaching Materials

Karen Somerville represents Gakeemaneh/Gignamoane, a group of teachers, parents, elders, and youth from a wide expanse of territories including Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec and Maine. The organization is open to all interested Wabanaki People throughout the region, both speakers and nonspeakers. Their main approach to sustaining the endangered languages of Passamaquoddy, Maliseet and Micmac is the development of language immersion and second-language curriculum. The ELF grant will help pay for recording equipment to be used in this effort.