11 Grants Awarded in 2000

This year the Endangered Language Fund selected eleven grants for support. We were assisted greatly with a grant from the Kerr Foundation of Oklahoma, allowing us to make an additional grant available for work to be done in Oklahoma, site of many of the U.S.'s endangered languages. The total amount available for the grants was about $20,000 again this year; this helps facilitate worthwhile projects, but we hope to be able to expand our funding in the future. The continued support of our members is crucial in this effort.

Alice J. Anderton (Intertribal Wordpath Society)—Ponca Culture in Our Own Words

The Ponca language, of the Siouan linguistic family, is spoken in the White Eagle tribal community, just south of Ponca City, Oklahoma. Only about thirty fluent speakers remain, all in their 60s or older. The Ponca Language Arts Council (PLAC) has received repeated comments by Ponca students and teachers that they lack good materials for teaching the Ponca language, and that the traditional culture is being lost; the Intertribal Wordpath Society (IWS) has been granted an award to help improve this situation. IWS will produce five videotaped texts describing Ponca culture in the Ponca language. These video projects will be aired on its television show Wordpath, a public access cable program it produces on Cox Cable about Oklahoma Indian languages and those who preserve them. Researcher Alice Anderton will tape the texts in the Ponca/White Eagle area. Each VHS tape will be two hours long and contain 10-15 minutes of text in Ponca only, Ponca text with English subtitles, and Ponca text with Ponca subtitles. A translator, in consultation with the native speakers, will then produce a transcription and a literal and fluent translation. These will be in the form of five booklets to be distributed with the tapes. IWS will provide copies of the tapes to PLAC, Frontier High School, the Ponca City Public Library and the Endangered Language Fund. The research will provide samples of fully fluent conversational texts, a rarity for almost any Native American language, and make them available to students of Ponca and to the linguistic community for study. The tapes will document Ponca culture, teach and popularize the new official Ponca alphabet, and educate the general public about Ponca language and culture.

Mark J. Awakuni-Swetland—ELF Omaha Language Curriculum Development Project

In 1994, the Omaha Tribe stated that less than 1% of its total enrollment were identified as fluent speakers of Omaha, a Siouan language. It is reported that less than seventy elderly speakers of the language remain and that of these, only thirty use the language on a daily basis in the Macy area of Nebraska. There are several facilities that teach Omaha, namely the Macy Public school (recently renamed Omaha Nation Public School) and Nebraska Indian Community College (NICC). However, all suffer from the lack of a systematic curriculum and classroom materials. The present project is part of a larger collaborative effort to combat this problem. It will support the development of language and culture lesson plans, immersion situations, and language exercises, drawing upon existing materials from NICC and Omaha Nation. The materials will be examined for linguistic and cultural content, placed into a larger four semester framework, and edited for content and consistency. New lessons will be generated to link and augment existing lessons. Funds will be shared equally with the NICC and Omaha Nation, so as to bring direct benefit to the larger Omaha community at the K-12 and post-secondary levels.

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Melissa Axelrod, Jule Gomez de Garcia, and Jordan Lachler—Plains Apache Language Documentation

The Plains Apaches, formally known as the Apache Tribe of Oklahoma, are centered in Anadarko, Oklahoma. Plains Apache is one of the Apachean group of Athabaskan languages, and is part of the Na Dene family. Today, there are only three elderly people who still speak it. Tribal leaders formed a committee in 1993 to help preserve their cultural and linguistic heritage. The primary aim of the project was to produce documentary of the language, chiefly in the form of an interactive CD ROM dictionary. Axelrod, Garcia, and Lachler will act as consultants in completing the dictionary. In addition, they will continue research to aid the Plains Apache in language documentation. Their project will include a dictionary, a grammar, the videotaping of elders, and the publication of oral history and folklore. However, timing is urgent. Since their last visit, two of the most fluent Plains Apache speakers have passed away.

Frank Bechter and Stephen Hibbard—Apsaalooke Textual And Gestural Form: Videorecording Crow and Plains Sign Talk Narratives

The Crow language is spoken by roughly 4,000 people in southeastern Montana (about half the registered Crow population), while only 10% of the Crow children are acquiring the language today. Traditionally, most Crow speakers would also be fluent in “Plains Sign Talk” (PST), a manual semiotic code that was once a lingua franca among the Plains Indian nations. It is clearly moribund, with probably fewer than 100 proficient speakers, all elderly. We now have one last chance to see how conventions in PST may have affected storytelling ad other techniques in spoken Crow. Bechter and Hibbard will collect traditional and non-traditional narratives in Crow and PST, recorded in font of Crow-speaking audiences. Gestural forms (if not PST forms) will be seen in informal discourse as well. Crow consultants will aid in producing Crow transcriptions and English translations of narratives. The project will not only benefit researchers, but will aid in language preservation and revitalization projects. Copies will be available at the Crow Agency Bilingual Education Program, the Language Archives at the University of Chicago, and the Endangered Language Fund.

Barry F. Carlson and Suzanne Cook—Lacandon Text Collection

Lacandon is currently spoken by a dwindling population of Mayas. Their ancestry has been obscured by the absence of a written tradition, and their primary source of culture, the Lacandon story-teller, has been threatened by the

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influence of modern media such as television. As the remaining story-tellers grow older and fewer, the state of the Lacandon traditional culture is in increasing jeopardy. Carlson and Cook will record traditional narratives, songs, and ceremonies in the northern community of Naja in Mexico. Personal narratives and conversations will also be recorded to document the full range of Lacandon use. The audio and video recordings will help preserve the Lacandon oral culture against further loss and provide materials for possible future language renewal projects. The research will augment earlier grammatical information, while adding the new dimension of audio/video analysis of oral performance previously unstudied by linguists. In addition, the oral performances may be compiled into a collection of Lacandon texts. These performances will add to the growing body of research on Native American ethnopoetics.

G. Tucker Childs and M Djibril Batchily—Fieldwork on Mmani (Atlantic, Niger-Congo), a dying language of coastal Guinea-Conakry

Mmani is the northernmost language of the Bullom family of the Mel sub-group of languages, belonging to the Atlantic Group Niger-Congo. Its speakers are located on the southernmost coast of Guinea near the Sierra Leone border. Investigation has revealed that there are several villages of speakers on the islands off the coast, as well, one of which is now accessible by ferry. Mmani is geographically surrounded by Susu (a distantly related language) and interpenetrated with Temne (a related language). There are very few speakers left, none under 60 years old. Childs believes that Mmani is at least a widely divergent dialect of Bullom, if not a separate language. Currently there is no work being done on the language, and previous research has yielded little documentation and no sound recordings. Childs and Batchily plan to make recordings, digitizing the speech for archiving, accumulating a word list and different discourse types, and sketching a grammar. The investigation of Mmani will chronicle a once distinct language and culture, and it will contribute to a greater understanding of the Atlantic group of languages as a whole.

Terry Crowley—Moribund languages of northern Malakula

The island of Malakula, the second largest island in the Republic of Vanuatu in the southwestern Pacific, currently holds over two dozen separate Oceanic languages spoken by a population of under 30,000 in total. In spite of this linguistic diversity, the original number of languages is thought to have been much higher. Crowley recently discovered that the Langalanga and Marakhius languages, assumed to be extinct, do in fact have a small number of speakers remaining. In addition, a previously unreported language originally spoken in the Khabtol area of central Malakula also has a small number of speakers. These languages are only spoken by older members of the community, who speak other local vernaculars as their primary languages; they are not being passed on to younger generations. This is our last chance to record them so that descendants may appreciate, in part, what has been lost.

Linda A. Cumberland—A Grammar of Assiniboine

Cumberland plans to develop a descriptive grammar of Assiniboine, a Siouan language of the northern plains, now only spoken by a small number of elders in Saskatchewan and Montana. The grammar will focus on phonology, morphology, syntax, and usage, including gendered speech, register, and generational and regional variation. The goal of the project is to provide a broad description of the major grammatical processes of Assiniboine that will serve as a resource for the Assiniboine communities in Canada and the U.S. in their language revitalization programs. Currently only 130 out of a total population of 3500 are fluent speakers, and most are over the age of seventy. There are at least three centers actively attempting to revitalize the language. However, no systematic description of the grammar exists.

Theodore Isham-Language—Immersion Camps in Mvskoke (Creek)

Immersion in a language environment is one of the most successful techniques in language learning. Isham, of the Mvskoke Language Institute in Oklahoma, used a grant from the ELF to start a program with current members of the Muscogee Nation. Workshops were held in the summer of 2000, involving language learners at all levels and ages. The immersion program used as many media as were available—audio recordings, videotapes, written material and cultural material. It is hoped that the immersion camps will create a better environment for the use of the language by a larger number of casual users, and eventually the acquisition of the language by young children. Further, videotapes of the older generation speaking in the heritage language will be treasured by their descendants for even more generations.

Linda Jordan and Leslie. D. Hannah—Cherokee Storytelling Project

The Cherokees comprise the largest Native American group in North America. It is estimated that there are between 10,000 and 15,000 native speakers of Cherokee, mostly in Oklahoma. Cherokee is not considered in imminent danger of extinction, but it is threatened, as the major-
Eva Toulouze and Kaur Maegi—Recording and Analyzing Forest Nenets Language Materials

The Forest Nenets are a semi-nomadic group of people inhabiting northern Russia. They have no written language and little linguistic description, and although clearly related to their more northern neighbors, the Tundra Nenets, their language differs enough to deny mutual understanding. The Forest Nenets are not recognized officially as a single ethnic group, and their territory has been occupied by the oil industry. As a result, the language and culture are seriously threatened. Only a few elders have a rich knowledge of both everyday language and traditional oral folklore. The middle-aged population uses Nenets at home, but little is passed on to the young. Since Forest Nenets is only marginally known in the academic community, Toulouze and Maegi plan to concentrate on collection of language materials and establishment of a scientifically based orthography. The latter will be used in the community in hopes of stimulating more interest in the language and culture. They will record folklore, as well as spontaneous daily conversation, in two regions of Russia: the Agan and Num-to regions.