LANGUAGE LEGACIES PROGRAM MAKES AWARDS TO 13 PROJECTS IN 2011

The Endangered Language Fund’s Language Legacies grant program is pleased to announce the awardees from our 2011 competition. These grants are awarded to scholars, teachers, and language activists throughout the world.

This year, 13 awards were made. They cover a range of projects, spanning traditional grammatical description to interactive video for language learning. As has been the case recently, the projects came from all over the globe, roughly in proportion to the number of applications from each area.

The deadline for applications for the 2012 competition is April 20, 2012. Details can be found on our website, at http://www.endangeredlanguagefund.org/request.php. Projects are for one year, with average budgets of $2,500 and a limit of $4,000.

Esteban Israel Méndez (American School Foundation of Puebla): Xayacatlán Mixtec Multimedia and Documentation Project

In the southern part of the State of Puebla, Mexico, there are roughly 2500 speakers of Xayacatlán Mixtec (ISO 639 mit). Most people over the age of 40 speak the language, but it is no longer transmitted to younger generations. The focus of this project will primarily be on creating DVDs from folk stories and anecdotes which will be especially enjoyable to children. Material for the DVDs will come from previous fieldwork, and will include field notes as well as audio and video recordings. The final product will be made available in schools and to the community as a whole. In addition, recordings of the language will be used to develop a phonetic analysis, a sketch of Xayacatlán Mixtec grammar and morphology, and an analysis of deictic verbs of motion, which will be made available online for students and linguists in the academic community.

Saudah Namyalo (Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda): Documentation of Lunyara Legends

In this project Namyalo will contribute to cultural preservation as well as linguistic science. Ten legends from the Banyara oral tradition, in the Lunyara language (ISO 639 ruc), will be recorded, analyzed for phonetic inventory and morphology, and used to produce a monograph on gender relations and power sharing in the Banyara culture. The language is estimated to have around 20,000 speakers, but is still quite threatened.

Femmy Admiraal (University of Leipzig): Baure-Spanish Memory Game: Learn To Play

Admiraal estimates that, as of 2009, there are 34 people who consider themselves speakers of Baure (ISO 639 brg), only 16 of whom are fully fluent and all of whom are elderly. This language is spoken in and around the town of Baures in the lowlands of Bolivia. Transmission of the language has skipped several generations. Thankfully, in more recent years, Bolivia has experienced a marked increase in the value of indigenous identity among its people, and the use of indigenous language is now encouraged. There is strong local support for indigenous language use and there are revitalization programs in place. Because of the status of the language none of the language teachers are themselves native speakers and they lack materials with which to teach the language. For this project, ELF will provide funding for the production of 100 memory games to be distributed in the Baures community to aid the development of Baure vocabulary among the children.
Margarito Vasquez, Carlos Enrique Cortez and Erica Olsen (La Asociacion de Desarrollo Comunal Indigena Nahua; University of Don Bosco, Office of Nahau Language in the Department of Investigations; Maryknoll Lay Missioners): Nahau School (Escuela Nahau)

Margarito Vasquez has experienced the difficulties that can come along with motivating youth to reconnect with the indigenous languages of their communities and understand the importance this has to cultural identity. He and his collaborators are now redesigning their approach to revitalizing the Nahau language of El Salvador (ISO 639 ppl), the language of the Nahau-Pipiles people. They will focus on maintaining interest and enthusiasm and, importantly, will incorporate cultural education as well. Native speakers are now elderly, and so cannot be teachers themselves, but they will be consulted for the production of audio and video materials. These materials will be correlated with and incorporated into structured lesson plans and will help students identify with Nahau-Pipiles tradition, culture, and language.

Leila Dodykhudoeva and Yusufbekov Shodikhon (Russian Academy of Sciences; Khorog State University): New Data on Ishkhashi-Sanglichi Linguistic area in Tajik-Afghan Badakhshan

This project will document short colloquial texts on cultural matters in three endangered Pamiri languages: Ishkhashi, Sanglichi, and Zebaki (ISO 639 isk, sgy). Currently, Ishkhashi is under linguistic pressure from Tajik and Russian, Dari is replacing Sanglichi in some villages, and Zebaki is likely extinct, but the project aims to document what is remembered by the eldest members of the community. Data collected from these documentation efforts will be used to produce a digital corpus and interlinerized transcriptions, and aims to provide information on basic and previously unknown lexical items and phonetic and morphosyntactic properties.

Gabriela Pérez Báez (Smithsonian Institution): Oral Histories of the San Lucas Quiaviní Community

San Lucas Quiavini Zapotec (ISO 639 zab) is an endangered language with some 1700 speakers that remains under pressure from Spanish and emigration out its speech community. The project funded by ELF will engage elders in the community in story-time sessions at a preschool, to be recorded, archived and disseminated throughout the local community as well as migrant communities. The primary goals are to introduce San Lucas Quiavini Zapotec into the school curriculum early, to allow children to engage community elders not only as revered members of the community, but as resources of cultural knowledge and history, to archive oral history and knowledge of San Lucas Quiavini Zapotec, and to integrate technology in supporting the continued use of San Lucas Quiavini Zapotec.

Girma Mengistu (Addis Ababa University): Sezo: Descriptive Grammar of a Mao Language

Sezo (ISO 639 sze) is an endangered language spoken in the western borderlands of Ethiopia. Currently, Sezo-speaking peoples are shifting to the well-established Oromo language of the region. Mengistu has found that Sezo is typically only used in homes and is not being transmitted to the next generation. His hope is that the resulting grammar will not only be a contribution to linguistic science, but will be used for revitalization efforts.

Claire Bowern (Yale University): Bardi Corpus Development and Circulation

When Bowern began her work with the Bardi people of North-Western Austarila there were roughly 40 speakers remaining. Today, there are perhaps 6 speakers remaining and only 3 who are able to contribute to language projects. In light of this, Bowern has shifted her focus to providing language materials to the Bardi community that will allow for the language (ISO 639 bcj) to be passed on to future generations. A previous ELF grant allowed Bowern to to digitize, type, translate and annotate language materials recorded in the 1920s by Gerhardt Laves, and to place them in the context of Bardi culture and grammar. This led to a larger grant from The
National Science Foundation, and ultimately to the Bardi language no longer remaining undocumented. This grant from ELF will help Bowern bridge the gap between what is covered by The National Science Foundation and what is needed for this important project to reach its full potential.

Sofiya Zahova: Documenting Varna Bugurdži Romani Dialect through Oral Folklore and Life Stories

Zahova has over ten years of experience working with and documenting the lives of Roma peoples in Europe. For this project, she turns her attention to Varna Bugurdži Romani, a dialect of the Romani language spoken in north-central and northeastern Bulgaria (ISO 639 rmn). The recording and transcription of oral folklore and life stories of Varna Bugurdži Romani speakers will contribute to cultural documentation and will also shed light on the nature of this dialect. It is difficult to categorize any Romani dialect, as Romani is not established as a unified language and varies greatly depending on region. For this particular dialect there are perhaps 5000 speakers living in various places in Bulgaria, and it is significantly different from dialects already documented.

Yuki Tanaka (Southern Illinois University Carbondale): Documentation of Belizean Mopán

In this project, Tanaka will contribute to the documentation and description of Belizean Mopán (ISO 639 mop), a Mayan language spoken in the Toledo district of Southern Belize. Little research has been conducted on the language, so the primary goals are to establish a strong foundation on which to build further documentation efforts and to establish a greater understanding of the language’s relationship to other nearby languages. Cultural documentation will be performed alongside linguistic documentation.

Natalia Bermudez (Endangered Language Alliance): Annotation and Mobilization of Naso Language Materials

While the Naso peoples reside in 11 villages along the Teribe River in Panama, only the two farthest upriver, Sieykjing and Sieyllik, are isolated enough to have maintained the use of the Naso language (ISO 639 tfr). Because of an increasing level of influence and pressure from Spanish and the presence of industry in the area, it is estimated that there are only 800 speakers of the language remaining and that it is not being passed on to children. Bermudez worked with speakers in New York City, then obtained funding from the Gesselschaft für Bedrohte Sprachen for an initial trip to the Naso speaking villages in January of 2011. This ELF grant will help fund her second visit, where she will transcribe recordings with the help of native speakers, and crucially, will train native speakers to conduct documentation work themselves.

Odilia Romero and Aaron Huey Sonnenschein (Centro Binacional Para el Desarrollo Indígena Oaxaqueño; California State University Los Angeles): Dizha Xhon Baan (Zoogocho Zapotec is a living language)

San Bartolomé Zoogocho is a village in the northern highlands of Oaxaca, Mexico which has seen significant migration to urban areas and large influence from Spanish on those remaining. This situation has left the village’s indigenous language, Dizha Xhon Xgrozho (Zoogocho Zapotec; ISO 639 zpq), highly endangered. Second and third generation immigrants from San Bartolomé Zoogocho currently residing in Los Angeles have started a revitalization effort for the language, which this grant will assist. The project aims to produce pedagogical materials including language learning tools for children and a traditional print and multimedia phrasebook to aid second and third generations in speaking the language when visiting San Bartolomé Zoogocho. It also aims to document the speech of elders in Los Angeles including monolingual or near-monolingual speakers.

George Ann Gregory (Central New Mexico Community College): Choctaw Language DVD for children

Gregory aims to apply her experience in bilingual literacy, language use, and cultural education to develop a much needed tool for educating Choctaw communities in their language. Drawing on her observations of language programs for the Maori in New Zealand and her work in applied linguistics, she will develop a DVD consisting of ten stories in the Choctaw language (ISO 639 cho) to teach vocabulary, grammar and orthography. The project aims to be an improvement over previous efforts by bringing the language into the home, tailoring pedagogical materials for children in the communities, monitoring the use of and response to the material and incorporating feedback from Choctaw communities in the future development of language revitalization tools for Choctaw as well as other endangered languages.
Myaamia Project Director Daryl Baldwin has been elected to the Board of Directors of the Endangered Language Fund (ELF). With this appointment, we gain a respected language activist with extensive experience in language revitalization. The Myaamia Project itself (http://www.myaamiaproject.org) was an outgrowth of Daryl’s own reclamation of the Miami language, which had fallen silent for 40 years. Using linguistic methods to reconstruct the language to the extent possible, he began raising his children bilingual in English and Miami. He has extended the effort to a successful series of summer camps that are aimed at having the language used rather than only studied. The Myaamia Project is a cooperative venture with Miami University in Oxford, OH. Its goals are to continue the work on the Miami language and bring tribal culture and language revitalization to the attention of the undergraduates.

Daryl took part in ELF’s National Breath of Life workshop in Washington, DC. This past June, 60 teachers, researchers, Native language speakers and activists spent two weeks mining the archives at the Smithsonian Institution and the Library of Congress. About 20 languages were represented by tribal members; some were speakers, some were learners. Mornings were spent in training sessions, including “From Paper to Talk: An Account of Language Revitalization from Archival Materials” by Daryl. In that, he presented an engaging, informative and uplifting account of the Myaamia Project. Another of his presentations was “Language Revitalization Planning,” of immediate importance to most of the attendees. He also did further workshops on language in the community and in the home.

The Endangered Language Fund is very pleased to have Daryl’s expertise and energy to help us expand our efforts. Although ELF has been successful with its program to date, we are hoping that, with Daryl’s help, we can expand into further regions that we have not been able to before. Daryl expects his connection with ELF to bolster his own efforts to broaden the scope of the Myaamia Project.