



## 10 Awards for Language Work in 2003

*Another crop of excellent proposals leads to hard choices, great projects.*

The Endangered Language Fund's seventh annual request for proposals has resulted in the submission of 68 projects on languages throughout the world. As we have come to expect, the quality of the proposals was quite high, leading to many difficult decisions. We were able to fund 10 of the projects, and could easily have justified twice as many (if not three or four times). While this tight funding rate ensures that only the best proposals receive an award, it is a frustrating level for those who just miss. We are hoping to expand our ability to provide for future grants--as always, we depend on the generosity of our members.

This year's proposal came from all over the world, and the successful ones came from representative areas as well. Half of the projects are for languages from North America, including the U. S., Mexico and Canada. Two were from Russia, two from Africa, and one from Australia. While there are endangered languages everywhere, this selection actually reflects the areas that we received proposal from. The acceptance rate per continent was essentially the same, so the lack of awards to, say, South America reflects the relative dearth of proposals for those languages. (Perhaps this is due to the bumper crop of South American awards we made last year.) The selection process seems to be working well, giving us the maximum coverage with the greatest quality.

*Cora McKenna and Brenda McKenna (Nambé Pueblo, NM) Tewa Dictionary and Curriculum, Nambé Dialect*

Nambé Pueblo is located 16 miles north of Santa Fe, at the base of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. Established in the 1300s, the present village of Nambé has a population of about 650 but only 43 fluent speakers. This distinct language of the Kiowa-Tanoan family is a precious resource for the community. The current Nambé classes serve learners from age 4 to 60, so the curriculum has to be specially designed. The only dictionary available is one from a neighboring pueblo, San Juan. The language is the same between the two pueblos, but the dialects are different. Copies of the dictionary are limited and out-of-print. The Endangered Language Fund grant awarded to the McKennas will help collect material for the classroom and begin a more comprehensive dictionary for Nambé's members while there is still time.

*Lisa Conathan and Belle Anne Matheson (UC Berkeley) Arapaho Description and Revitalization*

The Northern Arapaho language is spoken by about 1,000 people, most in their 50s or older. It has been over 40 years since children have learned Arapaho in the home. The Wind River Reservation in Wyoming has made significant efforts in bilingual education over the last decade, with mixed results. The immersion kindergarten has been a success but not to the point of producing fluent speakers. The community feels a need for a

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***The Endangered Language Fund***  
Department of Linguistics  
Yale University  
P.O. Box 208366  
New Haven, CT 06520-8366 USA

e-mail: [elf@haskins.yale.edu](mailto:elf@haskins.yale.edu)  
www: <http://www.ling.yale.edu/~elf>

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dictionary, but not a print one, rather, an audio one. The complicated shifts in the pitch accent are not necessary for fluent speakers to write but are difficult for learners to figure out. Conathan and Matheson will work on this dictionary along with a better description of the rules of the sound system, which will help with the teaching efforts.

***Nadezhda Shalamova (Tomsk Polytechnic U.),  
Andrei Filtchenko (Rice U.) and Olga Potanina  
(Tomsk State Pedagogical U.) Documentation  
of Vasyugan Khanty***

This project pursues the documentation of the endangered language and cultural heritage of the Vasyugan Khanty, one of the Eastern Khanty group. Only about 50 speakers of this language remain, with most over 50 years of age. Being in an isolated location far from population centers in Tomsk, this language and its culture have received less attention than other, related languages. This project will redress the balance somewhat, providing texts and descriptions for the community and for linguistic science. Since Vayugan Khanty is quite conservative (probably because of its relative isolation), it provides a valuable source of data for reconstruction of the Khanty family.

***Dmitri Funk (Russian Academy of Sciences)  
The Last Epic Singer in Shors (Western Siberia)***

The aim of this project is tape-recording the unique examples of the heroic epics of Shors, which are performed by the last practicing epic singer, Vladimir Tannagashev (born in 1932). It was story-tellers who for a long time managed to preserve all nuances of the spoken Shors language. Only three are now alive, and Tannagashev is the only one still practicing. He still remembers more than 60 epic songs, each of which can last an entire night. Unfortunately, with the rapid reduction in the audience, he does not perform that often. Funk is trying to take this last opportunity to record as many of the songs as possible, so that future generations can appreciate some of what they have missed.

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**Arthur Schmidt, Rita Flamand and Grace Zoldy (Metis) The Camperville Michif Master-Apprentice Program**

Michif is a mixed language that evolved from contact between Cree and French speakers in the early part of the European spread into the Americas. There are about 1,000 speakers, most elderly. Schmidt, a native Michif but not a speaker, will apprentice himself to Flamand and Zoldy. Both these speakers are eager to see young people learn the language. Flamand writes, "I think this program sounds like a Godsend to our dying language of heritage; the one on one immersion approach is the key, I hope, to accomplish the revitalizing of my language through these young apprentices." The Endangered Language Fund grant will allow Schmidt to spend time in Camperville, a small town on the eastern shore of Lake Winnipegosis in Manitoba, Canada. Here, the language is an active part of many people's lives. Mayor Donald Richard says, "We welcome this form of initiative to revitalize our heritage language, and are certain that it will be a positive impact to our community."

**Cheruiyot Kiplangat (Centre for Endangered Languages, Kenya) Working to Save Ogiek and Sengwer of Kenya**

The minority languages of Kenya are under severe pressure from the influx of outsiders into traditional regions. The present project works with two languages of the Rift Valley, Ogiek and Sengwer. Language material will be recorded and made available to all interested in it. Information from elders on historical practices, values, beliefs, cultural festivities, herbal medicine and its use will be the most valuable. This will mainly benefit the young generations who have had their knowledge eroded, to assist future learners who are interested in indigenous people, and for the protection of the Ogiek and Sengwer minorities.

Sengwer is a community that speaks Sengwer language, practice Sengwer culture and traditions. Severally, they were referred to as Cherengany or Mei. This nicknames meant poor person without cattle according to the Maasai Community.

Sengwer Community are hunters and gatherers, who rely on honey, wild fruits and meat besides herbal medicines. Their population was claimed to be up to 50,000 in the 20th century, but it has descended to below 6,000 persons. The overall population of Ogiek is below 20,000 of which, 75% live in Mau Complex of Nakuru District. The Akie language is on the verge of deterioration after the only ancestral land for this community was invaded and demarcated by other communities including the Kipsigis, Tugen and Nandi. Daily trading has also caused the gradual loss of culture and language. For both communities, the way of fighting and facing these challenges is through the building of cultural centers in the villages so as to restore their rich heritage.

**Claire Bown (Harvard U.) Bardi Language Documentation: The Laves Material**

Bardi is a an Australian language, and member of the Nyulnyulan family. There are about 35 fully fluent speakers of the language along with up to 200 passive speakers (out of a community of 1200). All the fluent speakers are over 60 years of age, most over 70. The community, feeling an increasing need to record the language, advertised for a linguist to help in the 1990s. Collection continued until 1994, and some of the results have appeared (such as a dictionary in 1999). But there is a considerable amount of material that has been collected that is not accessible to community members. Of particular value are the cultural texts collected by Gerhardt Laves in 1929. These were written in a way that is relatively easy to decipher if you know the language, but very difficult if you do not. Bown will check as many of these stories with the remaining fluent speakers as possible. The Bardi community is eager to have these stories available, and they need to be reworked now while there are still people who know the cultural context of the materials.

**Francis Egbokhare (U. Ibadan, Nigeria) Documenting Akuku Oral Traditions**

Akuku is an endangered language spoken in the Edo state of Nigeria. The village of Akuku is set in a hilly and rocky terrain, one difficult for

*The Endangered Language Fund*  
Department of Linguistics  
Yale University  
P.O. Box 208366  
New Haven, CT 06520-8366  
USA  
e-mail: elf@haskins.yale.edu  
www: http://www.ling.yale.edu/~elf

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travel. It is a single-village community, with no claims to affinity with neighboring or distant villages, and none of its neighbors claim any kinship with it. It is claimed to be the oldest community in the area, and it is believed to have evolved the art of building hanging bridges across tree tops. The language is now under pressure from the national languages (Pidgin English, English and Yoruba), despite its distance from the cities. Egbokhare will record oral narratives and translate them so that both the younger generation and linguists can better understand them. A wordlist will also be generated, to allow a better placement of the language within the Edoid family.

***Rosemary Beam de Azcona (UC Berkeley)***  
***Southern Zapotec Language Materials***

It appears that there are only two remaining speakers of San Agustín Mixtepec Zapotec, a southern Zapotec language of Mexico. Coatlán-Loxicha Zapotec is better off with about 170 speakers, but its decline is evident as well. Beam de

Azcona will use her experience with several of the Zapotec languages to record as much of these materials as possible. She reports, “As a volunteer for the Breath of Life: Silent No More language revitalization workshop at UC Berkeley, I witnessed first hand the value linguistic records have for people trying to learn about their ancestral languages.” She plans to provide as many texts as possible for the appreciation of future generations.

***Rick Thoman and Gary Holton (U Alaska Fairbanks) The Tanacross Athabascan Sound System***

This project will produce a platform-independent interactive CD-ROM illustrating the sound system of Tanacross Athabascan. This will be accomplished by videotaping native speakers pronouncing selected words and phrases. The sound system of Tanacross contains a rich array of ejectives, affricates and fricatives as well as contrastive tone. This CD-ROM will be a useful resource for Tanacross language learners and serve to document the rich segmental and tonal inventory of this endangered Athabascan language.