

The 36th LAUD Symposium
**“Endangerment of Languages across the Planet:
The Dynamics of Linguistic Diversity
and Globalization”, Landau 2014**

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**1. Language endangerment
and the 36th LAUD Symposium**

The number of languages threatened with extinction is alarmingly growing – as many as 3,000 languages (out of *ca.* 6,000) are endangered (UNESCO 2011: 4). The UNESCO classifies endangered languages taking into consideration intergenerational language transmission (see Table 1). However, language loss may – as the UNESCO experts and numerous scholars as well as activists believe – be prevented (see e.g. Grenoble and Whaley 2006). The UNESCO provides a clear, concise answer to the question why we should preserve language diversity:

Languages are vehicles of our cultures, collective memory and values. They are an essential component of our identities, and a building block of our diversity and living heritage. (UNESCO 2011: 4)

Language loss has become a burning issue for numerous communities. As Martin Pütz and Neele Mundt (2016: 9) remark, language endangerment and language death are “a worldwide phenomenon, a result of linguistic, socio-cultural and cognitive factors”.

Table 1
 Degrees of language endangerment
 (UNESCO 2011: 6, based on UNESCO 2003: 8)

Degree of endangerment	Intergenerational language transmission
Safe	Language is spoken by all generations; intergenerational transmission is uninterrupted.
Vulnerable	Most children speak the language, but it may be restricted to certain domains (e.g., home).
Definitely endangered	Children no longer learn the language as mother tongue in the home.
Severely endangered	Language is spoken by grandparents and older generations; while the parent generation may understand it, they do not speak it to children or among themselves.
Critically endangered	The youngest speakers are grandparents and older, and they speak the language partially and infrequently.
Extinct	There are no speakers left.

Numerous researchers – linguists, sociologists and representatives of other disciplines – express serious concern about language endangerment. Preserving language diversity was the reason behind the decision on the theme of the 36th LAUD Symposium. As Dirven, Pütz and Radden (n.d.) explain,

The vision that half of the world’s languages is endangered, seriously endangered or dying within this century is a deplorable fact which motivated the organizers Martin Pütz & Monika Reif to make the issue a central concern of the 36th LAUD Symposium (2014).

As can be easily seen, the theme of the symposium was formulated both broadly (in the main title: “Endangerment of Languages across the Planet”) and specifically (in the subtitle: “The Dynamics of Linguistic Diversity and Globalization”).

2. Venue, organizers and participants

The 36th LAUD Symposium¹ was held in Landau on 31 March – 3 April 2014. Its organizers – mentioned above, Prof. Martin Pütz and Dr Monika Reif – are affiliated with the University of Koblenz-Landau. The Organizing Committee also included Ulrich Schmitz (LAUD Chairman), René Dirven, Luna Filipović, Justyna Robinson and Hans-Georg Wolf. The organizers were assisted by a team of students: Conny Fink, Fabian Glaß, Freya Hemesoth and Tim-Oliver Paul. The symposium was sponsored mainly by the German Research Foundation and University of Koblenz-Landau.

The Symposium attracted more than 90 researchers from Australia, Botswana, Brazil, Cameroon, Canada, China, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Kenya, Latvia, Malaysia, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, Poland, Russia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States.

3. Plenary lectures

The invited speakers included outstanding scholars specializing in investigating language endangerment: Peter Austin (University of London), Bernd Heine (University of Cologne), Lisa Lim (University of Hong Kong), Salikoko Mufwene (University of Chicago), Shana Poplack (University of Ottawa), Suzanne Romaine (University of Oxford), Sarah Thomason (University of Michigan) and Li Wei (University of London). They delivered the following plenary lectures:

- (1) “Language documentation 20 years on” (Peter Austin);
- (2) “An African perspective on language endangerment” (Bernd Heine);

¹ The LAUD Symposia, with their various themes, have a long tradition going back to 1973. See Dirven, Pütz and Radden (n.d.).

- (3) "Endangerment, evolution and empowerment in globalising Asian ecologies: Where *java* and *patois* take their communities" (Lisa Lim);
- (4) "A cost-and-benefit approach to language loss" (Salikoko Mufwene);
- (5) "Is Canadian French an endangered language?" (Shana Poplack);
- (6) "Linguistic diversity, sustainable development and the economics of language policy" (Suzanne Romaine);
- (7) "Language loss and language revitalization: The role of the community" (Sarah Thomason);
- (8) "My Chinese stopped when I was six: The cultural memory of language" (Li Wei).

4. Papers

At the symposium the participants presented papers on numerous issues concerning language endangerment and its prevention which included, *inter alia*, the following ones:²

- maintaining an endangered language,
- language revitalization,
- language planning,
- endangered languages in education,
- training teachers of endangered languages,
- language endangerment and globalization,
- reasons for language loss/attrition,
- documenting endangered languages,
- language shift,
- sociological and psychological aspects of language loss,
- economics, industrialization and language endangerment,
- folklore and endangered languages,
- multilingualism,
- immigrant languages and identities,
- linguistic and biological diversity.

² For details, see the book of abstracts (*Abstracts: 36th International LAUD Symposium ...*, 187 pp.).

The participants concentrated on various languages spoken all over the world, diagnosed with the different degrees of endangerment presented in Table 1. The discussed languages included, *inter alia*, indigenous languages of Mexico (Acazolco Otomi), Brazil (Aikanã, Yanomae), French Guiana (Palikúr) and Bolivia (Baure); Ethiopia (Argobba), Nigeria (Igala, Igbo, Koring, Ogu), Morocco (Beni Iznassen Amazigh), Tanzania (Ngoni); the Native American languages, Aboriginal Australian languages as well as languages of Siberia (e.g. Dolgan, Enets, Nenets, Selkup), China (Makista), the Sakhalin Island (Nivkh, Uilta, Evenki, Nanai), Nepal (Koïc, Surc) and other regions of Asia and Oceania (Chabacano, Neo-Aramaic, Papapana and Ririo, Papia Kristang, Saipan Carolinian, Yiddish). The endangered languages spoken in Europe explored by the symposium participants were, *inter alia*, the British Sign language and Cornish in the United Kingdom, Aragonese in Spain, Arbëresh, Sardinian and Veneto in Italy, Arvanitika in Greece, Istro-Romanian (Vlashki/Zheyanski) and the Split Čakavian dialect in Croatia, Latgalian in Latvia and Kashubian in Poland.

5. Symposium proceedings

The papers presented at the 36th LAUD Symposium have been published in two peer-reviewed volumes:

- *Endangered Languages and Languages in Danger: Issues of Documentation, Policy, and Language Rights* edited by Luna Filipović and Martin Pütz (2016), including three sections: “Perspectives on endangerment: Ideology, language policy and language rights” (containing papers by Colette Grinevald & Chris Sinha, Ana Suelly Arruda Câmara Cabral & Wany Bernardete de Araujo Sampaio & Vera da Silva Sinha, Liz Hales & Luna Filipović, Jill Jones, Salikoko S. Mufwene), “Language documentation, ethno-history and language vitality” (containing papers by Peter Austin, S. James Ellis, Hein van der Voort, Gale Goodwin Gómez and Ellen Smith) and “Language transmission: Shift, loss and survival” (containing papers by Lisa Lim, Bernd Heine & Christa König & Karsten Legere, Tove

- Rosendal, Maik Gibson & B. Araali Bagamba, Francois Nemo & Antonia Cristinoi and Bernard Spolsky);
- *Vanishing Languages in Context: Ideological, Attitudinal and Social Identity Perspectives* edited by Martin Pütz and Neele Mundt (2016), also including three sections: “Language planning, linguistic inequalities and human rights” (containing papers by Modupe M. Alimi, Dörte Borchers, Hilda Kebeya-Omondi & Fridah Kanana Erastus), “Language attitudes, discourse and ideology” (containing papers by Anna Ghimenton & Giovanni Depau, Neele Mundt, Britta Schneider, Eeva Sippola and Danuta Stanulewicz & Małgorzata Smentek) and “Case studies of endangered minority languages” (containing papers by Heiko F. Marten & Sanita Lazdiņa, Maria Rieder, Esther Senayon, Gideon Sunday Omachonu and Eileen Lee).

6. A final word

The 36th LAUD Symposium, splendidly organized, provided its participants with an ideal opportunity to present their research on endangered languages from various perspectives. Needless to say, the participants could also exchange their ideas on language revitalization.

As Luna Filipović and Martin Pütz (2016: 19) write in the Introduction to the volume *Endangered Languages and Languages in Danger*,

It is by all means worthwhile to document our linguistic and cultural heritage in all its entirety and leave this information for posterity. As for engineering language survival, the issue is much more thorny and would require stopping or diverting some big societal seismic shifts, where multiple factors contribute to the changes that impact language survival. It will be hard for language specialists to do much if the community that speaks an endangered language is not willing to do so and help should be offered if such efforts are visibly made. One thing that has to be secured though is the assurance and practical implementation of language equality, with respect to languages’ political and social status, opportunities and services available and individual attitudes.

This quotation perfectly summarizes the 36th LAUD Symposium “Endangerment of Languages across the Planet: The Dynamics of Linguistic Diversity and Globalization”.

References

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