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# Responses to Language Endangerment

In honor of Mickey Noonan

*Edited by*

Elena Mihas

Bernard Perley

Gabriel Rei-Doval

Kathleen Wheatley

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## Responses to Language Endangerment

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### **Volume 142**

Responses to Language Endangerment. In honor of Mickey Noonan.  
New directions in language documentation and language revitalization  
Edited by Elena Mihas, Bernard Perley, Gabriel Rei-Doval and Kathleen Wheatley

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# Table of contents

Dedication	VII
Acknowledgements	IX
Introduction	XI
<b>PART I. Language endangerment: Challenges and responses</b>	
The world's languages in crisis: A 20-year update <i>Gary F. Simons &amp; M. Paul Lewis</i>	3
What can revitalization work teach us about documentation? <i>Marianne Mithun</i>	21
Unanswered questions in language documentation and revitalization: New directions for research and action <i>Lenore A. Grenoble</i>	43
Training as empowering social action: An ethical response to language endangerment <i>Carol Genetti &amp; Rebekka Siemens</i>	59
How to avoid pitfalls in documenting endangered languages <i>Sarah G. Thomason</i>	79
<b>PART II. Case studies in documentation and revitalization of endangered languages and languages in contact</b>	
Converb and aspect-marking polysemy in Nar <i>Kristine A. Hildebrandt</i>	97
Grammatical relations in Mixe and Chimariko: Differences and similarities <i>Carmen Jany</i>	119
Having a <i>shinshii/shiishii</i> 'master' around makes you speak Japanese!: Inadvertent contextualization in gathering Ikema data <i>Toshihide Nakayama &amp; Tsuyoshi Ono</i>	141

Internal and external calls to immigrant language promotion: Evaluating the research approach in two cases of community-engaged linguistic research in Eastern North Carolina <i>Ricard Viñas-de-Puig</i>	157
Code-switching in an Erzya–Russian bilingual variety: An “endangered” transitory phase in a contact situation <i>Boglárka Janurik</i>	175
Colonialism, nationalism and language vitality in Azerbaijan <i>John M. Clifton</i>	197
Revitalizing languages through place-based language curriculum: Identity through learning <i>Joana Jansen, Janne Underriner &amp; Roger Jacob</i>	221
<i>Remembering</i> ancestral voices: Emergent vitalities and the future of Indigenous languages <i>Bernard Perley</i>	243
Index	271

## Dedication

This volume is dedicated to the late Michael (Mickey) Noonan (1947–2009), Professor of Linguistics at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, who contributed a significant body of high quality theoretical and descriptive work to functional-typological linguistics. Among his seminal works are a cross-linguistic study of complementation (2007[1985]), the frequently cited grammar of Lango (1991), and numerous papers on grammatical aspects of Tibeto-Burman languages. Michael Noonan was an editor of *Typological Studies in Languages*, co-editor of *Studies in Language* and its Companion Series, and the founding editor of *Himalayan Linguistics*.

His distinguished record of publications and editorships reflects only a fraction of the work he did as a field linguist, tirelessly promoting objectives of language documentation to “record everything!” (in his own words) and provide practical support in language maintenance and revitalization efforts of endangered language communities. Mickey Noonan’s life-long commitment was to the Chantyal-speaking community of Nepal. His excellent dictionary of Chantyal (1999) and a book of children’s stories were the result of community-based and community-oriented work. The storybook -the first ever published in the Chantyal language-was distributed free to the schools in three Chantyal-speaking villages.

Perhaps Mickey Noonan’s most profound impact has been on the people with whom he worked and whom he taught and mentored. After his death, Mickey’s academic and human influence was recognized by many friends, colleagues, language consultants, and students whose lives he touched (Moravcsik 2009; Genetti 2009). For many, his work ethic, dedication to ‘small’ languages and ‘small’ people, and his humility became a model to follow. His infectious enthusiasm with regard to studying endangered languages in far-flung regions of the world continues to inspire his former master’s and doctoral students.

This volume is special in that it was precipitated by Mickey’s plan, which he shared with his colleagues in 2008. The volume was envisioned by Mickey Noonan as a necessary conclusion to the conference on language documentation and revitalization to be held in Milwaukee and hosted by the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. In accordance with his proposal, the 26th UWM Symposium on Language Documentation and Revitalization was held in 2011 and an impressive body of conference papers was collected. So this publication not only posthumously celebrates Michael Noonan’s life as a Linguist and Teacher but also recognizes his initiative to organize the conference and publish the forum’s best papers.



The editors believe that this dedication will be an appropriate way of acknowledging Michael Noonan's legacy in language documentation and revitalization, the field of linguistics whose importance he especially recognized (2006). It is also a reminder that as his brainchild, this volume certainly owes its existence to Michael Noonan, although he didn't live long enough to see it through.

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There are many people that we would like to thank for their support of the 26th Linguistics Symposium at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, held in October 2011. The papers in this volume represent a selection of a small portion of the papers that were presented at this conference, and the editors of this volume, who were also on the Organizing Committee of the conference, would not have been able to organize this conference successfully without the help of other members, especially Hamid Ouali, Co-Chair of the Conference, Edith Moravcsik, Bozena Tieszen, and Sally Noonan. There were also many other faculty members and students, who are too numerous to name here, that also assisted in the details of making the conference such a success, and their efforts were greatly appreciated.

The Conference was made possible with the generous support of many units at UWM, including the Provost's Office, the Graduate School, the College of Letters and Science, the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies, the Center for International Education, the Electa Quinney Institute, the American Indian Studies Program, the Department of Linguistics, the Department of Anthropology, the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, the Department of French, Italian, and Comparative Literature, the Sam and Helen Stahl Center for Jewish Studies, the Center for Celtic Studies, the Center for 21st Century Studies, the UWM Bookstore, and the Student Union Event Planning Services.

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Finally, we would like to extend our thanks to all of the participants and contributors to the conference, whose enthusiasm and commitment to the revitalization of endangered languages was truly inspiring.

Elena Mihas, Bernard Perley, Gabriel Rei-Doval, & Kathleen Wheatley

## Introduction

As the title makes clear, this volume focuses on language endangerment issues, with language endangerment defined as “en mass, often radical shift away from unique, local languages and language practices” (Woodbury 2011: 160). Research on language loss and shift has been a preoccupation of scholars since at least the end of the Second World War, and continued with the subsequent processes of nation building and reshaping in the 1940s and 1950s, as well as the connected processes of development of third world nations and communities. Therefore, the development of disciplines such as language planning or sociolinguistics of society has been crucial to better understand and address the weakening or loss of indigenous and minority languages around the globe.

However, at the beginning of the 1990s preoccupation with language loss made it a compelling task to be urgently attended to by scholars not included in the previously mentioned paradigms, and the field of language revitalization saw a very significant expansion. As a result of this increased interest, questions regarding the best responses to language endangerment have been raised by linguists, sociologists, social psychologists, and native speakers of indigenous languages (e.g. Fishman 1991; Grenoble & Whaley 1998; Hinton & Hale 2001; Lopez 1998; Reyhner et al. 1999; Reyhner et al. 2003). Since then, a special subfield of linguistics that deals with language endangerment issues, documentary linguistics, has gone through a period of dynamic growth. In practical terms, various action items concerning language revival work have been revisited with new eyes and perspectives in recent years (e.g. Austin & Sallabank 2011; Flores Farfán & Ramallo 2010; Grenoble & Furbee 2010; Grenoble & Whaley 2006; Harrison, Rood & Dwyer 2008), aiming to also contribute to the goal of preventing, stabilizing, or reversing the rapidly accelerating local language shift to languages of national or regional stature. Taking stock of the most recent proposals, the key responses to language endangerment have involved (i) language documentation, including creation of a rich multi-genre corpus of recorded connected discourse of the endangered language community and digital archiving of collected data, (ii) establishment of funding bodies to finance documentation projects and, to a lesser extent, language revitalization work, (iii) creation of language education programs by government bodies and other interested parties, and (iv) training of documentary linguists and language teachers, the latter two being roughly subsumed under the domain of language revitalization (Austin & Sallabank 2011).

Language description, equated with the end products of documentation, typically a grammar and a dictionary, is regarded as a supplementary goal of language documentation (Himmelman 1998).

The current volume further complicates and advances the contemporary perspective, as reflected in its subtitle *New Directions in Language Documentation and Language Revitalization* and evidenced in the content of the volume. In particular, Part I, *Language Endangerment: Challenges and Responses*, offers a general discussion of some of the complex and pressing issues, such as the assessment of the degree of language endangerment (Simons & Lewis, Chapter 1 ‘The world’s languages in crisis: A 20-year update’), the contribution of linguistic scholarship to language revitalization programs (Mithun, Chapter 2 ‘What can revitalization work teach us about documentation?’), the creation of successful language reclamation programs with regard to ‘emergent’ languages which arise as a result of revitalization efforts after the interrupted transmission (Grenoble, Chapter 3 ‘Unanswered questions in language documentation and revitalization: New directions for research and ‘action’), the training of field linguists and language educators (Genetti & Siemens, Chapter 4 ‘Training as empowering social action: An ethical response to language endangerment’), and the ethics of fieldwork (Thomason, Chapter 5 ‘How to avoid pitfalls in documenting endangered languages’).

The volume’s other section, Part II, *Case Studies in Documentation and Revitalization of Endangered Languages and Languages in Contact*, consists of detailed accounts of fieldworkers and language activists grappling with issues of language documentation and revitalization in the concrete physical and socio-cultural settings of the native-speaker communities. The subtitle of the volume *New Directions in Language Documentation and Revitalization* is also indicative of the imperative for the direct involvement of the language community in the ongoing discussion of the actions undertaken in response to language endangerment.

The volume contains two theory-oriented contributions, from Hildebrandt, Chapter 6 ‘Converb and aspect-marking polysemy in Nar’, and from Jany, Chapter 7 ‘Grammatical relations in Mixe and Chimariko: Differences and similarities’. Both works highlight the need to document sophisticated grammatical patterns whose linguistic description ultimately enriches language theory, as is the case with the aspect-marking converbial constructions in Nar (Tamangic, Tibeto-Burman), spoken in Nepal, and the expression of grammatical relations in Chuxnabán Mixe (Mixe-Zoquean), the at-risk language of Mexico, and Chimariko, the extinct language of Northern California, USA.

One of the focal issues in documentation of endangered languages is the ethics of data collection and the establishment of partnership relations between the linguist and community members, regarded to be central to the success of documentation projects (Austin & Sallabank 2011: 13). Nakayama & Ono’s ‘Having a *shinshii*/

*shishii* 'master' around makes you speak Japanese!: Inadvertent contextualization in gathering Ikema data' (Chapter 8), and Viñas-de-Puig's 'Internal and external calls to immigrant language promotion: Evaluating the research approach in two cases of community-engaged linguistic research in Eastern North Carolina' (Chapter 9) underscore the pivotal importance of forging collaborative relationships with members of the speaker community. The continuous negotiation of the linguist and community researchers' mismatching agendas and identities is illustrated by the fieldworkers' engagements with the native community of Ikema, a dialect of Miyako Ryukyuan (Japonic) from Japan, and the immigrant communities of two indigenous languages of Mexico, Tzotzil (Mayan) and Hñähñu (Oto-Manguan), currently spoken in North Carolina, USA.

Of significant importance to both linguists and language activists are documentary and descriptive studies of local languages with small and middle-range numbers of speakers, which are showing signs of convergence onto the dominant language in situations of long-standing language contact and stable bilingualism. In Chapter 10 'Code-switching in an Erzya–Russian bilingual variety: An "endangered" transitory phase in a contact situation', Janurik documents striking structural changes in the versions of Erzya (Finno-Ugric) spoken by 'neo' speakers in the Russian Federation.

Another critical area of research is studies of 'linguistic ecologies' of endangered languages, i.e. socio-cultural and economic settings of native communities, in view of their direct relevance to language shift (Austin & Sallabank 2001:21). It is commonly observed that local languages fade away when a radical disruption of native speakers' traditional lifeways takes place, by way of 'dislocating' speakers geographically (e.g. due to territorial expropriation of tribal land), economically (e.g. by forcing speakers to switch from hunting and fishing to farming), and/or culturally (e.g. when the homogenizing national ideology places emphasis on being like Us, not Others). In Chapter 11 'Colonialism, nationalism and language vitality in Azerbaijan', Clifton discusses linguistic ecologies and chances of survival of the indigenous languages of Azerbaijan, Talysh and Tat (Iranian), and three North Caucasian (Shahdagh) languages, Budukh, Kryz, and Khinalug.

Training of field linguists and language teachers, and design and implementation of effective teaching methods are a sorely wanting field of study. It is still not clear what teaching models work best or what assessment criteria should be used to determine the success of a revitalization program. It is important to determine how to make training more accessible and more responsive to the needs of field linguists, on the one hand, whose main task is to document the language in situated uses, and the needs of language practitioners, on the other hand, who run language classes in the native communities. The volume's contributions by Genetti & Siemens, Chapter 4 'Training as an empowering social action: An

ethical response to language endangerment' and by Jensen, Jacob & Underriner, Chapter 12 'Revitalizing languages through place-based language curriculum: Identity through learning' tackle these issues. In particular, Genetti & Siemens provide the specifics of the training programs conducted within the participatory community-based research framework by Infield (Institute on Field Linguistics and Language Documentation), University of Santa Barbara, in 2008. Jensen, Jacob, & Underriner elucidate the pedagogy of a place-based curriculum, with its "focus on topics directly related to culture and culture revitalization", developed at the Northwest Indian Language Institute at the University of Oregon and implemented in the indigenous communities of the US Pacific Northwest.

This volume's special concern is with language revitalization and reclamation of autochthonous languages. Notwithstanding the great advances in the theory and practices of language documentation, which have made fieldworkers' engagement with endangered language communities more effective, language revitalization issues remain 'under-theorized' and 'under-researched' (Austin & Sallabank 2011: 22). The present collection explores some of the available solutions. Among the tasks demanding especially urgent attention are production of language materials which 'reconcile full complexity and user-friendliness of grammatical patterns' and 'ways in which languages are special' (Mithun, Chapter 2 'What can revitalization work teach us about documentation?'). Mithun details extant Mohawk (Iroquoian) structures of fascinating complexity which may be lost by the younger generations of bilingual 'neo' speakers (who speak a somewhat simplified version of the traditional language), unless these structures are thoroughly documented in situated contexts and included in the reference grammar materials for community use in the US and Canada. This situation is reported to be difficult to resolve, when the linguist aims to write a comprehensive grammatical description rather than a simpler, pedagogically-oriented account of grammar basics, requested by native language teachers and activists (Austin & Sallabank 2011: 17). In Chapter 5 'How to avoid pitfalls in documenting endangered languages', Thomason gives practical advice on preparation of dictionary materials for the community, based on the author's experience with speakers of Pend d'Oreille (Montana Salish), the indigenous language of Montana, USA. In Chapter 13, Perley's 'Remembering ancestral voices: Emergent vitalities and the future of indigenous languages' offers an evaluative view of the adequacy of responses to language endangerment from the perspective of a linguist/native speaker. Perley outlines concrete steps in the creation of various multi-media projects for indigenous communities. Using the Maliseet (Algonquian) native community as an example, this chapter points in the new direction of revitalization work which includes production of highly entertaining, artfully illustrated 'graphic novels', narrating native stories in Maliseet and English, a series of inspiring native-language stories for television, and television shows with native language voice-overs, accompanied by English subtitles. Graphic

novels are envisioned to be eventually transformed into a tablet device application. Crucially, such multi-media products aim to reflect the modern conventions of Maliseet conversational genre and the use of the native language in contemporary language domains and media.

The ultimate goal of this volume is to offer a forum for academics and members of native speaker communities to take stock of thorny issues and examine the outcomes of the most commonly cited ‘responses’ to language endangerment, i.e. language documentation, language revitalization, and training. Produced by a variety of authors, including veteran linguists, beginning scholars, and language activists, the contributions to the current volume reflect multiple perspectives and experiences in the field. It is hoped that the current collection will meaningfully contribute to the ongoing conversation on the complexities and practical ways of counteracting language endangerment.

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