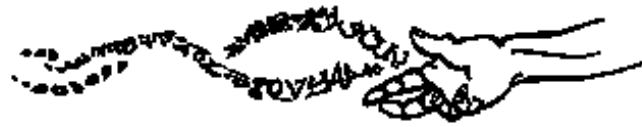


FOUNDATION FOR ENDANGERED LANGUAGES



(UK Registered Charity No 1070616)

OGMIOS

A graphic element consisting of a horizontal line with several vertical bars of varying heights and colors (blue, orange, yellow) interspersed along it, resembling a stylized barcode or a series of flags.

INALCO in Paris, the venue of our 30th FEL conference, 2026

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1. Editorial

This conference will be our 30th, and so we sincerely hope it will turn out worthy of that impressive round number. And that we'll continue in future to hold our annual conferences all around the world. We haven't missed a year yet. And we haven't missed a continent for our venues.

If anyone among our members and subscribers has concrete ideas for themes and locations for future conferences, please let your Editor know. And of course I'm appealing for articles too, always! Any length, with or without illustrations, in Word, as long as it's related to threatened tongues. We like to provide variety and a wide view of the minority language situation in the world. Keep us informed about the welfare of minority languages in your part of it! And we welcome pictures too!

For the latest provisional Call for papers, see the 'Events and announcements' section below. And please pardon the lateness of this issue; your Editor has been ill, and copy has not been flowing in.

Chris Moseley

2. Development of the Foundation

FEL grants for 2026 awarded

On 1 March 2026 our Grants Officer, Hakim Elnazarov, announced the award of seven grants to applicants for the Foundation's annual round of grants. Grants to the total value of \$6345 (US), or 4700 GBP were disbursed this year to researchers into endangered languages across the world. As always, a team of FEL committee members evaluated the applications from many different countries around the world.

3. Endangered Languages in the News

Restoring a language in Lesotho

By Rachel Savage, from the Guardian (UK), 20 January 2026
Ha Sekhobe, Lesotho

Tsotleho Mohale was addressing a group gathered on a mountainside still damp from intense rain that morning. The peaks on the other side of the valley were draped in cloud. Mohale was speaking in siPhuthi, a language spoken by just a few thousand people in parts of southern Lesotho and the north of South Africa's Eastern Cape province, about the plants he used and the ailments he cured as a traditional healer.

The questions came from Sheena Shah, a British linguist, and were translated into siPhuthi by Mohale's grandson Atlehang. Shah's German colleague Matthias Brenzinger filmed the exchange. Shah and Brenzinger have been travelling regularly to Daliwe, remote valley in Lesotho about 15 miles from the nearest paved road, since 2016, working with local interpreters and activists to document SiPhuthi.

Observing the encounter was a senior healer, Mathabang Hlaela. Initially, she refused to be interviewed, wary of foreigners stealing knowledge she had been amassing since 1978. But after briefly disappearing into her corrugated iron hut, she emerged adorned with beads – a thick belt, headbands and necklaces – and said she too wanted to be interviewed.

While siPhuthi remains under threat from the dominant languages of Sesotho in Lesotho and Xhosa across the border in South Africa, it has undergone a remarkable revival.

Malillo Mpapa, a shop owner, started working with Shah and Brenzinger as a paid language consultant in 2019. She recalled how receptive local people, known as ebaPhuthi, had been to the project. "When we made recordings, they were so impressed and they were proud and willing to help," said Mpapa, 34, who lives in the Seapala valley neighbouring Daliwe. She added that it had also helped improve her siPhuthi. "I was interested in how to write and speak siPhuthi correctly."

About half of the world's 7,000 languages are spoken by fewer than 10,000 people. While intergenerational transmission is more important than absolute numbers in language survival, about half of languages are at risk of extinction by the end of the century, according to UNESCO.

While at the University of Cape Town, Shah and Brenzinger heard about siPhuthi and realised there had been no academic research on the language since the nineteen-nineties. In January 2016, they set out on a month-long trip to find out where siPhuthi was spoken and whether communities would be open to working together. "We really wanted not to have any agenda before this trip, because we thought it's also important to gain trust," said Shah, now a researcher at the University of Hamburg.

The pair hiked for two days to reach one village and found just three siPhuthi speakers, two of them elderly. Many people had not heard of the language or were reluctant to admit they spoke it. The researchers were told the "purest" SiPhuthi was in the Daliwe valley, home to about 1,000 people, mostly farmers. There, they found children speaking it.

Shah and Brenzinger became members of Libadla le baPhuthi, an association campaigning for official recognition of siPhuthi in Lesotho and political representation for the community.

They have since worked with about 20 local people to record more than 40 hours of siPhuthi on video, covering everything from marriages and funerals to poems, recipes and life stories.

From 2019 to 2022 they hosted workshops with about six ebaPhuthi each time to decide on an agreed way of writing siPhuthi. They plan to publish a 3,000-word dictionary next year and are conducting a census of speakers.

Outside Daliwe, in the town of Alwyn's Kop, six linguists trained by Shah and Brenzinger are translating the Bible into SiPhuthi for the deeply Christian community. The project started in 2019 with Bible stories recorded on solar-powered devices and distributed among siPhuthi speakers.

Despite such efforts, Brenzinger, now a research fellow at the University of the Free State in South Africa, said siPhuthi was still endangered outside of the Daliwe valley due to the dominance of Sesotho and Xhosa. "There is always this notion of English being a killer language," he said. "In most cases in Africa, it's not English or French that are threatening other languages, it's the dominant national languages."

SiPhuthi had a boost in August when it was made an official language of Lesotho, alongside Xhosa and sign language. It was the culmination of decades of campaigning, said Letzadzo Kometsi, the president of Libadla le baPhuthi and a law lecturer at the National University of Lesotho. "I feel like my mission is accomplished." He acknowledged the government needed to allocate resources and effort to implement its status, including in schools.

Bongani Peete, a teacher at Daliwe primary, said school rules mandated punishments for children caught speaking siPhuthi. "I feel so bad," he said. "I need everyone to be allowed to express his or her self in his or her language."

It was news to him that siPhuthi now had official language status. "It is very good indeed," he said, adding that he would no longer reprimand children for speaking their mother tongue.

China passes 'ethnic unity' law curbing minority languages

By Amy Hawkins, from The Guardian (UK), 13 March 2026

China's National People's Congress (NPC), the state legislature, voted yesterday on a suite of new laws agreed at this year's annual "two sessions" gathering, including legislation that will diminish the role of minority ethnic languages in the education system.

NPC delegates approved a new ethnic unity law, along with a new environmental code and the 15th five-year plan, the economic planning document for 2026-2030. Delegates have spent the last week debating Beijing's proposed bills. The NPC, often described as a rubber-stamp parliament, has never rejected an item on its agenda.

The votes took place as this year's two sessions – concurrent meetings of the NPC and a separate Communist party advisory body – drew to a close. The main headline from this year's gathering was the historically low 2026 GDP growth target, which China's premier, Li Qiang, announced on 5 March. At 4.5%, it is the lowest growth target in decades, and reflects Beijing's shifting priorities and challenging domestic economic situation.

Aside from the economic targets, the NPC is the forum in which Beijing's policies become law.

A key policy for Xi Jinping, China's president, is the "sinicisation" of China's ethnic minorities – the assimilation of their cultures as far as possible into that of the Han ethnic majority. Xi has said that China's ethnic groups should be like "pomegranate seeds that stick together".

To that end, China's new law on ethnic unity will require schools to use Mandarin by default, taking priority over minority ethnic languages such as Tibetan, Uyghur and Mongolian. The law also requires Mandarin to be displayed more prominently than minority ethnic scripts on public signage. Recent reports from Inner Mongolia, where there were protests in 2020 over the erosion of the Mongolian language, suggest that some signs have already been renovated to show Mandarin characters more prominently than Mongolian script.

Yalkun Uluyol, a China researcher at Human Rights Watch, said: "Many of the policy directives proposed in the new already exist in practice in Xinjiang, Tibet or Inner Mongolia." He said the law "is a blatant move by Beijing to legalise forced assimilation and political control."

According to NPC Observer, a web-site that tracks Chinese politics, the ethnic unity law has been treated with particular importance by the Chinese Communist party. In 2025, the CCP's full politburo, led by Xi, discussed a draft of the law, something that has not been reported in four decades.

The NPC also approved a new ecological and environmental code, a unified framework that will repeal and replace various laws on pollution and environmental protection as China moves towards its "dual carbon" goals of peaking carbon emissions by 2030 and reaching net neutrality on emissions by 2060. The draft includes chapters on waste management, pollution prevention and climate change adaptation.

Li Shuo, the director of the China Climate Hub at the Asia Society Policy Institute, said the code "represents a step forward in the development of China's environmental legal system."

He said: "By elevating environmental protection to a codified legal framework, it signals that environmental governance is not only a policy priority but a long-term legal commitment."

Syria decree grants Kurds new rights, formally recognising Kurdish language

From the Aljazeera news agency, 17 January 2026

The decree is the first formal recognition of Kurdish national rights since Syria's independence in 1946.

Syria's President Ahmed al-Sharaa has issued a decree formally recognising Kurdish as a "national language" and restoring citizenship to all Kurdish Syrians.

Al-Sharaa's decree on Friday came after fierce clashes that broke out last week in the northern city of Aleppo, leaving at least 23 people dead, according to Syria's health ministry, and forcing tens of thousands of people to flee the two Kurdish-run pockets of the city.

The clashes ended after Kurdish fighters withdrew and the Syrian army assumed full control over the city of Deir Hafer in the governorate of Aleppo.

The violence in Aleppo has deepened one of the main faultlines in Syria, where al-Sharaa promised to unify the country under one leadership after 14 years of war against former President Bashar al-Assad, who was overthrown in December 2024.

The decree for the first time grants Kurdish Syrians rights, including recognition of Kurdish identity as part of Syria's national fabric. It designates Kurdish as a national language alongside Arabic and allows schools to teach it.

It also abolishes measures dating to a 1962 census in Hasakah province that stripped many Kurds of Syrian nationality, granting citizenship to all affected residents, including those previously registered as stateless.

The decree declares Newroz, the spring and new year festival, a paid national holiday. It bans ethnic or linguistic discrimination, requires state institutions to adopt inclusive national messaging and sets penalties for incitement to ethnic strife.

Reacting to the decree, the Kurdish administration in Syria's north and northeast said the decree was "a first step, however it does not satisfy the aspirations and hopes of the Syrian people".

Palula poets learned writing poetry in their own language

From the web-site of the Forum for Language Initiatives, Pakistan, 30 March 2026

FLI organized a three-day workshop for Palula poets, enabling them to create content and write in their own language. Palula, spoken in southern Chitral by around 15,000 people, has long been a focus of FLI's educational and literacy initiatives.

Over the years, FLI implemented its flagship multilingual education program in Palula, followed by a successful adult literacy project. Building on this foundation, FLI has now launched a one-year Poetry Promotion Project in collaboration with the Palula Community Welfare Organization. Earlier this year, both organizations signed a Memorandum of Understanding to strengthen Palula poets' digital capacity for creative documentation.

The first activity under this project introduced poets to a wide range of skills:

- Palula Orthography Standardization – establishing consistent writing practices
- Phonology – detailed sessions on vowels and diphthongs
- Language & Technology – exploring linguistic work with digital tools
- Creative Documentation Basics – techniques for preserving cultural content
- Social Media Creation & Use – practical guidance for online presence
- Video Editing – hands-on training with accessible tools
- Applied Practice – direct engagement with editing software and platforms

A total of 23 Palula poets participated in this workshop, which combined linguistic standardization with practical training in modern technology. The program was designed to enhance their creative development and digital skills, ensuring that Palula poetry continues to thrive in both traditional and digital spaces.

The global extinction of languages is threatening a vital type of human knowledge

By Carly Cassella, from *Science Alert*, 13 June 2021

As human languages are driven to extinction around the world, a verbal encyclopedia of medical knowledge is on the brink of being forgotten.

Among 12,495 medicinal uses for plants in indigenous communities, new research has found over 75 percent of those plants are each tied to just one local language. If these unique words trickle out of use, so too may the knowledge they contain.

"Each indigenous language is therefore a unique reservoir of medicinal knowledge," researchers write, "a Rosetta stone for unraveling and conserving nature's contributions to people." Language extinction is a tragic phenomenon that's been occurring worldwide, as languages spoken by precious few people are replaced by larger ones. Roughly one language ceases to be spoken every four months, and 3,054 languages are currently endangered around the world.

New research on indigenous languages in North America, Papua New Guinea, and the northwest Amazon reveals just how much crucial information could be lost as this occurs.

In fact, our collective knowledge of medicinal plants appears more threatened by the loss of indigenous voices than it is from environmental destruction.

Of all 3,597 medicinal plant species analyzed in the study, researchers found less than 5 percent are on the Red List of Threatened Species compiled by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

Some of these plants have not undergone a proper conservation assessment, so further research is needed to figure out how they are actually faring. That said, current data and machine learning suggest very few species we are keeping a close eye on are at risk of dying out.

Instead, it is the *knowledge* surrounding these plants, passed from generation to generation for hundreds if not thousands of years, that is at risk of vanishing. The vast majority of plant species in the study were found to have medical properties described in just one indigenous language, many of which are themselves endangered.

In North America, for instance, the authors found waning indigenous languages held 86 percent of all unique knowledge on plant medicine. In the northwest Amazon, on the other hand, 100 percent of medicinal plant knowledge is restricted to languages on the edge of extinction.

"This result highlights that the Americas are an indigenous knowledge hotspot (i.e., most medicinal knowledge is linked to threatened languages) and, thus, a key priority area for future documentation efforts," the authors write.

"By contrast, threatened languages account for 31 percent of all unique knowledge in New Guinea."

Still, that could be an underestimation. New Guinea's languages are harder to assess as there aren't as many linguistic surveys in this region of the world. Today, research indicates young people in New Guinea are 33 percent less likely to be fluent in their indigenous language compared to their parents, which is a dramatic decline for just one generation.

If we don't make an effort to protect and preserve indigenous languages now, experts warn we stand to lose potentially crucial information on plants, animals, and sustainable land practices.

Currently, about 6 percent of higher plants have had their biology studied, which means it's unclear whether indigenous medicinal plants stand up to Western scientific scrutiny – but there is precedent that at least some do.

For instance, some medicinal plants in the Yaegl Aboriginal community of Australia have recently been shown to possess antibiotic-like properties, which could be used to supplement our fight against ever-growing antibiotic resistance.

Still, regardless of their effectiveness in clinical medicine, researchers say knowledge of medicinal plants is important culturally and should be saved for heritage reasons.

"Our study suggests that each indigenous language brings unique insights that may be complementary to other societies that seek potentially useful medicinal remedies," researchers write.

"Therefore, the predicted extinction of up to 30 percent of indigenous languages by the end of the 21st century would substantially compromise humanity's capacity for medicinal discovery."

4. Events and announcements

FEL 30th Conference, Paris, November 2026

CALL FOR PAPERS

The 30th Annual Conference of the Foundation for Endangered Languages, FEL XXX (2026)

"Endangered Languages and Innovative Technologies: Documentation, Processing and Revitalisation"

Organised by the Foundation for Endangered Languages ([FEL](#)), the Centre d'Études en Sciences Sociales sur les Mondes Africains Américains et Asiatiques ([CESSMA](#)) and the Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales ([INALCO](#))

Paris, France, 3-5 November 2026

The conference aims to create a space for dialogue between researchers, technologists, and, crucially, language communities themselves, concerning the opportunities and challenges presented by innovative technologies in efforts to prevent language loss and promote the maintenance and revitalisation of endangered languages. We strongly encourage submissions from community members, educators, activists, and practitioners, as well as presentations of collaborative work between academic and non-academic partners.

More about the theme: <https://www.ogmios.org/conferences/2026/theme.php>

Important dates:

- 10 July 2026: Deadline for submission of abstracts
- 13 July 2026: Registration opens
- 01 August 2026: Selected applicants informed

- 15 September 2026: Deadline for submission of extended versions of accepted abstracts
- 03-05 November 2026: Conference dates
- 06 November 2026: Excursion (to be confirmed)

Twelfth Cambridge Conference on Language Endangerment

Language Endangerment and Revitalization: Language planning, Variation and the Speech Community

July 13th 2026

Venue

Alison Richard Building, 7 West Road, Cambridge CB3 9DT

Organisers

- Mari Jones (French Section, Faculty of Modern & Medieval Languages & Linguistics / Peterhouse, University of Cambridge) mcj11@cam.ac.uk
- Oliver Mayeux (French Section, Faculty of Modern & Medieval Languages & Linguistics / Peterhouse, University of Cambridge) ofm23@cam.ac.uk

Call for papers

Recent years have seen considerable advances made in our understanding of both the social and linguistic dynamics of language endangerment and revitalization. In this context, we seek to explore new approaches to the notion of language planning in minority speech communities. We invite papers that reflect on issues including the following: is it possible to undertake language planning without also undertaking identity planning in parallel? To what extent does language planning imply standardization, and how are competing standards reconciled in the community? Does language planning in revitalization necessarily imply elimination of linguistic variation? What is the interaction between language planning and shifts in language ideologies? What are the implications of language planning on community and individual identities? Which actors have a stake in language planning? How do processes of language variation and change interact with language planning?

Abstracts: Abstracts of 200 words maximum should be submitted by 15 March 2026. Those unable to use EasyAbs may submit their abstract to the organisers by e-mail. Please submit in docx/odt or similar, including in your abstract your current academic affiliation and whether or not you are a student. Notifications of acceptance will be sent by the end of March.

Paper format: 20 minutes + questions.

We regret that we cannot offer the possibility of virtual participation at the conference.

Registration

Registration is now open. The standard fee is £35 with a reduced fee of £30 for students (proof of student status will need to be presented). This includes lunch, coffee breaks and a drinks reception at Peterhouse. Please note that registration will only work for one delegate at a time.

Registration closes on **July 1st 2026**. We regret that it is **not possible to register after this deadline** and that it is **not possible for delegates to register or pay on the day of the conference**.

Accommodation

The organisers are unable to arrange or help book accommodation. However, the following websites may be useful:

Visit Cambridge

University Rooms, Cambridge

13th International Conference on Missionary Linguistics

Dear colleagues,

The Organizing Committee of the **13th International Conference on Missionary Linguistics** is pleased to announce the Call for Papers for the 2027 edition of the conference and would be most grateful for your help in circulating this announcement among colleagues and research networks who may be interested.

13th International Conference on Missionary Linguistics: Contributions to the Safeguarding of the World's Linguistic and Cultural Heritage

University of Vigo, Spain – March 31 to April 1, 2027

University of Trás-os-Montes and Alto Douro, Vila Real, Portugal – April 2 to 3, 2027

The conference is jointly organized by the Instituto de Investigación Lingua, Universidad de Vigo (iLingua-UVigo) and the Centro de Estudos em Letras (CEL), based at the University of Trás-os-Montes and Alto Douro. It continues a long-established series of international meetings dedicated to the study of Missionary Linguistics, launched and continuously co-organized by Otto Zwartjes. Previous editions have taken place in Oslo, São Paulo, Macau/Hong Kong, Valladolid, Mérida, Tokyo, Bremen, Lima, Manila, Rome, Santa Rosa (La Pampa), and Hsinchu.

Missionary Linguistics lies at the intersection of the historiography of linguistics, historical linguistics and historical sociolinguistics. The field investigates how Western missionaries documented and analyzed previously undescribed languages in Asia, Africa and the Americas, often producing the earliest grammatical descriptions and lexical records of those languages. Relevant sources include grammars, dictionaries, catechisms, language manuals and translations of religious texts. The 2027 edition, under the theme **“Contributions to the Safeguarding of the World's Linguistic and Cultural Heritage”**, aims to foster discussion on the scientific, political and ethical relevance of missionary linguistic materials and their contribution to the preservation and understanding of the world's linguistic heritage. Contributions addressing digital humanities methodologies, preservation and cataloguing of historical collections, editing of sources, and critical or decolonial perspectives on missionary linguistic traditions are also particularly welcome.

The conference strongly encourages the participation of early-career researchers, contributing to the renewal of the field and to the strengthening of the international scholarly networks that sustain research on Missionary Linguistics.

Working languages

Portuguese, English, Spanish, Galician and French.

Formats of participation

- Individual papers: 20 minutes plus 10 minutes discussion
- Thematic panels: 3 to 5 presentations
- Posters: dedicated poster session

Abstract submission

Abstracts of 200 to 300 words should include title, author name(s), affiliation(s), keywords and the format of the proposal.

Submission link:

<https://icml-xiii.utad.pt/abstract-submission/>

Important dates

Abstract submission deadline: August 31, 2026

Notification of acceptance: November 30, 2026

Early registration deadline: January 31, 2027

Final registration deadline: February 28, 2027

Conference venues

University of Vigo (UVigo): March 31 – April 1, 2027

University of Trás-os-Montes and Alto Douro (UTAD), Vila

Real: April 2 – 3, 2027

Transportation between Vigo and Vila Real will be provided for participants.

We would greatly appreciate your help in disseminating this call among colleagues, research groups and doctoral students who might be interested in contributing.

Thank you very much for your support.

More information:

E-mail: icml.xiii.2027@gmail.com

Webpage: <https://icml-xiii.utad.pt/>

Linguist List: <https://linguistlist.org/issues/37/779/>

Kind regards,

Gonçalo Fernandes

on behalf of the Organizing Committee

Lahe Academy issues inaugural news bulletin

Dr. Anui Sainyiu, founder of the Lahe Academy in the Naga autonomous Zone, a previous recipient of an FEL grant, reports to us on the progress of the recently established Lahe Academy, dedicated to the preservation of Language and culture in Burma.

Dear Colleagues and Friends,

I am honored to personally share with you the inaugural issue of the Lahe Academy Newsletter.

Since 2020, my life's work has been dedicated to documenting the Lainong language and culture, and ensuring that our children in the Naga Self-Administered Zone have access to a quality, localized education. This first issue marks a significant milestone in our journey from a community-based initiative to a globally recognized educational model.

In this first issue, I am pleased to share:

- Our Deep Roots: The 1560 history of my ancestor, Anui Lahe I, and the founding legacy that drives our Academy today.
- Global Partnerships: Insights into our work recognized by the Foundation for Endangered Languages (2023) and the Endangered Language Project (2026).
- The Lainong Research Centre: Our 2022 discoveries regarding ancient spring salt wells and the traditional science of bamboo.
- Technical Excellence: The vital role of Dr. Naw Khu Shee (MICP) in providing the technical and financial training that sustains our Mother Tongue-Based programs.

- The 2025 Milestone: An update on the Lahe Heritage Village campus site, generously donated by our local landowners.

My goal for Lahe Academy is to transform our cultural resources into a sustainable system of leadership. We are currently preparing for our next phase of infrastructure development, and I invite you to read more about our progress and our future objectives.

Thank you for your friendship and your continued interest in the preservation of indigenous knowledge. I welcome any feedback or inquiries regarding our upcoming projects.

Sincerely,

Dr. Anui Sainyiu

Superintendent and Founder

Lahe Academy

Executive Director

Central Committee of the Lainong Literature and Culture Committee

Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights due for an update?

EN Català and CIEMEN have launched a project to update the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights, as the previous one was signed 30 years ago.

You can support the project and submit your contributions via this website: <https://www.dudling.org/es/que-es-la-dudl-es/>

On the same site, you will find detailed information about the initiative, as well as the planned schedule.

The Chair of World Linguistic Heritage encourages you to learn more about the project and to submit your contributions if you wish to do so.

5. Obituaries

Emeritus Professor Andrew Pawley 1941-2026

From the web-site of the Australian Academy of the Humanities

The Australian Academy of the Humanities acknowledges, with deep sadness, the death of Emeritus Professor Andrew Pawley FAHA FRSNZ.

Andrew was elected to the Academy in 1991 as an internationally acclaimed linguist. His main research interests were the Austronesian and Papuan languages and associated cultures, and in the nature of linguistic competence.

Andrew completed dictionaries of Wayan (an Oceanic language of Western Fiji), Gela (Solomon Is.), and of Kalam (a Papuan language of Papua New Guinea).