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SIL International and Endangered Austronesian Languages

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SIL International

SIL International has been partnering with Austronesian language communities in language development for over fifty years. This paper briefly reviews that history, situates it in the current environment of international concern for the documentation and revitalization of endangered languages, and looks at ways in which SIL might assist endangered Austronesian language communities of today. Two aspects of *language development* are considered—one more "academic" in nature, focusing on products primarily of interest to linguists and other researchers; the other more "development" in nature, focusing on language resources and competencies of greater interest and relevance to language communities. The paper summarizes some recent studies related to *language endangerment/ vitality*, and considers how language development relates to *language revitalization* and *documentary linguistics*. SIL can continue to learn from and link with others in *describing and documenting* endangered Austronesian languages, in providing *consulting and training* at the request of language communities and others, and in designing and developing affordable *language software* to help accomplish related tasks.

1. INTRODUCTION[1]. Five thousand people are gathered outside a rural conference center in Kota Belud, Sabah, Malaysia to hear government officials, educators, and representatives of international organizations and local language communities address the role of local languages in a multilingual country. The event is the first Malaysian Indigenous Peoples' Conference on Education (MIPCE), a week-long conference organized by three Malaysian language community organizations (Kebudayaan Iranun, Kadazandusun Language Foundation, and United Sabah Bajau Organization), together with UNESCO and SIL International.[2] After the fanfare of the opening day, a group of 155 participants gets to work. This smaller group includes representatives from twenty-three language communities in Malaysia, as well as Maori-speaking guest presenters from New Zealand, and representatives from two language communities of Indonesia. The participants are uniformly interested in revitalizing and developing their heritage languages in a national context that officially promotes unity through diversity, but of necessity has focused primarily on the

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[2] For more information on MIPCE, held 23-30 April 2007, see http://www.klf.com.my/mipce1/index.htm.

promotion and development of a national language. They are especially focused on the role of local languages in the formal educational system. Interest is high, as well as the apparent level of commitment to action. These community leaders and representatives have looked into the future, and have seen that the welfare and very survival of their languages and cultures may be influenced by commitments made and actions taken at this conference.

The first Malaysian Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education illustrates several social and political realities of the global context for Austronesian language communities, endangered or otherwise. Austronesian language communities of today are generally multilingual, linked to the outside world and increasingly networked with each other, ready to learn from the experience of others, and at varying levels of commitment and readiness to promote and develop their own languages.[3] This paper briefly considers the history of SIL involvement in Austronesian languages, and looks at ways in which SIL may best contribute further to efforts on behalf of endangered Austronesian languages.

2. WHAT IS SIL INTERNATIONAL? SIL International is a faith-based, international non-governmental organization that partners with language communities worldwide in language development-related efforts. SIL is "faith-based" in that its personnel share a Christian commitment of service to God through service among minority language communities of the world. It is "international" in that members come from over sixty different countries, and carry out language research in over seventy. It is "non-governmental" in that it consists of volunteers serving as private individuals in a non-sectarian, non-profit organization dedicated to a professional, scholarly, community-based approach to language development. "Language development" includes a variety of activities and products, some of which are more easily classified as "academic" and others which more clearly fall into the "(community) development" category. Academic efforts include the publication of scholarly descriptions of languages. Development efforts include the production of literacy materials in local languages, as well as the introduction of literacy itself in communities where the local language may have previously been unwritten.

The hallmark of SIL has traditionally been fieldwork carried out by personnel residing for extended periods of time in local language communities,[4] and specializing in the application of linguistic research to literacy and translation needs. This type of fieldwork inherently involves some level of commitment to "language documentation"[5] as well as to building capacity in the language community to carry out language development efforts. For those concerned with the documentation and revitalization of endangered Austronesian

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[3] I owe the basic articulation of these characteristics to an unpublished paper by John Watters entitled "Minority language communities in the 21st century."

[4] These "extended periods of time" often span decades, with an SIL team resident or near to the community much of that time.

[5] The concept of "language documentation" as the product of "documentary linguistics" is discussed further below. The primary distinction of language "documentation" is its focus on primary data, collected, annotated, and made available as "a lasting multipurpose record of a language" (cf. Himmelmann 2006:1).

languages, then, it may be instructive to review SIL's experience in Austronesian languages, and to consider ways in which SIL might further assist those working for the well-being of Austronesian languages and their speakers.

2.1 A BRIEF HISTORY. SIL began in the 1930s, when the scientific description of non-Indo-European languages was in its infancy. Cameron Townsend held the first "summer institute of linguistics" in Sulphur Springs, Arkansas in 1934, and soon thereafter led a small group of North American linguists to serve among indigenous language communities of Mexico. From the start, Townsend committed to rendering practical assistance to language communities (such as training in alternative gardening techniques) as well as informal advocacy at the local and national government levels. Practical assistance and informal advocacy was offered alongside a program of formal research, which in turn shaped local literacy and translation programs. Townsend was also committed to serving the national government. He became a close friend of Mexican President Lázaro Cárdenas, and was so impressed with the President's commitment to the welfare of indigenous peoples that he eventually wrote a biography highlighting the President's accomplishments (Townsend 1952).

This model of cooperation with governments in service to indigenous peoples was transplanted to the realm of Austronesian languages in 1953, when Dr. Richard S. Pittman arrived in the Philippines with a small group of linguists, at the invitation of future President Ramon Magsaysay. Beginning in the Philippines, the work of SIL spread to Papua New Guinea (1956), Indonesia (1972), and Malaysia (1977).[6] SIL officially began assisting in language development efforts in Rapa Nui of Easter Island in 1976.[7] Through the 1980s, SIL began serving various language communities in the Solomon Islands, New Caledonia and Vanuatu.

3. WHAT IS LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT? Language development, as noted above, includes some activities and products that are more purely academic in nature relating to language description, and others that are more clearly related to the overall welfare and development of language communities.[8] From the beginning, SIL academic goals for language projects have included the publication of a grammar, some type of lexicon and a collection of text material. A standard grammar sketch also includes a basic phonology statement. The lexicon may range from a simple glossary or word list to more elaborate dictionaries with thousands of entries containing detailed grammatical information and sample sentences. A glossed and annotated text collection provides at least representa-

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[6] Papua New Guinea and the Indonesian province of Papua, being more linguistically complex areas, also represent many non-Austronesian languages. Approximately one fourth of Papua New Guinea's 820 living languages are Austronesian in origin, according to Ross's (1988) estimate of 201 Austronesian languages.

[7] See Programa Rapa Nui (2006) for an extensive bibliography of publications in and on the Rapa Nui language. Weber and Weber (1998) report on early educational efforts in that language development program.

[8] Over the decades, SIL has become increasingly aware of and committed to the essential role the language community plays in determining its own goals and needs in language development work.

tive data on which the phonology, grammar and lexicon are based, as well as documenting important cultural information. Some text collections provide more detailed linguistic analysis through morpheme-by-morpheme glosses, while others show less linguistic detail but provide more raw material for its anthropological content. These three basic tools of a grammar, lexicon and text collection have long been considered foundational for language description as an academic undertaking, as well as for language development work in general.

Also from the beginning, SIL goals have included activities and products that more directly relate to the overall well-being and development of the language community itself. Primary among these goals has been the promotion of literacy in the local language. Literacy in any language, of course, presupposes the development of an orthography and literature in that language. Where no orthography exists, SIL works with the community to develop one, taking into account linguistic, pedagogical, political and other factors. The initial development of reading materials often happens through writers' workshops.[9] Materials for teaching reading are designed taking into account whether the learners will be learning to read for the first time or are already literate in another language. In many cases, community literacy efforts have taken the form of adult, non-formal education campaigns. Increasingly, in today's interconnected world, promotion of literacy has focused more on the role of the local languages in formal, multilingual education—especially in the earlier levels of formal schooling. With a growing awareness on the part of educators, policy makers, and multilateral agencies regarding the crucial role of language in education, SIL is increasingly being called on by language communities as well as national governments and other agencies to advise on matters of multilingual education, and to advocate on behalf of minority language communities.

Language development, then, may be defined as the advancement of language resources and competencies so that a community can effectively use its language(s) for the varied purposes it requires and desires. While it is impossible to draw a clear line between resources and competencies, *language resources* primarily refers to published products that facilitate and "legitimize" the use of a language for specific purposes, in the eyes of its own speakers as well as in the estimation of other significant opinion leaders and decision makers. These products include such items as grammars, dictionaries, lists of specialized vocabulary, published text materials, etc. *Language competencies*, on the other hand, refers to particular skills in the language—literacy being primary among these. Other skills would involve use of the language for public (including electronic) discourse and artistic expression in a variety of media. Such language competencies can be measured on an individual level. But competency in *language development* also involves a community's capacity to produce language resources as well as to promote specific skills in and uses for a language among the members of that community.

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[9] See Weber, Wroge and Yoder (2007) for a discussion on the place of writers' workshops in the context of a community literacy program.

4. SIL'S EXPERIENCE IN AUSTRONESIAN LANGUAGES. *Ethnologue* lists 1,268 Austronesian languages, making it the second largest language family in the world.[10] (Only the Niger-Congo family has more languages—at 1,514.) SIL has had some level of involvement in 393, or roughly one third of all Austronesian languages. That history of involvement is summarized here in terms of publications and other types of activities, before proceeding to look at the issue of "endangered" languages in particular.

Publishing a description or undertaking any type of project in a given language presupposes, of course, that such a language has been identified. The question of what or how many Austronesian languages are in existence is by no means a simple one. That *Ethnologue* can list 1,268 of them indicates a tremendous amount of resources invested in language survey. One of the services SIL has provided the governments of the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea has been in the identification of languages spoken in the more remote areas of those countries. While Austronesian linguistics has been the purview of numerous scholars and institutions around the region and the world, it is not an exaggeration to state that a considerable amount of what is known about the identity and interrelationships of Austronesian languages can be linked to data gathered by SIL field personnel.[11] In addition to data collected by SIL researchers, SIL attempts to track and report basic information on all the world's languages through *Ethnologue*.

The clearest indicator of a significant level of involvement in a particular language is a record of publication in or on that language. Figure 1 shows the total number of SIL publications on Austronesian languages, classified according to the relative size of the language group. Publications are subcategorized according to whether they are primarily of an academic nature (typically in a language of wider communication), or in the vernacular (meant for the local language community). The general picture is one of academic publications slightly outnumbering vernacular publications, and with SIL involvement increasing along with the number of languages in a particular size category.

A record of publications alone does not show the extent of SIL involvement with a given language community, however, either in terms of time depth or scope of activities. In some cases, as with several languages in the southern Philippines (Tboli, Blaan, Western Subanon, Binukid and some varieties of Manobo, for example), SIL and Translators Association of the Philippines assisted communities in developing highly successful programs to introduce and promote literacy in the local language.[12] Such efforts have necessarily involved the standardization of orthographies, production of literacy materials, and equipping members of the language communities as literacy teachers, often over a period of decades.

In many cases, especially where government schools are already operable, SIL has been less active in literacy and education efforts. One notable exception is in the Lubuagan, Kalinga community of northern Luzon, also in the Philippines. The municipality of Lubuagan has since 1998 been the site of a mother tongue multilingual education program

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[10] See http://www.ethnologue.com/show_family.asp?subid=89851

[11] For some Philippine examples of SIL contributions, see Walton 1979 and Gallman 1997, as well as acknowledgements in such works as Zorc 1977 and McFarland 1981.

[12] See Awid 2001 for a discussion of an innovative literacy program in Western Subanon.

known as the "First Language Component/Bridging Program".[13] The goals of this program are to equip elementary school teachers to design and produce their own language resource materials and to use the first language of the students effectively for the introduction of literacy skills. Use of the local language is emphasized especially in the first three grades, bridging into increased use of Filipino and English for both literacy education and delivery of curriculum content in a sequential manner in succeeding years. Initial indicators demonstrate the effectiveness of such an approach, as measured by student performance on standardized tests in other academic subjects as well as in language arts.[14] The Lubuagan FLC Bridging Program is being documented carefully over a period of ten years, as part of a larger Longitudinal Studies Project, which is also investigating similar programs in mainland Asia and West Africa.
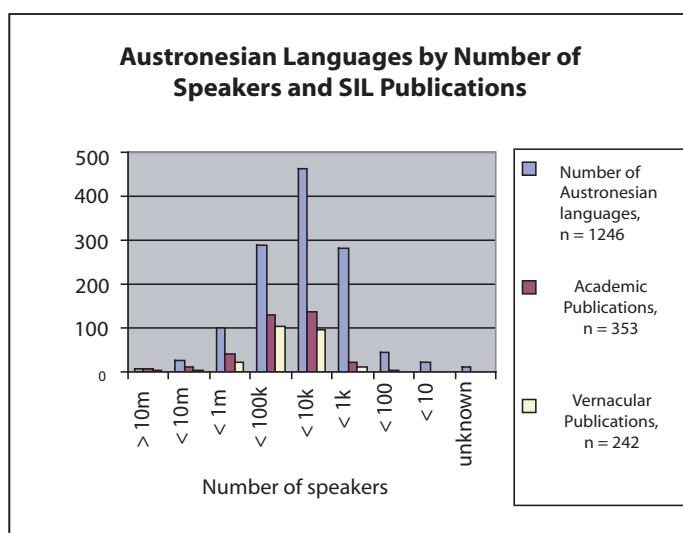

FIGURE 1. Austronesian languages and SIL publications[15]

The country in the Asia-Pacific region where SIL has been most active in promoting literacy and education in the local language has been Papua New Guinea, which has made great strides in incorporating the local language, or *tokples*, into the formal school system and related pre-school efforts. Papua New Guinea provides numerous case studies for the

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[13] For further information on the Lubuagan program, see especially Dekker and Dumatog 2003. See also Dekker 1999, Young 2002 and Dekker and Young 2005.

[14] A January 5, 2007 letter from the Department of Education (Division of Kalinga) attributes Lubuagan's high scores on a National Reading Test in English and Filipino to the First Language Component. Lubuagan ranked first among the ten districts where the test was administered.

[15] I am indebted to Gary Simons for these figures, which come from SIL's Language Program Database, as accessed in February 2007.

role of language communities in developing their own pre-school programs in the local languages, as well as for an evolving national language policy increasingly supportive to the development and use of local languages.[16]

Austronesian languages have been considered thus far in this paper without reference to whether they should be characterized as endangered. In order to address the issue of SIL and endangered Austronesian languages, we must first come to some agreement on what is meant by "endangered."

5. WHAT IS AN "ENDANGERED LANGUAGE"? Numerous terminologies have been suggested for classifying degrees of language endangerment, with little real agreement among linguists regarding a standard. The crudest measure of language endangerment would be in terms of absolute number of speakers. It has often been observed, however, that the number of speakers which make a language seem threatened varies according to geography. In Africa, where the median language size is over 25,000 speakers, a language of 1,000 speakers may in fact be quite endangered. In the Pacific, however, where the median language size is only 800, languages even smaller than that may remain vital for several generations to come, depending on other variables.[17]

Fishman's (1991) "Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale" is one of the better known systems for classification of levels of language endangerment. The key indicator in this scale remains whether languages are being passed on intergenerationally. Table 1 below summarizes the eight stages, along with suggestions for "reversing language shift" in stages 4 through 8. The vast majority of Austronesian languages would fall between stages 5 and 8 on the GIDS, with 5 being the more secure ranking, and eight being the most endangered. Very few languages of the world reach level 1.

TABLE 1. Fishman's (1991: 87-111) Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) for Threatened Languages (format taken from Baker 2006: 61).

Stage 8	Social isolation of the few remaining speakers of the minority language. Need to record the language for later possible reconstruction
Stage 7	Minority language used by older and not younger generation. Need to multiply the language in the younger generation
Stage 6	Minority language is passed on from generation to generation and is used in the community. Need to support the family in intergenerational continuity (e.g. provision of minority language nursery schools)

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[16]   See Litteral (1999 and 2004) and Wroge 2002 for some helpful summaries of language and education issues in Papua New Guinea. See http://www.sil.org/literacy/snapshots/snap_STEP.htm for information regarding an SIL-sponsored training program for teachers in mother tongue education and literacy programs.

[17]   Barbara F. Grimes 2001 and Joseph E. Grimes 1995 discuss various factors relating to language viability in addition to population size.

Stage 5	Literacy in the minority language. Need to support literacy movements in the minority language, particularly when there is no government support.
Stage 4	Formal, compulsory education available in the minority language. May need to be financially supported by the minority language community.
Stage 3	Use of the minority language in less specialised work areas involving interaction with majority language speakers.
Stage 2	Lower government services and mass media available in the minority language.
Stage 1	Some use of the minority language available in higher education, central government and the national media.

A framework for categorizing language endangerment developed by a UNESCO team of experts uses the following nine factors:

> a. Intergenerational language transmission
> b. Absolute numbers of speakers
> c. Proportion of speakers within the total population
> d. Loss of existing language domains
> e. Response to new domains and media
> f. Materials for language education and literacy
> g. Governmental and institutional language attitudes and policies
> h. Community members' attitudes towards their own language
> i. Amount and quality of documentation (Brenzinger 2003: 9-17)

Each of these categories (except for #2, which is a raw number) receives a ranking on a scale of 0 to 5, with 5 being the most robust evaluation. Lewis (2006) attempts to apply this framework to a hundred languages of the world. He concludes that although it represents an admirable attempt to capture "state of the art" thinking on language endangerment, practical use of the framework is limited because so little is currently known about many of the languages of the world, especially those which are most endangered.

The flip side of language endangerment is language vitality, and some scholars have chosen to view matters from this more positive perspective. Landweer (2006: 65-68) proposes the following eight Indicators of Ethnolinguistic Vitality. Each of these indicators is assigned a point value from 0 to 3, with 3 being the value that will lead to the most robust evaluation.

1. Position of the speech community on the remote-urban continuum
(less frequent contact is better)

2. Domains in which the target language is used
(more domains for the vernacular is better)

3. Frequency and type of code switching
(less code switching is better)

4. Population and growth dynamics
(more population is better)

5. Distribution of speakers within their own social network
(tighter social structure for the vernacular is better)

6. Social outlook regarding and within the speech community
(higher group prestige is better)

7. Language prestige
(higher language prestige is better)

8. Access to a stable and acceptable economic base
(more stable and acceptable income is better)

Landweer's more nuanced system grew out of research on language endangerment studies from other parts of the world, coupled with long experience in the context of Papua New Guinea. She argues that the Melanesian context is distinct from much of the rest of the world, due to the relative lack of a dominant "oppressor" language and "the traditional egalitarian coexistence of multiple languages in Pacific nations" (2006: 5). It may be that Landweer's system is more appropriate for the evaluation of most contexts where Austronesian languages are spoken, especially in the absence of a clearly dominating cultural group and language. Still, it is apparent that relatively in-depth information on each language group must be available in order to make the best use of the indicators.

Although the classifications for degrees of endangerment are several and varied, there is one basic underlying principle: a language is moving in a dangerous direction if it is losing ground in terms of number of speakers or number of contexts in which it is used. *Ethnologue* lists 516 "Nearly Extinct Languages" around the world, where "only a few elderly speakers are living."[18] The two regions with the most languages in this category are the Americas (170 out of 1002 living languages=17%) and the Pacific (210 out of 1345 living languages=16%). The high number of nearly extinct languages in the Pacific might at first seem to belie Landweer's claim that Melanesian languages are by and large vital ones. However, 168 (or 61%) of the 210 nearly extinct languages in the Pacific are not Austronesian languages, but rather Aboriginal languages of Australia. Excluding Australia, the percentage of nearly extinct languages in the rest of the Pacific is only 4%. Figure 2 shows the percentage of living languages that are nearly extinct according to region of the world, with Australia listed as its own region.

There are two basic reasons why a language loses speakers. One is that the community of speakers of the language are physically dying out. The other is that people shift to using another language in place of the first. Throughout history, some languages have disappeared due to entire populations dying out as the result of disease, war, or natural calamity. Cahill (1999) discusses the situations of language groups of a few hundred speakers or less in Brazil and Papua New Guinea that were in imminent danger of dying out completely. Each has made a comeback, thanks in part to access to modern medicine. An important

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[18] See http://www.ethnologue.com/nearly_extinct.asp#Africa.

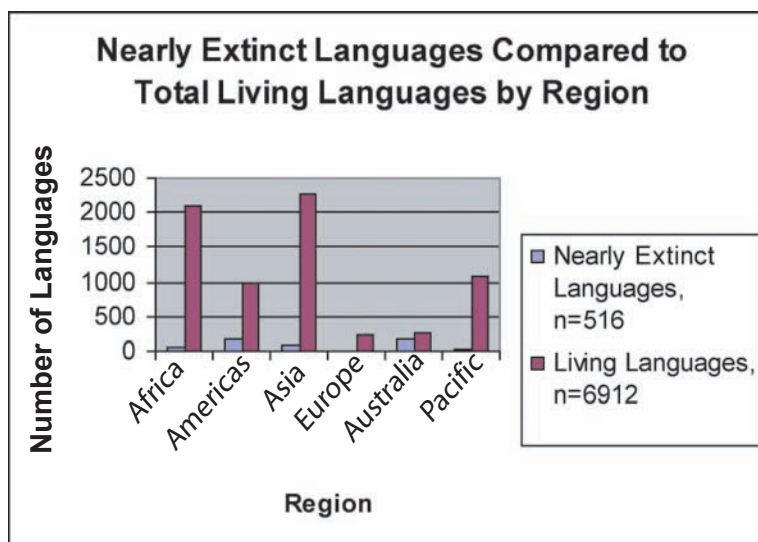**Nearly Extinct Languages Compared to Total Living Languages by Region**

FIGURE 2. Nearly extinct languages compared to living languages according to region of the world.

factor in several of these cases was also a heightened sense of self-respect among language community members, corresponding with the introduction of literacy and the translation of the Bible in these languages.

In most cases, language death is not so much about an entire population dying out, as it is the end point of language shift—the cumulative result of countless individual choices of a population to no longer use their heritage language. Language death typically happens gradually, as more and more parents decide to speak to their children in a national or regional language because they believe their children would be better served by speaking that language well. Thus more and more children begin learning a national or regional language at home to the exclusion of their heritage language. This dynamic of endangerment has no doubt been playing out in the twenty-seven nearly extinct Austronesian languages listed in *Ethnologue*, as well as in an uncounted number of other Austronesian languages experiencing varying levels of endangerment.[19]

What factors will work most strongly in favor of language maintenance as opposed to shift? Landweer found through her in-depth case studies in Papua New Guinea that two primary social factors related positively to language vitality—language as a marker of ethnicity, and endogamous marriage patterns. A language's vitality is more at risk when the link between language and ethnic identity weakens, and in situations where there are an increasing number of exogamous marriages.

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[19] For example, Bob Weber (personal communication) reports that in spite of numerous language preservation efforts on the part of school teachers and others, Rapa Nui of Easter Island is increasingly endangered due to lack of intergenerational transmission.

Scebold (2003) describes a situation in Central Tagbanwa of Palawan, Philippines where only the older generation speak the Tagbanwa language to any real degree of fluency. Over the decades since World War II, settlement patterns, disease, and massive in-migrations of speakers of other languages influenced Tagbanwa parents to switch to the use of Cuyonon, a regional lingua franca, with their own children. The result is a younger generation that maintains relatively few markers of Tagbanwa ethnicity, and a heritage language that is on the brink of extinction.

Headland (2003) expands the definition of endangerment in his discussion of thirty-two Negrito languages of the Philippines. Although some of these languages are now extinct because all their speakers have died out (or sometimes been killed), he argues that most of these languages are endangered due to a rapid degree of culture change, resulting in loss of broad areas of traditional vocabulary. Because the social and cultural contexts of these language communities are undergoing such sweeping changes, the languages themselves are becoming unrecognizable compared to earlier forms of the languages reflecting the world and worldview of hunter-gatherer societies. Headland's "endangerment" then, focuses not on languages per se, but on the breadth and richness of the lexicon.

In the final analysis, distinguishing levels of endangerment or vitality is probably less important than encouraging a perspective of linguistic diversity as an asset as opposed to a liability, and granting that communities of human beings have an inherent right to appreciate, promote, maintain and develop their unique languages as resources for communication and expression of their unique cultural heritage and identities.[20] While maintaining linguistic diversity for its own sake has not been an explicit or primary goal for SIL in the past, the academic research and development activities in which it engages do provide essential resources for the well-being of endangered languages.[21]

6. LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT AS LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION. SIL serves language communities of the world in development-related efforts through research, translation and literacy. Although SIL serves primarily in smaller language communities, the issue of the survival of these languages has largely been assumed, rather than addressed.[22] This is perhaps even more true in the case of Austronesian languages, where endangerment has not yet reached the same alarming levels as in Australia and the Americas. Lack of awareness of language endangerment issues on the part of SIL and lack of advocacy on behalf of minority ethnolinguistic groups represent weaknesses to be addressed. Happily, however, the traditional goals of SIL projects do contribute positively and crucially to efforts on behalf of endangered languages.

Language development has been defined above as the advancement of language resources and competencies so that a community can use its language(s) for the purposes it requires and desires. Language endangerment was summarized as a situation where a language was "losing ground" in terms of number of speakers or number of contexts in

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[20]   See Grin 2005 for an interesting discussion of human rights and other arguments in favor of linguistic diversity.

[21]   See Pittman 1998 for a collection of anecdotes documenting "sixteen accounts of ethnic renaissance" in language communities where SIL has had an active presence.

[22]   See Headland 2003 and Scebold 2003 for recent exceptions with regard to Philippine languages.

which it is used. In the most severe cases, a population of speakers is either actually dying out, or shifting to another language as the older generation chooses not to use the heritage language with the younger generation. Language revitalization focuses then on "regaining ground," moving a language from more to less endangered, from less to more vital. More specifically, language revitalization efforts aim to increase the number of speakers or number of contexts in which a language is used.

Clearly, there are common ingredients for successful language development and language revitalization efforts. These include *critical resources*, *critical expertise*, *critical mass*, and a *critical context*. *Critical resources* for language revitalization depend and build on the linguistic analysis and language resource materials that are at the heart of language development. Linguistic analysis provides the necessary foundation for designing orthographies, writing grammars, compiling dictionaries, and publishing text materials.

Critical expertise for language development involves basic language competencies on the part of individual members of a language community (such as listening, speaking, reading and writing in the language), as well as competency on the part of the community overall to produce necessary language resources and to promote the use of a language in that community. This kind of capacity presumes a level of proficiency in linguistic analysis within the community, but also requires foundational skills in community organizing as well as in addressing a range of educational, political and promotional concerns.

Critical mass refers to the involvement of a significant proportion of the community in language development and revitalization efforts. Experience has shown that it is possible to produce language resources that are never widely used in a community, especially if those products have been generated by a few individuals working in relative isolation from the broader community. Opinion shapers and decision makers throughout the community must be actively involved and supportive in order for language revitalization efforts to succeed.

A *critical context* for language revitalization necessarily assumes a local community committed to the promotion and use of its heritage language. Efforts of the local community, however, must be situated in a larger context of regional and national policies that allow smaller languages to flourish. There is little point in developing written materials for use in a local elementary school, for instance, if national educational policy dictates the use of national and international languages only inside the classroom. Thus, local language communities need not only the permission, but also the support of local and national institutions to use and develop their languages for further use.

Language revitalization is essentially an effort to encourage a community to make certain choices about acquiring and using a certain language over a sustained period of time. The products and activities typical of language development projects can be seen as prerequisite for making these choices possible. This is not to say that producing written materials or introducing the local language as a medium of formal instruction are in every case the most appropriate first steps toward language revitalization.[23] In a case where a language is no longer being passed on to children at home, producing books and school lessons may

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[23] See Reynard 1999 for a discussion on a "hierarchy of needs based on the health of a language", which employs Fishman 1991's Graded Intergenerational Scale of Disruption in his consideration of the language situation in American Indian communities.

be superfluous or even counterproductive. However, Lewis and Trudell (2005: 5) argue—along with many others—that "sustainable language cultivation ultimately requires [that language's] use in written form by some significant segment of the population."

Any effort to effect social change requires sustained leadership. Effective, sustainable leadership for language development and revitalization efforts will be community-based, with links to national and international support. Local leaders must ultimately provide the motivation, and display the example and political will to revitalize their languages in their daily lives in the context of their own community and family. Such efforts can be encouraged and practically supported (and sometimes crucially so) by outsiders skilled in language analysis, the production of language resource materials, and other community-building efforts.[24]

6.1 IBATAN—A REVITALIZED LANGUAGE AND COMMUNITY. The Ibatan of Babuyan Claro Island in the Northern Philippines exemplifies an endangered Austronesian language community that has been revitalized over the past three decades through sustained language and community development efforts. In 1978[25] there were fewer than 500 speakers of Ibatan, many of whom were no longer using the local language variety in their homes. The more prestigious Ilokano language was preferred for public discourse, and native speakers of Ilokano openly ridiculed the Ibatan language. In the 1980s, SIL personnel and their Ibatan counterparts initiated concerted efforts to promote the use of written and spoken Ibatan in as many contexts as possible. This small team of local language activists and outsider linguists launched a local newspaper, printed numerous books, posted written announcements, started a writers' club, and formed an economic cooperative—all using Ibatan only. They modeled Ibatan use in school, at church, and in other public contexts. They worked with non-Ibatan government officials to translate resolutions and by-laws into Ibatan, and the Ibatan began writing their own resolutions in the Ibatan language. In all these efforts, the goal was not to prohibit the use of any other language, but to model Ibatan as a viable, valuable alternative for personal and official communication. The publication of a hymn book in 1985, and the New Testament in 1996 further enabled sustained public use of the Ibatan language.

In addition to more purely language-related efforts, the team advocated through the years for the establishment of a high school and medical clinic, and more recently for the granting of a Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title. Prior to the Ibatan submitting their claim, the Philippine government had no official record of the Ibatan as a distinct cultural community. Two factors were crucial in the decision to award the land title: (1) recognition of the Ibatan as a distinct "tribe" (evidenced in large part by the publications in and about

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[24] See Miller 2001 for a helpful discussion on ways "Mother Tongue Advocates" from the outside can be of assistance to leaders of minority language communities and others.

[25] 1978 was the year SIL linguists Rundell and Judi Maree took up residence on Babuyan Claro Island. They continued to reside among the Ibatan for extended periods of time through 1996, and are still working with Ibatan speakers on a dictionary, text collection and other development projects. A grammar is currently in press.

their distinct language); and (2) acknowledgement of the long-term residence of the Ibatan people on Babuyan Claro Island (evidenced by the genealogical record of generations of Ibatan published by SIL in 2005 at the request of the Ibatan community).[26]

In 2007, there are 1200 to 1300 Ibatan people. They have official recognition from the National Commission of Indigenous Peoples as a distinct tribe of the Philippines, along with a Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title to the land they have historically inhabited. They have a high school and medical clinic on their island. There are a growing number of Ibatan with college degrees. Their traditional arts of reed- and vine-weaving, and making bark cloth are enjoying a modest revival. Ibatan enjoy numerous publications in their own language, and speak it with pride in public as well as at home. And sometimes, even an Ilokano learns a little Ibatan.[27]

7. DOCUMENTARY LINGUISTICS. Awareness of the importance of language documentation has been growing worldwide over the past couple of decades along with awareness and concern over language endangerment. Language documentation has to do with producing a lasting record of representative samples of that language. As traditionally practiced by SIL, and indeed by the whole Western linguistic enterprise, language documentation has focused on the production of resources for the linguist or academician more than on resources that directly benefit speakers of the language being documented. In the tradition of early twentieth century American linguists Sapir and Bloomfield, field linguists have produced grammatical descriptions and text collections which would be published by major universities and academic publishing companies in order to advance a general, scholarly understanding of human language.[28]

American structuralist linguistics in general, together with a generation or so of SIL linguists trained in the tagmemic tradition of Kenneth Pike, emphasized the importance of language data (i.e., a record of actually occurring linguistic behavior). This dependence on more or less naturally occurring language data was lost to much of Western linguistics during the Chomskyan era of the latter half of the twentieth century, as linguists in search of language universals increasingly and ironically relied on their own intuition and grammaticality judgments of sample sentences generated by the linguists themselves. Field linguists (those working with more "exotic" languages), on the other hand, remained of necessity more dependent on language data produced by and in a community of native speakers. Although the very enterprise of descriptive linguistics depended on primary language data, the actual data were rarely published. Rather, analytical statements were made on the basis of the data in an attempt to "describe" rather than "document" the language.

Language data that have been published in the tradition of descriptive linguistics have often been "regularized" or "systematized" or even "corrected," so that the documentation no longer portrays the linguistic behavior as it actually occurred, but rather as a more polished, "limited" product. Some adjustments to the language data were for esthetic reasons,

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[26] See Maree 2005.

[27] Rundell Maree (personal communication) reports that at least two Ilokano high school teachers on Babuyan Island have learned enough Ibatan to use the language well in the classroom.

[28] Bloomfield's 1917 *Tagalog texts with grammatical analysis* is still considered a classic of this sort.

such as the editing out of hesitations or false starts, adjustments in vocabulary, sentence length, etc. These sorts of edits may be made solely by the analyst, but often the original speaker or writer of the language data also desires some degree of editing in order to put their contribution in its best form.[29]

Other adjustments to language data come as an inevitable part of the transcription process. Decisions must be made in transcribing audio-recorded language data, for example, as to what level of detail one wishes to transcribe (broad versus narrow, phonemic versus phonetic). Inevitably, significant segmental and suprasegmental details are lost in the process of committing a spoken text to paper—not to mention the loss of accompanying gestures, props or other important aspects of the communicative context. More rarely, field linguists have video-recorded linguistic behavior, but until very recently, technological considerations have prevented such recordings from being commonly made or widely shared.[30]

In summary, language data on which much linguistic analysis and description is based have rarely been published as such. This is as true of SIL-published data on Austronesian languages as much as it is true of material published by other field linguists on less commonly studied languages around the world. Where language data have been published, it has usually not been "primary data," but rather "secondary data" that have been edited, systematized or regularized in some way.

The past decade has seen increasing interest in the documentation of representative primary data in a form that will be permanently accessible to speakers and researchers in an electronic environment.[31] Indeed, a new sub-discipline of linguistics has appeared bearing the name of Documentary Linguistics. The web-site of the Hans Rausing Endangered Languages Project at the School of Oriental and African Studies credits Nikolaus Himmelmann as a catalyst for the development of this discipline, citing his 1998 paper entitled "Documentary and descriptive linguistics." In it, Himmelmann (1998: 116) states that

> The aim of a language documentation is to provide a comprehensive record of the linguistic practices characteristic of a given speech community... This... differs fundamentally from... language description [which] aims at the record of a language... as a system of abstract elements, constructions, and rules.

Himmelmann, Gippert and Mosel (2006: v) specify that documentary linguistics is concerned with the "methods, tools and theoretical underpinnings for compiling a representative and lasting multipurpose record of a natural language or one of its varieties."

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[29] Himmelmann (2002:16) mentions the "problem" of contributors of language data wanting a "clean, edited" finished product. He suggests a possible compromise solution, where publications of the data in book form (for public use) contain edited versions, while recordings and transcripts of original texts are kept in a database which can be accessed for further scientific inquiry.

[30] Motivation for video recording language data was higher for certain art forms, as with the case of the Manobo oral literature analyzed extensively by Wrigglesworth (1991, 1993, 2004 and In Press).

[31] See Austin 2006 for a fuller discussion on the role and handling of data in language documentation.

Note that we have made an assumption throughout this paper that languages are in fact discrete, whole, abstract yet identifiable and countable systems. Although this assumption matches popular understanding, it is by no means universally accepted in the scholarly world. Himmelmann (2002) successfully avoids the central issue of what a language is by consistently referring to the "linguistic practices of a speech community." Suffice it to say here that there are several perspectives from which linguistic behavior can be viewed, and that one of these includes the useful fiction that languages exist, and hence can be identified, described, cultivated and propagated.[32]

8. WHERE TO FROM HERE? SIL International has been identifying, describing, and assisting in the development of resources in Austronesian languages for over fifty years. SIL activities and goals have, of course, been shaped by more general understandings of what constitutes a language, as well as what constitutes linguistic field work. SIL began with the goal of serving language communities in lasting ways, primarily through engagement with those communities in academic research (especially in descriptive linguistics), translation of literature of high moral and practical value (normally including parts of the Bible), and the promotion of literacy in the local language (sometimes even introducing the concept to a community for the first time). For the past couple of decades, SIL has classified much of what we do as "language development".[33] Although SIL has stressed service to all—including national governments, universities and other host institutions—in practice much of our work has been focused on local languages at the local community level.[34]

Meanwhile, the international academic world has awakened to the fact that many of today's languages are endangered—that is, losing ground in terms of number of speakers and/or relative number of domains in which the language is used. Motivated by the belief that a loss of linguistic diversity is a loss to humankind, and that communities have an inherent right to preserve and promote their unique languages and cultures, a growing number of academic, governmental and non-governmental organizations have become committed to the documentation and revitalization of endangered languages. Within the Austronesian language family and beyond, "endangered languages" overlap with the local languages in which SIL has an on-going involvement and active interest.

How can SIL serve local language communities effectively in a manner relevant to the broader context? Fruitful service may best be rendered through continued documentation and description, consulting and training, and making available appropriate, affordable lan-

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[32] Pike was a proponent both of different perspectives on language-as-system and on explicitly viewing language as a type of human behavior. See Pike1967 for his magnum opus on this foundational aspect of Tagmemics, and Pike 1982 for a more readable summary on the same issues.

[33] Paul Lewis (personal communication) and others of SIL are now promoting the use of the term "language-based development" to describe the holistic, community-based efforts in which SIL engages. This is due in part to terminological confusion related to the use of "language development" by some linguists to refer to child acquisition of language in progressive, developmental fashion.

[34] Focusing on the local community is not bad. It does, however, carry with it the danger that we will fail to notice significant trends or important changes happening in a broader context.

guage software. In each of these spheres, it is important to work collaboratively with local communities, national governments, international agencies, and the academic community at large.

8.1 DOCUMENTING AND DESCRIBING. SIL needs to distinguish between documenting and describing languages, and renew its commitment to both as crucial components of language development. Needs and desires of local language communities will increasingly shape the projects in which SIL becomes involved. The end products of language documentation and description will thus serve the local community, as well as national and international bodies. SIL has always been committed to making the results of language research available to all who wish to benefit from them. In this day of computer-assisted research and web-publishing, making language data accessible is increasingly becoming feasible. An indicator of language research becoming more accessible is the fact that the SIL International Publications web page has links to on-line publications specific to languages of the Philippines and Papua New Guinea.[35]

While there is increasing capacity and demand for on-line publishing, language communities will continue to value print publications in the local language of a more traditional or descriptive nature. Multi-language phrase books, word lists, and dictionaries are among the most highly valued and commonly purchased publications that SIL helps produce. In the African context, Batibo (2007: 5) notes a three-fold motivation for those engaged in language documentation—namely, "to preserve data of endangered languages, to build comprehensive linguistic databases and to service the relevant communities." He states that most linguists in Africa would like to see primary importance given to the last of these three motivations, arguing that language documentation should not just serve to record dying languages, but also to empower communities to use their languages extensively and proactively. He lists the most useful and relevant materials for language empowerment as the following:

1. a practical orthography
2. a user-friendly reference grammar
3. a basic reference dictionary
4. specialized dictionaries or thesauruses of plants, wildlife, environment and indigenous knowledge systems
5. literacy materials (for learning and sustaining literacy)
6. variety of reading materials for cultural and socio-economic empowerment
7. any other relevant materials

Using the Naro language of Botswana as a case study, Batibo notes that the production of these kinds of materials led to empowerment of the language community as manifested by a greater emotional attachment of speakers to their language, higher self esteem among members of the community, greater desire for the language to be used by future generations, and more vigorous efforts on the part of adults to encourage young people to actually

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[35] http://www.sil.org/acpub/index.html

use the language. Batibo's observations indicate that SIL needs to maintain an orientation of practical service to language communities while actively engaging in the new discipline of documentary linguistics.

8.2 CONSULTING AND TRAINING. SIL consults with individuals, teams and committees representing specific language communities, as well as with national governments and multilateral agencies. Local language communities, in particular, have changed significantly over the past decades as a result of increasing access to higher formal education and greater integration into their larger socio-political contexts. As a result of these changes, SIL's role has been shifting to a more consultative, collaborative, facilitating one vis-à-vis the local language community. This trend needs to continue. As evidenced at the Malaysian Indigenous People's Conference on Education, local language communities and others are requesting assistance from SIL to advise, advocate for, and link language communities with relevant training and resources. Consulting, training and advocacy efforts range from small, non-formal workshops held in local communities, to larger events in more centralized locations bringing together representatives from several communities, to national level formal training programs, to international academic conferences.

The Northern Philippines Mother Tongue Translators Association (NPMTTA) consists of several local language committees that provide leadership for language development programs, the majority of which originally began through efforts of SIL personnel resident in those communities. NPMTTA, in collaboration with SIL, Translators Association of the Philippines (TAP), and the Philippine Bible Society, sponsors series of workshops to provide their personnel with new skills and update existing skills related to translation and language development. NPMTTA is also working with TAP and SIL to sponsor a number of scholars for graduate level studies in the Applied Linguistics Program at Alliance Graduate School in Manila, which offers a nationally accredited Graduate Diploma in Applied Linguistics, as well as a Master of Arts in Applied Linguistics with specializations in either Language Development or Bible Translation.

In addition to providing relevant training for members of local language communities, SIL is committed to assisting members of those communities to gain a voice in a broader context. SIL does this by co-hosting a variety of conferences and workshops with other agencies. In 2006, SIL and the Linguistic Society of the Philippines hosted the Tenth International Conference on Austronesian Linguistics.[36] Because the conference was held in the Philippines, a record number of Filipino scholars were able to participate and present their research findings on Philippine languages. A special session on languages of Palawan was sponsored at that conference by faculty of the Palawan State University. In 2003, SIL, Mahidol University and UNESCO sponsored a landmark conference on Language Devel-

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[36] All papers submitted by participants of 10-ICAL are available on-line at http://www.sil.org/asia/ philippines/ical/papers.html. Edited collections of selected papers are to appear in the 2006 volumes of *Philippine Journal of Linguistics,* and in several volumes of the series *Studies in Philippine Languages and Cultures*.

opment, Language Revitalization, and Multilingual Education in Minority Communities in Asia.[37] Follow-up workshops are equipping policy makers, administrators and classroom teachers to bring local languages into the classroom as media of instruction.

In May 2007, SIL International – Asia signed a memorandum of understanding with UNESCO Bangkok – Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education which included joint commitments to the following efforts of particular relevance to endangered Austronesian languages:

• building the capacity of educational policy makers to make decisions with regard to language-in-education issues.

• advocating for the affirmation and support of linguistic diversity and the recognition of the danger that many existing languages will be lost.

• exploring further areas of cooperation such as publications in endangered languages, software for universal access to information and knowledge, and other areas of potential common interest.

The last point of this MOU mentions a crucial area for the documentation and revitalization of endangered languages not yet considered in this paper—that of software for language development.

8.3 SOFTWARE. SIL International has developed over sixty pieces of software to support the work of language development, most of which are available for free download.[38] Programs available to record and analyze survey data, teach the International Phonetic Alphabet, parse words and interlinearize texts, adapt text material from one language into another, build dictionaries, use special fonts and characters, and more. *The Linguist's Shoebox* is an integrated data management and analysis tool especially helpful for building a dictionary based on interlinearized text. *The Field Linguist's Toolbox*, built on *Shoebox* 5, is an upgrade of *Shoebox* which adds Unicode support.[39] *Discourse Profiler*, developed by Phil Quick (discussed in his paper in this volume), builds on *Toolbox* and is designed for analyzing the context of specific discourse features. SIL has also produced an electronic library of many of the linguistic resources commonly used in SIL fieldwork.[40]

SIL Fieldworks is the most recent suite of language software developed by SIL for the management of language and cultural data. *Fieldworks* assists the field linguist with tasks associated with the initial collection of data, with the analysis of linguistic rules and cultural precepts, and with the publication of findings. It facilitates categorizing cultural

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[37] The conference program, papers and other information are available at http://www.sil.org/asia/ldc/.

[38] See http://www.sil.org/computing/catalog/index.asp for SIL's on-line software catalog and instructions for downloading or ordering.

[39] For further information, see also http://www.discourseprofiler.com.

[40] *LinguaLinks Library*, which contains 149 book or book-length works, and over 200 SIL journals, is available for purchase at http://www.ethnologue.com/LL_docs/contents.asp.

observations based on the Outline of Cultural Materials and incorporates a Dictionary Development Process for building and refining a dictionary. *Fieldworks* is a sophisticated software tool to assist trained linguists and other researchers of language and culture.

SIL is also developing tools designed for non-linguist members of local communities to assist directly in language development projects through data gathering. An example of this sort of tool is *WeSay*, an Open Source project being developed by the Software Unit of the Payap University Linguistics Institute and SIL International (discussed in this volume by Eric Albright and John Hatton).[41] *WeSay* is envisioned to be an extremely simple, task-oriented tool that will run on inexpensive rugged computers suitable for use in a rural environment. *WeSay* is especially intended for building dictionaries and text collections, in collaboration with advisors who can handle the more technical aspects of the analysis and publication of data. Straightforward import and export facility between *WeSay* and *Fieldworks* is planned.

SIL supports linguists and language communities through the development of affordable, appropriate language development technology. Worthy of special mention here is another technology for producing reading materials that has been used successfully by local language communities in various parts of the world. *Shellbook Publishing Systems*[42] provides software that enables local users to insert culturally appropriate text and illustrations into a template for an existing publication. Through this method, high quality materials with accurate vital information can be produced as a supplement to locally created literature.

9. CONCLUDING REMARKS. This paper has briefly reviewed the history of SIL International language development work in Austronesian languages, giving special consideration to issues of language endangerment and revitalization. Using the Malaysian Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education as a microcosm of today's Austronesian language communities, it shows that these communities are generally multilingual, increasingly linked to each other and to the outside world, ready to learn from the experiences of others, and often ready to commit to promoting and developing their own languages. Numerous factors influence the degree of vitality or endangerment of a particular language. Many researchers hold that literacy in a local language is a crucial factor for a language's survival in today's world. The most critical issue, however, is whether parents are passing on the language of the community to children in the home. Assuming that parents are still passing on their heritage language to their children, many of the language development products and activities that SIL has traditionally helped produce can be considered as prerequisites for language revitalization, or in the words of Batibo (2007), "language empowerment". Finally, this paper offered some ways that SIL may best assist those working on behalf of endangered Austronesian languages today—namely, through efforts in documenting and describing, consulting and training, and providing affordable, appropriate language software.

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[41] For further information, see http://www.wesay.org.

[42] *Shellbook Publishing Systems* is a private corporation, not part of SIL. For further explanation of the *Shellbook* philosophy and methodology, see http://www.shellbook.com/about.faces.

The very fact that computer software enters into a discussion on language revitalization indicates that we are in a different world in this twenty-first century than when SIL began language development work in Austronesian languages in the 1950s. At the same time that national and international languages and the forces of globalization are threatening to wipe out the majority of the world's local languages, technology also offers some means for strengthening the role and status of endangered languages. Still, in the words of Joshua Fishman, when it comes to promoting the vitality of local languages, the most important "laptop" is the lap of the parent or grandparent in passing on one's intangible heritage to the next generation.[43]

Like today's local language communities, SIL is ready to learn from and link with others as we serve the parents and grandparents, children and grandchildren who desire to preserve and promote their increasingly endangered languages.

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[43] Fishman 1996: "My wife engages in laptop publishing. She publishes in the Yiddish language for our grandchildren. But let me tell you, the true lap top here is my lap and her lap and the laps of the children's mother and father. That is a bond with the language that will stay with them after we are long gone. That is the lap top of language."

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