



LANGSCAPE

News and views from TERRALINGUA:
partnerships for linguistic and biological diversity.

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Comments and suggestions are welcome, and we do welcome articles and news items for publication. Please send all communications regarding this newsletter to the Editor, Ms. Anthea Fallen-Bailey, either by electronic mail (afallenb@wvi.com) or regular mail (41620 Fish Hatchery Drive, Scio, Oregon 97374-9747. U.S.A.). Membership inquiries should also be sent to Ms. Fallen-Bailey, while membership renewals and fees/donations (if any), as well as general Terralingua correspondence, should be sent to Mr. David Harmon, Terralingua, P. O. Box 122, Hancock, Michigan 49930-0122. U.S.A., or at dharmon@georgewright.org.

Please note that our NEW Web site is available at www.terralingua.org. We thank Dr. Martha Macri, of the Department of Native American Studies at U.C.-Davis, for hosting Terralingua's original Web site.



activities is available on the G.D.F. Web site, <www.globaldiversity.org.uk>. Gary has provided the following summary of the Foundation's activities:

Training courses: we organize multidisciplinary courses on cultural and natural diversity, conservation and community development. The courses form part of graduate and adult education programs of selected academic institutions in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Pacific.

Field research: in key natural areas near these institutions, we support field study centres where local researchers and students gain practical experience in documenting, monitoring and promoting cultural and natural diversity. Areas of specific research focus include the dynamics of ethnobiological knowledge, community access to biological resources and the valuation of biodiversity.

Fellowships and grants: the Foundation supports multidisciplinary diploma and graduate degree programs in collaboration with botanical gardens, research institutes and universities. We provide fellowships for talented young colleagues from diverse countries who are studying for advanced degrees, and grants to support their research at field study centers.

Community and conservation: near its field study centers, the Foundation contributes to continuing conservation and development projects that involve local communities, governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations and academic research centers.

Publications and symposia: we present the results of our applied scientific research in seminars, symposia and scientific publications. To educate the general public on the threats to global diversity, we support exhibits, publications and tours that focus on agricultural diversity, cultural traditions and natural history.

Donations and fund-raising: we work in collaboration with international and local organizations that provide in-kind contributions and institutional support. Contributions from individuals and grants from funding agencies support our efforts. Our trading subsidiary, Diversity Excursions Ltd., offers tours of cultural, ecological and historical sites, providing profits to G.D.F.

Profiles and partnerships: we collaborate with a diverse network of people and institutions. Biographical profiles of these colleagues and descriptions of collaborating institutions are available on the G.D.F. Web site.

For additional information, visit the G.D.F. Web site or contact Dr. Gary Martin at <gj_martin@compuserve.com>.



by Kieran Suckling
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The things closest to us are often the most mysterious. Dance, for example, is a universal fact of life. We teach, document, enjoy, censor, celebrate, and commercialize it every day. But why do humans dance? What does it mean? Why is dance so often linked to religion, eroticism and animals? Is dance expressive, exploratory, or celebratory? Why do so many cultures describe light, water, animals, the cosmos and their divinities in terms of dance? Painting, song, religion, eating, cooking, sexuality, story telling and language present similar mysteries. Even an act as seemingly utilitarian as shopping has sufficient psychological, spiritual, and political dimensions to produce a literature of its own. That humans have lived and died and thought about the world for hundreds of thousands of years, yet have no univocal answers to these questions, is not a failure of philosophy. Philosophy's virtue is to reveal for each age and individual the wondrous strangeness of a world which exceeds our knowledge of it.

Nonetheless, western philosophy, at least since Socrates, has tended to explore these questions in a narrow anthropocentric manner. If it seems obvious that dancing, singing, and speaking are human traits, and that they should be explored by examining humans, we should pause to notice that for indigenous and non-western cultures around the world, and for most of western history, neither premise is obvious. Outside the restraint of western humanism, human existence has always been thought of in relationship to other species, places, natural processes and some sense of the holy. I believe that language is not best understood as a human trait. By this I don't mean to raise the question (though it is a good one) of whether other animals also possess language. But more profoundly, whether humans possess it. This is not say humans are without language, but that the languages we "have" are not reducible to human needs, desires, ideas, or projects. In a profound sense, languages are not communication "tools" and are not under our control. Diachronically, they precede and will survive every individual and culture, drawing on a rich history of meaning within and between languages. Synchronically, they are not just about the world, but proceed by way of it, in an infinitely complex and shifting semantic ecology.

As any Basque, French Canadian, or Apache can attest, language is closely linked to issues of identity and power. The perception of who does or does not belong to a given language, or to language itself, is of enormous political and philosophical importance. Less powerful cultures and their languages are routinely oppressed by more powerful cultures. Cultures which perceive non-humans as excluded from language in general, tend to identify humanity exclusive of nature and oppress if not obliterate the plants, animals, rivers, forests and deserts around them.

That humanity today is experiencing the greatest onslaught of extinction of languages and species in its history, at the same time that it is experiencing an unparalleled global process of language hegemony should give pause for thought.

The muses of philosophy, Socrates advised an aspiring philosopher, "concern themselves with the heavens and whole story of existence — divine and human".¹ The whole story does not essentially involve trees, rivers, wolves or cicadas. It is not to be found in mythic stories and especially not in the preponderance of mythological beings which are part human, part divine and part plant or animal. These identity-bending stories and relationships can no doubt be reduced to human imagination, explains Socrates, but "I have no time for such work and the reason is, my friend, that I've not yet succeeded in obeying the Delphic injunction to 'know myself', and it seems to me absurd to consider problems about other beings while I am still in ignorance about my own nature". Socrates believed that examination of nature and myth would divert him from self-knowledge because they are extraneous to the question of self-identify. That question can only be taken up within the city walls among those who speak. But his ironic acknowledgement of the infinite number of metamorphic beings and his conflicting assertions that nature doesn't speak and that philosophers must not listen to its speech, suggest a deeper kind of deferral. If the language we partake of involves other beings as well, if they are essential rather than extraneous to the project of self-knowledge, then it will be impossible to arrive at a transparent, atomic self. Relationships and multiplicity will be irreducible. Socrates would indeed have no time, because the anthropocentric self-knowledge he envisions would never be attained if he included nature within its scope.

As the western quest for self-understanding turned with Socrates away from our relationship with other species, those species and their habitats were destroyed on a scale unparalleled in human history. Even with the planetary extinction crisis approaching the catastrophic level of the Earth's five great extinction events,² self-knowledge and satisfaction have not been attained. If, *contra* Socrates, self-knowledge necessitates engagement with other species, what becomes of us when those species are driven extinct?

An evolutionary account of humanity promises to provide a broader perspective.³ It needs to be shown, however, that there is a continuous relationship between the evolutionary origin of human culture and its current state of affairs. Many a humanist has argued after all, that regardless of our evolutionary origins, humans have long since moved on to a process of cultural "evolution" in which only other humans are of essential relevance. In this paper I want to explore a different linkage between the lives of humans and other species, though I suspect a full treatment would need to come back to the question of evolution.

If it is undeniable that humans in some sense create and employ language, it is also true that every individual is born into a language which preceded them and will continue after their death. Language partially shapes the infant's brain structure and greatly contributes toward his or her understanding of the world. In a real sense, languages possess people as much as people possess languages.

¹ Plato. *Phaedrus*. Translated by Walter Hamilton, 1973. London: Penguin Books.

² For a review of current research and projections, see Suckling, K. 2000. A House on Fire: linking the biological and linguistic diversity crises. *Animal Law* 6:i-ix.

³ See for example, Hauser, M.D. 1998. *The Evolution of Human Communication*. Cambridge: M.I.T. Press; Shepard, P. 1996. *The Others: how animals made us human*. Washington, D.C.: Island Press; and Dunbar, R. 1996. *Grooming, Gossip, and the Evolution of Language*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Language has an undeniable and powerful utilitarian function. By communication with others (including other species) we can draw attention to a falling leaf, construct an international peace treaty, or give directions to a supermarket. This aspect of language has dominated the main course of western philosophy for 2,500 years. The idea that language exists to communicate clear and distinct ideas in order to accomplish goals or transmit facts reached an apex in logical positivism which proclaimed that all other uses of language are devious, confused, or of mere ornamental value.⁴ If language is essentially a tool for the communication of clear ideas, why is it so full of metaphors, puns, similes, analogies, complex semantic clusters, indefinable concepts, folk etymologies and colloquialisms? Why do we misunderstand each other so often? Indeed, why does so much of actual language use seem to be engaged in something other than understanding? To ignore this side of language or relegate it to error or inessential ornament, is an act of force, not understanding. It blinds us to — or better, shelters us from — the fact that in language, something is happening which is not *other than* communication, but is not *reducible to* communication. At least not only to communication.

That every language is a disseminating network of inter-related meanings we participate in rather than create; that this network exceeds, even subverts, human will; that more than communicate, language orientates (and disorientates) us in the world, is the insight of a philosophical current which accepts the centrality of language yet questions the premises of humanism. It prompts Heidegger to describe language as the “house of being”, Merleau-Ponty to associate it with the “flesh of the world”, Bachelard to advocate a philosophical method of linguistic reverie, Foucault to declare the “end of man”, Lyotard to promote the “inhuman”, and Derrida to insist that there is no safe haven of clear meaning free from the semantic play of language.

These philosophers are structuralists in that they see existence as a “network” of relationships rather than independently existing entities, they are post-structuralists in that they don’t view these relationships as structurally definable, and they are critics of humanism in that they challenge the belief that humans are masters of the world or even of their own existence. Though a challenge is put to humanism, the hyper-rationalism of western philosophy and linguistics, the destruction of non-western cultures, and monolingualism, it is not clear where plants and animals fit in. If there is a play in language which connects us to the world in a manner exceeding human will, is it because language arises in a biocultural ecology, or because language has replaced humanity as the self-referential, constituting center of existence? While the insights of post-structuralism (for want of a better name) open onto the former, it is not openly embraced. Philosophy has absorbed three (Nietzsche, Freud and Marx) of the four great idol-smashers of the 19th century, but is still ambivalent, even anxious about Darwin.

In the West, for at least 2,500 years, art, culture, cooking and especially language have constituted the defining characteristics by which humans have been distinguished from and valorized over other animals (not to mention plants, rocks, and fungi). Yet these most human of human traits have everywhere and always been bound to other species. There is no culture

⁴ Ironically, the conception of language as a tool inevitably leads to the demand that humans conform to the tool, rather than vice versa. There is a deconstructive reading here that would encompass Carnap’s censure of phenomenology, Eurocentric anthropology’s view of totemism as a category “mistake”, Descartes’s description of reason as straightjacket, and Plato’s charioteer.

on Earth whose metaphors, folk stories, myths, music, painting, song, dance and sculpture; whose cups, bowls, jewelry, linoleum, wall paper, clothes, and toys; and whose homes, watches, cars, boats, sports teams, and computers do not reflect the great diversity of species, landscapes and natural processes which surround them. The most sterile office will have a wildlife calendar, the most austere scientific treaties will employ animal metaphors, the strictest parents will provide their children with animal toys.

E.O. Wilson⁵ coined the term “biophilia” to describe the universal human fascination with other species and his belief that our mental well-being requires their existence. Some researchers have set out to more or less rigorously measure biophilia (and biophobia), others have theorized its role as an evolved trait.⁶ The important rôle of non-human animals in human psychological development has also been shown.⁷ More elusive is the semantic rôle of biological diversity. It requires a demonstration that language always “employs” plants and animals, and a theory of language which shows that meaning is not only *about* plants and animals, it proceeds *by way of* them. This would be primarily a theory of metaphor and symbolism. It would show that just as our bodies cannot function without a host of symbiotic animals and bacteria, our minds cannot function without biological diversity. Plants and animals, then, are not only what we eat and who we live near, they are also how we understand the world. They are part of who we are and inseparable from the quest for self-understanding. As Paul Shepard wrote: “The human species emerged enacting, dreaming and thinking animals and cannot be fully itself without them”.⁸

Languages are not only being hollowed out by the extinction of plants and animals (or their removal from daily experience), they are being driven to extinction themselves. In fact, the proportional extinction rate of human languages is greater than for non-human species. As many as 50% of all existing world languages are already moribund. Between 20 and 50% are likely to go extinct within 100 years. Ninety percent of all existing languages could become moribund or extinct within 100 years. This has led some linguists to classify 95% of all existing languages as endangered.⁹

In addition to the destruction and/or assimilation of indigenous peoples, the linguistic diversity crisis has radically simplified — for the remaining languages — the multilingual context in which languages and cultures developed over hundreds of thousands of years. The diversity of co-existing languages and cultures prior to the continuous colonization of the globe by a small number of dominant nations was astounding. In what is now California, indigenous peoples once spoke over 100 distinct languages.¹⁰ This small area supported more linguistic diversity than

⁵ Wilson, E.O. 1984. *Biophilia*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

⁶ See essays in *The Biophilia Hypothesis* (Kellert, S.R. and E.O. Wilson (eds.)). 1993. Washington, D.C.: Island Press.

⁷ Searles, H.F. 1960. *The Nonhuman Environment in Normal Development and in Schizophrenia*. New York: International University Press; Shepard, P. 1982. *Nature and Madness*. Georgia University Press: Athens.

⁸ Shepard, P. 1999. *Encounters With Nature*. Washington, D.C.: Island Press.

⁹ Harmon, D. 1998. Sameness and silence: language extinctions and the dawning of a biocultural approach to diversity. *Global Biodiversity* 8 (3):2-10, Canadian Museum of Nature.

¹⁰ Ibid.

all of Europe. Over 300 native languages were spoken in what is now the United States. Meso-America had 80 distinct languages, South America over 500. At least 250 distinct languages were spoken in aboriginal Australia. Sixty-five percent of California's indigenous languages are extinct, with many of the remaining spoken by fewer than 10 people.¹¹ Only two or three of California's indigenous languages are spoken by more than 150 people. Overall, about 42% of the 300 languages indigenous to the United States are extinct. Eighty percent have become moribund since European colonization.¹² Only 20 (7%) are still being passed onto children.

There are approximately 6,500 languages on Earth today. About 50% of all humans, however, speak and think in one of ten globally dominant languages.¹³ That means 0.2% of languages hold sway over 50% of the human species and likely upwards of 85% of the globe's land surface. These are the language cultures primarily responsible for the global extinction crisis and the eradication/assimilation/marginalization of indigenous cultures. One percent of the human race, meanwhile, speaks 50-60% of all human languages. This one percent and all its wealth of knowledge is being driven to extinction at an unprecedented rate.

For all the energy western philosophy has devoted to language since the "linguistic turn" there has been scant attention paid to the catastrophic extinction of languages that is sweeping over the planet. If language is the "house of being," that house is collapsing. It is true that language itself is not in danger of extinction, but nobody (not even Chomsky) speaks language in general. The loss of languages is not only a tragedy involving the languages which are lost, but the surviving, dominant languages as well. Languages have always existed in relationship to a multitude of languages surrounding and bearing upon them. Multilingualism between and within cultures has been the human norm until very recently.¹⁴ Its eradication is dramatically altering our relationship to language, culture, and the world. As the Tower of Babel¹⁵ story suggests, multilingualism establishes limits to the authority and rights and projects of individual cultures. Encountering other languages, we are reminded of the limits of our own culture; recognizing that multiple languages legitimately exist within our culture, we are more aware of political repression; seeing that even the most isolated language is always and already infiltrated by other languages shatters the illusion of monolingualism.¹⁶

Dominant, illusionary monolingual cultures do not recognize a limit to their beliefs or exploitation rights, because they no longer genuinely encounter or become situated by a diversity of other languages, ideas, cultures and species. The external world is thought of, and to some degree

11 Hinton, L. 1994. *Flutes of Fire*. Berkeley: Heyday Books.

12 Op. cit. Harmon (1998).

13 Op. cit. Harmon (1998).

14 Mühlhäusler, P. 1996. *Linguistic Ecology: Language Change and Linguistic Imperialism in the Pacific Region*. London: Routledge Press.

15 Genesis 11:1-9.

16 See Jacques Derrida's *Monolingualism of the Other; or, the prothesis of origin*. (1996, Stanford: Stanford University Press (trans. by Patrick Mensah) for an interesting discussion of these themes. Derrida's repeated meditations on the Tower of Babel myth are also instructive (see Bennington, G. and J. Derrida. 1994. *Jacques Derrida*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

becomes, simply a modulation of their own desires.¹⁷ The resolution of the global bio-linguistic diversity crisis will require not only a re-conceptualizing of our relationship to other species and cultures, but a re-thinking our own identity and relationship to language. The centrality of language to identity — and its very real political consequences — affirms the nearly universal cultural belief that maintaining a proper relationship to language is a quasi-transcendental value. Far from language mysticism, it is a hard-nosed acknowledgement that the conditions of the political possibility of how we live are closely related to how we abide by language.



From: Iron Thunderhorse
Via the Editor

News from
The Algonquian Confederacy of the Quinipiac Tribal Council, Inc.

Aque quah wirrekesuk (hello and good day). In 1999 the Algonquian Confederacy of the Quinipiac Tribal Council established the Algonquian Confederacies Language Institute (A.C.L.I.):

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE: A.C.L.I. is a special coalition of Algonquian Elders, culture-bearers, Native speakers, linguists and scholars working together in mutual support, who are dedicated to the following goals....

GOALS AND INTENTIONS:

- 1) to preserve, protect and perpetuate our Algonquian language traditions;
- 2) to develop a comprehensive lingua franca to be shared by Algonquian groups of Southern Coastal New England (MA., R.I., CT., L.I.);
- 3) to gather and disseminate linguistic and related cultural materials in the continuing studies of the A.C.L.I.;
- 4) to encourage the linguistic repatriation of materials that are kept in archives out of our control and/or accessibility;
- 5) to conduct scholarly studies and share research with other native groups as well as the academic world;
- 6) to restore balance to our Algonquian cultural circles that were previously disrupted by the erosion of linguistic traditions;
- 7) to restore the ancient connections with mother and sister language dialects within the Algonquian language family.

The A.C.L.I. publishes an annual journal as well as booklets. Anyone interested in joining the Language Institute and/or supporting this work, or for any information on annual activities organised by the A.C.Q.T.C., should contact Biwâbiko Paddaquahas (Iron Thunderhorse), the A.C.Q.T.C. Thunder Clan Grand Sachem and A.C.L.I. Linguistic Culture Bearer, or Little Owl (Ruth Duncan), A.C.Q.T.C. Thunder Clan Duda and Headwoman, by mail at 201 Church Street,

¹⁷ See Duerr, H.P. 1985. *Dreamtime: concerning the boundary between wilderness and civilization*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, for an intriguing discussion of the necessity of limits in establishing community identity.