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## Living Languages – Lenguas Vivas – Línguas Vivas: Joining efforts towards language revitalization

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# Living Languages – Lenguas Vivas – Línguas Vivas: Joining efforts towards language revitalization

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the last 20 years, language revitalization efforts have grown to the point where we can now talk about a global movement to sustain the linguistic diversity that exists in different parts of the world. In its resolution 71/178 adopted in 2016, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly declared its deep concern for the current state of “the vast number of endangered languages, in particular Indigenous languages” and stressed “that, despite continuing efforts, there is an urgent need to preserve, promote and revitalize endangered languages” (p. 2). Different local, national, and international organizations are now dedicated to this cause, and there is a growing consensus that, similarly to the threat to biodiversity, the time to work towards the preservation of linguistic diversity is now. In 2020, after a successful year-long awareness raising campaign as part of the International Year of Indigenous Languages led by UNESCO, the UN General Assembly proclaimed 2022-2032 as the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (UN Report A/74/396, 2019, p. 9). Throughout the world, different communities and institutions are preparing their plans of action for the next ten years and beyond.

Because of their global reach, the initiatives and perspectives on issues related to language revitalization are so diverse that uses of the term *revitalization* often need to be nuanced. Ultimately, however, they all revolve around contexts of language shift which usually share two important characteristics: 1) there is a reduction of domains in which the language is and can be used (“loss of domains”) and 2) there is a reduction in the number of users of the language (“loss of users”). While the factors leading to language shift—e.g., assimilationist state policies, war and genocide, colonization, etc.—are often shared across contexts, the interplay between different factors in a specific situation is unique and results from the social and economic histories of the language communities in question and of individuals. In response to this diversity of situations and practices,

*Living Languages – Lenguas Vivas – Línguas Vivas* is interested in sharing knowledge about efforts in a broad range of areas such as *language maintenance* where the intent is to maintain the existing vitality of a language, *language revitalization* in which the focus is on the reversal of an ongoing process of language shift, and of *language reclamation* or *awakening* in the particular context in which a language has ceased to have first language users.

Diverse practices and perspectives in revitalization efforts are not only expected, but also necessary in order to achieve positive results in starkly different historical, socio-economic, and political contexts. After all, language revitalization is done by and for unique language communities with their own characteristics and histories (Farfán and Olko, 2021). Pérez Báez et al. (2019) further show the multitude of scenarios where endangered language revitalization is taking place and the many forms that these efforts can have. Importantly, prior experiences have shown that, despite the specific form that a particular effort may take, the degree of success of such effort depends heavily on the involvement, availability, and perseverance of practitioners from the language community (Hinton & Hale, 2001; Tsunoda, 2013; Grenoble & Whaley, 2006).

While reflecting on the community-specific and unique nature of language revitalization efforts as well as the role of community-based revitalization practitioners, we, as academics whose work seeks to support language revitalization, have considered the roles that we could and should play in these efforts. Our tentative answers led us to conceptualize the journal *Living Languages – Lenguas Vivas – Línguas Vivas*. It became clear that there is a need for a publication venue where community-based revitalizationists, whether academics themselves or not, could share their knowledge and practices. For this venue to be truly welcoming of all community-based revitalization practitioners and their experiences, some procedures, requirements, and barriers of academic style publications needed to be reconceptualized. Our approach at *Living Languages – Lenguas Vivas – Línguas Vivas*, therefore, is to publish three different kinds of contributions in addition to academic-style *Research Papers*. These include *Chronicles* that describe actions, projects, initiatives, and even individual journeys that lead to revitalization efforts, *Project Descriptions* of work in progress or planned for the future, and *Pedagogical Materials* to compile them into a repository that can be accessed by a global community of revitalizationists. The review process for each type of contribution has been carefully designed to accommodate the needs of university-based authors, and at the same time encourage and welcome submissions by many other contributors, all the while ensuring culturally-informed rigor. We provide the relevant details in Section 2 below.

Thinking about the plurality of voices that needed to be represented for a true exchange of perspectives, we also concluded that a publication in one single language such as English which already dominates in academic publishing, would hamper inclusion. Moreover, we firmly believe that

to play a direct, active role in fostering language revitalization, the journal should also be open to disseminating knowledge in the languages that are being revitalized. Therefore, *Living Languages – Lenguas Vivas – Línguas Vivas* publishes papers in any language being revitalized plus three other linguas francas (English, Portuguese and Spanish). This first volume, thus, includes a peer-reviewed research paper written in Kaingang (Glottocode: kain1272; Brazil) by Márcia Nascimento, and another in Chikashshanompa' (Glottocode: chic1270; USA) and English by Kari Chew and Lokosh (Joshua Hinson), in addition to papers in English, Portuguese, and Spanish. We hope to have many more contributions in the future written in languages being revitalized, and look forward to expanding the number of linguas francas that articles can be published in and which is now, by necessity, limited to the expertise of the current team of editors.

Another overarching goal of this initiative is to reach out to people working on language revitalization in different parts of the world to facilitate the growth of a knowledge-sharing network, using the journal as a catalyst. To accomplish this, we opted for an editorial structure that relies on a team of editors rather than on one or two individuals. At the time of its launch, the journal has 10 editors, and we expect this number could grow with the addition of more diverse geographic and linguistic representation. The editors handle the academic peer-review process for papers and provide editorial support for a diversity of revitalization practitioners who want to disseminate their knowledge through *Chronicles*, *Project Descriptions* and *Pedagogical Materials*. The journal also has an editorial board whose primary role is to promote the journal and invite a diversity of revitalization practitioners to publish in *Living Languages – Lenguas Vivas – Línguas Vivas*.

## 2. TYPES OF PUBLICATION

As mentioned in section 1, *Living Languages – Lenguas Vivas – Línguas Vivas* accepts four different types of contributions with different formats and goals: *Chronicles*, *Research Papers*, *Project Descriptions*, and *Pedagogical Materials*. To accommodate this diverse set of papers, the journal publishes two types of volumes: Regular volumes which will include *Chronicles*, *Research Papers* and *Project Descriptions*, and special *Pedagogical Materials* volumes. Each type of contribution is reviewed using a specifically designed set of criteria and procedures, as described below. Further details are available in the journal's website at <https://scholarworks.umass.edu/livinglanguages/>.

*Chronicles* are a special type of contribution aimed at sharing narratives, testimonials and experiences in language revitalization scenarios. These papers are intended as a forum for language communities, their members, language activists and research scholars that want to support other revitalizationists by sharing their experiences. There is no specific written style that is required for such papers. We encourage authors to explore a diversity of epistemological frames and to create a narrative that reflects the work from the perspective of the language community. *Chronicles* can

describe different types of actions taken by a community or communities to sustain, revitalize and/or improve the use, teaching or learning of the target language. They could deal with a description of a more complex, large-scale project, or focus on particular actions taken to prepare materials, provide teacher education, promote activities with the language in the community, etc. Some potential topics addressed by a *Chronicle* could discuss individual and collective experiences with language transmission, language training for specific professions (translators, educators, medical personnel, etc.), cultural production in the language (music, film, performing arts in general), the visibility of the language in public and private domains and in daily life, among other topics. We strongly encourage authors to think about potential outcomes and describe, for example, what happened during or after the activities and the impact that those activities had in people's language use, general attitudes towards the language and everyday practices related to the language. The peer-review process for *Chronicles* can vary and will depend on the language the paper is written in. For contributions in languages being revitalized, we ask authors to arrange for another member of the language community to review the contribution and also suggest someone external who, if proficient in the language in question, might be able to review the paper. In some cases, the community itself may be required to approve the content before it gets published. *Chronicles* will be evaluated in terms of how informative they are. We encourage *Chronicles* that are centered on community perspectives and that describe the impact of revitalization efforts on the language community.

*Research Papers* should explicitly focus on practical and theoretical topics in language revitalization. Authors should carefully read statements about the philosophy and goals of the journal available on its website. We do understand that approaches to language revitalization are multipronged and may require a multitude of customized actions based on different disciplines. When using methodological and theoretical frameworks from other disciplines such as general linguistics, education, and anthropology, authors should establish the connections between the body of research presented and the methodological issues in the subfield of language revitalization. As a good rule of thumb, authors should ask themselves how the work described in their manuscript helps support language revitalization and whether this support is clearly described and illustrated in the text. Some of the issues addressed by *Research Papers* can include topics in language documentation and description to support revitalization efforts, language program development, ethnographic studies of revitalization initiatives, historical perspectives on language revitalization, language planning and policy in revitalization scenarios, diasporic studies and language revitalization, language identity and ideologies and their impact on language revitalization, among many others. All *Research Papers* will undergo peer-review by two anonymous reviewers. This process will be double-anonymized to the extent possible. However, in order to accommodate for the diversity of papers that the journal seeks to publish, we will implement adaptive approaches to the peer-review process. For papers in

languages being revitalized, we ask authors to arrange for another member of the language community to review the contribution and also suggest someone external who, if proficient in the language in question, might review the paper. In addition, for papers reporting on a community-based revitalization effort, we ask that the authors provide one to three names of members of the relevant community who participated in or know about the described experience and can provide a peer-review of the paper from a community perspective.

*Project Descriptions* will present revitalization project proposals at different stages, from the conceptualization phase to their implementation or evaluation. The primary difference between a *Project Description* and a *Chronicle* is the stage of the work. *Chronicles* should report on current or past experiences. *Project Descriptions*, on the other hand, are plans for future work and work in progress being undertaken by a given community or group of revitalizationists. This article type can provide an opportunity to have a future project reviewed by peers with specialized knowledge in language revitalization and validated by way of a publication, which could prove useful when presenting the project for funding or for approval, for instance. *Project Descriptions* for language documentation and language description projects can be accepted provided that they make a clear connection to revitalization work. *Project Descriptions* will be evaluated in terms of how informative they are. We encourage descriptions centered on community perspectives and that describe the impact of revitalization efforts within the language community. Authors may also indicate with their submissions if there are any particular perspectives or advice that they would like to receive through the peer-review process.

*Pedagogical Materials* will be published in an annual special volume of the journal. Publications in this special volume will include the *Pedagogical Materials* themselves (or samples of the materials) accompanied by a written description of the characteristics, context, development, and use of the materials. The journal encourages the republication of materials that have been published elsewhere, provided that the appropriate permissions can be obtained. For example, if a workbook was published by a community or governmental agency in one country, but the authors believe that it could serve as a good model for other revitalization projects, they can submit their materials to be published by *Living Languages – Lenguas Vivas – Línguas Vivas* online along with a written description. The goal of these special volumes is to serve as a repository that can be accessed by a larger, international audience. Submissions in this category will require two documents. First, authors should send the pedagogical material being published, for example: games, flashcards, texts, storybooks, workbooks, exercises, lesson plans, dictionaries, pedagogical grammars, websites, apps, etc. There are no specific guidelines for editing these materials, but they should have a clear use or purpose in language revitalization efforts. They should be submitted in a fully edited and usable state (i.e., not as works-in-progress; however, we understand that some materials, especially those that exist online, may be

dynamic in their content). All materials should be submitted as PDFs. For websites, apps, and other materials that are not readily submitted as PDFs, please create a PDF document that includes information on accessing the material (e.g., a permanent URL) and 10 to 20 representative screenshots or photos of the material with captions for each image. Second, authors need to send an accompanying text with a description of the material. All *Pedagogical Materials* and written descriptions will undergo peer-review. The two documents will be evaluated separately but will only be published if both documents are accepted for publication. The materials will be evaluated in terms of their quality and their potential to serve as a model for similar work in the future. The reviewers will evaluate their pedagogical relevance and quality with a focus on the contribution of the materials to community-based revitalization efforts. They will also evaluate the quality of their design. The written description will be evaluated in terms of its ability to describe the characteristics, context, development, and use of the materials.

### 3. THE FIRST VOLUME

This inaugural volume of *Living Languages – Lenguas Vivas – Línguas Vivas* features 10 contributions that include both *Chronicles* and *Research Papers*. As mentioned earlier, these contributions include a paper in Chikashshanompa' and English by Kari A. B. Chew and Lokosh (Joshua D. Hinson), and one in Kaingang by Márcia Nascimento. In addition, there are contributions written in English, in Spanish, and in Portuguese, and one contribution is published in both a Spanish and an English version. This array of contributions and contributors cover various regions of the American continent from Brazil and the Andean regions of South America, to Costa Rica in Central America, and to Mexico and the United States in North America.

With the goal of sharing knowledge about the diversity of revitalization efforts, three papers provide insights into little-known cases. Jende's *Chronicle* provides a description of the Tsa'fiki language (Glottocode: colo1256; Ecuador) where revitalization is built around the fact that half the families in the community have shifted to Spanish. South America is the most linguistically diverse region of the world (Campbell, 2012) and therefore much remains to be understood about the diversity of language endangerment scenarios and the resulting efforts in place to sustain the languages in the region. Works such as Jende's article contribute to broadening our understanding of the diversity of revitalization contexts. The article by Balykova and Godoy on the Guató language (Glottocode: guat1253; Brazil) provides insights into the revitalization of a highly endangered language. The *Chronicle* by García Estrada and Porrás Cabrera on the Brorán language (Glottocode: boru1252; Costa Rica) raises critical issues about notions such as language dormancy and the relevance of related languages in the reconstruction of language knowledge for language awakening. Little has

been published on these topics in the literature and that which exists (see, for instance, Baldwin and Costa, 2016) is mostly limited to cases in the United States and Australia.

Other articles in this inaugural volume highlight domains of language revitalization that are of relevance across revitalization efforts around the world. The *Chronicle* by Nascimento about and in Kaingang addresses the imperative that schools ought to facilitate the development of speakers of Indigenous languages. The Global Survey of Language Revitalization Efforts (henceforth “Survey”, Pérez Báez et al. 2019) showed that out of 245 responses from around the world, 26% have as an objective the teaching of the target languages in structured settings. School-based efforts in particular have a dual function in that, in addition to recreating a new and deliberate process of language transmission, they reclaim participation in a domain of language use that has considerable impact in the lives of children—the domain of schooling—and which is usually reserved to majority languages.

In the Survey, when asked about the assets that have facilitated a revitalization effort, 12% of responses centered on the support that academic disciplines and institutions can lend to revitalization efforts. Five of the articles in this inaugural volume illustrate such contributions. Balykova and Godoy explain how status planning, corpus planning and acquisition planning can be applied to the revitalization of the highly endangered Guató language. The papers by García Weyandt and López de la Rosa, and by Moreno Villamar describe applied uses of theoretical models to support the revitalization of Wixárika (Glottocode: huic1243; Mexico) and P’urhépecha (Glottocode: pure1242; Mexico) respectively. The paper by Yepez-Reyes, Ortíz Pacheco and Morean describe a service-learning model at the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador implemented in support of language revitalization, to the benefit of the language community and the university students. Acosta’s paper describes an even broader approach that goes beyond institutional walls and disciplinary silos to contribute towards cultural production through an interaction between humanities, and the visual and performing arts in support of languages, knowledge systems and identities.

Community-building has a crucial role in revitalization. In the Survey, over a quarter of the responses about revitalization objectives focus on strengthening the language community by strengthening the language itself and vice versa. This points to the importance of language vitality for the well-being of the community and to the multi-faceted nature of revitalization efforts. In the words of a Nuu-wee-ya’ (Athabaskan, USA) revitalizationist, “revitalization is about putting the world back together again” (Viles, 2018) in ways that a community knows are best for them and that include re-engaging with cultural and linguistic practices as well as sociocultural knowledge. All papers in this inaugural volume bring up this topic in one way or another. The paper by Chew and Lokosh on and in Chikashshanompa’ highlights the need and relevance of acknowledging the contributions of individual community members in language sustainability, especially in the context of extreme oppression.



The articles by Moreno Villamar on P'urhépecha and by García Weyandt and López de la Rosa on Wixárika both describe revitalization in diaspora contexts. The literature on revitalization is heavily focused on place and language, with place being defined by an ancestral homeland. However, migration within geopolitical borders as in the case of the Wixárika community in an urban Mexican context, and across such borders as in the case of the P'urhépecha community in Washington state, USA, is rarely discussed. Yet, migration is high-scale around the world and has been shown to promote language shift (Pérez Báez 2014). As such, migration needs to be adequately explored for its potential role in revitalization. Kenfield's paper explores further complexities in that the author is herself in diaspora, questioning her role as an advocate for the revitalization of Quechua languages as she negotiates claims to community belonging in the context of historically layered identities.

The contributions of this diverse group of revitalization practitioners are introduced by two guest contributors Bruna Franchetto of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro and Luis Enrique López-Hurtado Quiroz of the Funproeib Andes and Red FEIAL. The latter takes the reader through a thorough yet accessible synthesis of important changes in language revitalization in Latin America. In particular, the author points out the relevance of a diversity of language revitalization domains with an emphasis on the arts, as Acosta's paper does, and draws attention to the complexities about identity and participation in revitalization that Kenfield's paper raises. Franchetto, in turn, presents a brief description of the most recent revitalization efforts in Brazil and how Indigenous communities from all over the country are organizing multiple local, regional, and national working groups to defend their languages, cultures, lands and ultimately their right to exist. In this compelling piece, Franchetto establishes the evermore direct connection between language revitalization and Indigenous resistance movements in Brazil, and calls everyone to action to defend the linguistic and cultural diversity in the largest Latin American country.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

There are many challenges to preparing, editing, and maintaining a multilingual publication that proposes to break editorial barriers to share knowledge produced outside as well as inside academia. Although the journal's mission is perfectly clear to our team of editors, the editorial choices presented in this paper represent our initial attempts to achieve the ambitious goals we have set for the journal. As far as we know, *Living Languages – Lenguas Vivas – Línguas Vivas* is the first international, multilingual journal solely dedicated to issues in language revitalization. By putting the topic front and center, we hope to emphasize that authors should not treat themes in revitalization as subproducts of other initiatives in areas such as language documentation, Indigenous education, language description, or linguistic anthropology. In fact, we would like to encourage approaches that go beyond current issues on how language documentation, language description, and education can support language

revitalization. We would like to see authors taking the field to a new level by showcasing ideas where initiatives in language revitalization are driving innovative ways in which documentation, description and education projects are designed. Ultimately, we want to see this journal support and foster the exciting, multidisciplinary field of language revitalization.

We hope that authors working with and/or representing different languages and cultures decide to share their projects, insights, and experiences in language revitalization in this journal. We therefore encourage all revitalization practitioners to visit the journal's website and learn more about how to prepare and submit manuscripts.

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