Endangered Languages Project
Because every last word means another lost world...

HRELP
The Hans Rausing Endangered Languages Project based at SOAS, (Web site at: http://www.hrelp.org) is the umbrella organisation co-ordinating all activities relating to endangered languages funded by the Lisbet Rausing Charitable Fund.

ELAP
The Endangered Languages Academic Programme (ELAP) is situated within SOAS’ Department of Linguistics. ELAP conducts postgraduate teaching and research on the theory and practice of language documentation and description. Our goal is to develop the skills of those currently engaged in endangered language documentation and to train the next generation of language documenters. Currently there are 20 MA and 7 PhD enrolled students. ELAP also offers a comprehensive programme of public lectures, seminars, and workshops.

ELAR
HRELP’s Endangered Languages Archive (ELAR) is part of an international network of digital endangered language archives. ELAR (based in R201) provides a digital archive for the documentations and descriptions of endangered languages as a result of work by ELDP grantees and others. ELAR started accepting deposits in October 2005. ELAR is a foundation member of the Digital Endangered Languages and Musics Archives Network (DELAMAN). ELAR also hosts the Rausing Room which contains meeting space and a suite of computers equipped for language documentation, sound and video editing.

ELDP
The Endangered Languages Documentation Programme offers up to UK£1 million in grants each year for the documentation of endangered languages. ELDP has already awarded grants to over 70 teams that are documenting endangered languages across the world. In 2006, ELDP awarded 27 grants for a total of £756,333, for projects ranging from Acipa (Nigeria) to Zou Lei (China). ELDP is funded by the Lisbet Rausing Charitable Fund. It is governed by an international panel, and administered by SOAS.

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Russell Square
London WC1 0XG
Living On (with discussion with writer and cast)
A play by David Crystal (booking essential 020 7898 4578)
Monday 23rd April - 6:30-9:30pm (with interval) - Khalili Lecture Theatre

David Crystal is one of the world’s leading experts on Linguistics and the English language. The Endangered Languages Project at SOAS is proud to present the first London reading of his play ‘Living On’.

David Crystal began work on ‘Living On’ in the late 1990’s with Greg Doran, now associate director at the Royal Shakespeare Company. His play was based on an article he wrote on endangered languages for Civilization, the Library of Congress magazine.

“I created a ‘last speaker’ of a language, Shalema, invented a language, Tamasa, for him to speak, and gave him a cultural background which was a fusion of notions derived from several endangered-language communities around the world. The plot revolves around the interaction between him and a field linguist, Derek, who has been documenting his language, and a British Council officer, Miranda, who works in the city where Shalema lives. All has been going well, but then Shalema refuses to cooperate any further...”

In Languages We Live: Voices of the World
A film directed by Janus Billeskov Jansen
Tuesday 24th April - 5:30-6:30pm - Room B102

“In Languages We Live: Voices of the World” is a documentary about the world’s linguistic diversity. Through a number of personal stories the film asks: What is the significance of this loss to those who speak these languages as well as for the rest of us?

The film examines language as a social, political and cultural field. Without language, any form of human societal structure would be inconceivable. It is the fundament of our relationships with other people. Why do some languages become world languages, while others are in the process of dying out? How are our language and identity connected? What does it feel like to be the last person to speak a language? How do you document a language? How does language develop? How does one translate linguistic and cultural meaning from one language to another?

“To lose my mother tongue would be like being forced into language exile. I would lose my family’s history and culture.”
Director Janus Billeskov Jansen

Mlabri and Outsiders
A film directed by Signe Byrge Sørensen
Tuesday 24th April - 6:30-7:30pm - Room B102

For centuries the Mlabri have lived as hunters and gatherers in the jungles of northern Thailand, but the forest is disappearing and now modern society is closing in on them. So far they have managed to keep their identity and unique language alive, but at present they number only 300 people.

We meet them at a decisive moment in Mlabri history, when the first youngsters are getting ready to leave the community. This film, made by Danish film-makers Signe Byrge Sørensen and Janus Jansen is mainly in the Mlabri language with English subtitles.

Endangered Languages Project Open Day and Display of MA Students’ Work
Wednesday 25th April - 10am-4pm - R201

The Endangered Languages Archive (ELAR) at SOAS is one of the world’s leading centres for digital archiving of materials on endangered languages. It was established in 2004 and has facilities for digitising, displaying, accessing and manipulating audio, video, image and text materials on languages from around the world. The Open Day will present ELAR at work, and include discussion session of some current projects, such as “Dawes Online” a collaborative project with SOAS Library Archives to develop an interactive multimedia resource from the Dawes manuscript, the oldest and most important record of the Aboriginal language of Sydney, Australia.

There will also be a display of current work by students in the MA in Language Documentation and Description, including projects on “Communicating about our work”.

Fragments of the Owl’s Egg
A film directed by Kim McKenzie
Thursday 26th April - 5-6pm - Room G2

Subtle in structure, understated, full of grace and gentle laughter, this film tells several related stories: how Nadjamerek, a celebrated Australian Aboriginal artist, is directing a fire management project from his home at Kabulwarny; how rock art surrounds him at every turn; and how he quests far and wide by helicopter to find a lost art site he remembers from his youth. The story is told in Lofty’s beautiful, endangered language, Kundajnenghmi; it is narrated by linguist Murray Garde and the words we hear seem to mingle with the splendour of the plateau, its rocks, streams and paperbarks, its cave walls and overhangs filled with ancient art.

Fragments, is a film made on Aboriginal terms dealing with traditional preoccupations, yet it is very much an artistic hybrid of two ways of seeing. The pathos of the story is extreme: a movie narrated in a dying language, paying tribute to the last traditional master of a near-emptied country, discovers at last a style of film that crosses fluidly between worlds.

seat reservations:
places are allocated on a first come first served basis - please email: elap@soas.ac.uk