

ENDANGERED LANGUAGES

*an interactive e-learning module
on the Internet for secondary schools*



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as part of the NWO Endangered Language Research Programme



www.bedreigdetalen.nl

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ENDANGERED LANGUAGES is an interactive e-learning module on the Internet developed for the last three years of secondary schools, and is part of the NWO Endangered Language Research Programme. The module comes in a Dutch and an English version. There is no difference between the two versions, so no adaptations for English have been made with respect to specific Dutch items.

The only technical requirement for the module is a computer with sound facilities, access to the Internet, and Adobe Flash Player which can be downloaded free of charge at the address <http://www.adobe.com/downloads/>.

Even if the connection is slow, the module works quite well. For those schools who don't have access to the Internet, a separate CD-Rom will become available in Dutch and in English.

The Endangered Languages learning module can be ordered by sending an email to c.ode@uva.nl or to (Linssen@nwo.nl, www.nwo.nl/bedreigdetalen).

The module consists of two lessons and can be used as optional teaching materials for two or three hours in the discipline geography. Since it contains many issues about languages in general, especially in the first lesson, it can as well be used in languages classes.

The module comes with instructions for both teachers and students. Interactive forms for completion of exercises can be downloaded, printed and filled out by students individually or in a classroom setting with a teacher. All answers to the questions in the working papers can be found by studying the slides and the short animations.

In the first lesson the following themes are dealt with:

about language

how many languages do you speak?

languages of the world

the origins of language

endangered languages

language loss, maintenance and revitalization

In the **first lesson**, after an introduction, each theme is further subdivided into short textslides and animations with many more details, including maps, sound examples and games.

The short textslides discuss a set of items which can be studied in more depth by clicking on “next” at the bottom of each slide, after which a new slide appears with short movies or a slide show. By clicking on an arrow the user can go back to the previous slide or to the opening page of the first lesson.

In general, movies and photographs speak for themselves. Where it was considered necessary, animations have been annotated.

Some attention is also paid to sign languages.

As it is nearly impossible to discuss within two or three hours all five continents each with its specific problems as regards language endangerment, examples are mainly taken from two areas.

The **second lesson** zooms in on these two regions: **Northeast Siberia** and **Western New Guinea**. Before starting the second lesson, it is assumed that the first lesson has been fully completed.

In the second lesson themes are:



- geography (climate, landscape, flora and fauna)
- village life (living, traffic, administration, health care)
- daily life (hunting, fishing, nomads, agriculture-gardening)
- traditions (feast, religion, birth-marriage-death)
- school (system, language education)

In this lesson students learn more about two specific language communities with people speaking an endangered language, notably **Tundra Yukagir** in the Sakha Republic, Russian

Federation, and Mpur in West Papua, Indonesia. Similarities and contrasts between the two communities are discussed.



The aim of the second lesson is to go into more detail of the environment of the peoples and into main factors causing language endangerment and language loss.

Screenshot of a lesson interface titled "LESSON 1". The text on the left discusses language extinction: "As of 2007, it is estimated that some 6,000 languages are spoken on earth, most of which are threatened with extinction. Predictions indicate that, in 100 years' time, 50 to 90 per cent of the world's languages will have disappeared. In this learning module, you'll learn all about language – its origins, why languages die and how terrible that is, and whether we can preserve languages. You'll also learn about new languages and how speakers of different languages view the world. To the right, you'll find links to all the various themes." Below the text is a "Geographical References" section with a globe icon and an upward arrow. On the right, there is a navigation menu with six themes: Theme 1, Theme 2, Theme 3, Theme 4, Theme 5, and Theme 6, each with a right-pointing arrow. The background of the interface shows a traditional wooden house interior.

In order to avoid leaving students with a “sad doom-and-gloom story”, much attention is paid to issues like language revitalization, the pride of a people for its own language, culture and traditions, the importance of self-esteem and own identity. Also, how peoples themselves, social organizations, schools and governments can contribute to language maintenance. Instead of having to worry about yet another world problem, students can enjoy the wide variety of other peoples’ languages and cultures.

Pictures by Cecilia Odé: Tundra Yukagir nomad reindeer herders and Mpur speaking Papuans.