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Fighting Language Extinction

College of Languages, Linguistics & Literature Hosts
International Conference on Language Documentation & Conservation

The College of Languages, Linguistics & Literature's renowned Department of Linguistics and National Foreign Language Resource Center recently hosted the 4th International Conference on Language Documentation & Conservation. The event attracted over 450 participants from around the world who are engaged in documenting, preserving, and revitalizing endangered languages. Titled "Enriching Theory, Practice, and Application," the 4-day gathering highlighted the importance and necessity of collaboration and integration in language learning and teaching.



Baffinuc Ilai (white shirt), Samantha Rarrick, and Andrea Berez (l-r)

Baffinuc Ilai travelled over 4,000 miles from Papua New Guinea to attend the conference. He speaks Kere, Tabare, Kuman, and Tok Pisin, all languages of Papua New Guinea, as well as English. Ilai became involved in language documentation as a way to keep Kere traditions alive and to improve village life in his home region. With a team that includes UHM assistant professor of Linguistics Dr. Andrea Berez and PhD student of Linguistics Samantha Rarrick, Ilai helps to document Kere through a video project funded by the Endangered Languages Documentation Programme (based at the University of London). The program's mission is to research the world's most endangered languages.

As the project's language consultant, Ilai is the integral link to the community. He masterfully creates documentaries of traditional practices and stories. Undertaking such endeavors could not even be considered without a local person of Ilai's capabilities and knowledge. Fueled by his tireless efforts, the Kere project aims to create, sustain, and promote language and cultural resources and practices for future generations.

There are almost 7,000 languages in the world; many experts believe that more than half of these languages will be extinct within 100 years. The impact and influence of this conference reverberates among participants like Ilai, and throughout the international and indigenous communities they represent.

Jeffrey Carroll, Dean of the College of Languages, Linguistics & Literature, remarks "The conference stands at the forefront of cultural and scientific efforts to save thousands of languages, including the Hawaiian language. We are proud to play a leadership role for this unique conference and in these important efforts."

The "Enriching Theory, Practice, and Application" conference was supported, in part, by the National Science Foundation

The College of Languages, Linguistics & Literature (one of the four Arts & Sciences colleges) of the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa offers a broad curriculum in English, foreign and heritage languages and literatures, second language studies, and linguistics. Its Asia and Pacific focused curricula is unique in the nation. The faculty regularly teaches more than 25 languages, and has the capacity to teach many more.

If you would like to support the college, please visit www.uhfoundation.org/GivetoLLL.

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