

EuroBABEL

Better Analyses Based on Endangered Languages



EuroBABEL – Better Analyses Based on Endangered Languages

The diversity of the world's languages is on the verge of becoming dramatically reduced in the decades to come. Partly because of the attention that has been drawn to this problem, the field of linguistics has been moving towards taking the diversity of languages more fully into account. The dramatic change in the amount and the nature of primary data being collected and analysed has proved to have, and will continue to have, a profound influence on our insights into the human language faculty.

The EUROCORES programme Better Analyses Based on Endangered Languages (EuroBABEL) will solidify this development and strengthen the impact of European research – in a global context – on linguistics as a whole. The main purpose of the programme is to promote empirical research on underdescribed endangered languages, both spoken and signed, that aims at changing and refining our ideas about linguistic structure in general and about language in relation to cognition, social and cultural organisation and related issues in a trans-/multi-disciplinary perspective.

The EuroBABEL programme is crucially different from, and is complementary to, existing documentation initiatives in that our emphasis lies on bringing the newly gathered data to bear on the development of linguistic theory and all areas concerned with the study of language. The programme covers a number of projects that will work on primary data, both newly collected and archival material, in order to concentrate on the analysis and use of the results to expand and correct our insights into the structure and nature of human language.

EuroBABEL brings together
22 research projects
from **9 different countries**
within and beyond Europe.

Running time: 2009-2011

Research budget:
approx. 5 million Euros

List of funded Collaborative Research Projects (CRPs)

Alor-Pantar Languages: origins and theoretical impact (Alor-Pantar)

(AHRC, NSF, NWO)

This project aims to further document and analyse the non-Austronesian languages of the Alor-Pantar archipelago of southeastern Indonesia. Until very recently these languages were among the least well-documented languages of Indonesia, and all of them are endangered.

The project focuses on:

- I. Extended Documentation of spatial reference and numerical expressions.
- II. Word Class Typology: the continuum between word classes and grammatical features; how morphosyntactic categories evolve; unusual morphosyntactic phenomena of the Alor-Pantar languages.
- III. Linguistic Prehistory: quantitative evidence for the genetic position of the Alor-Pantar languages, based on bottom-up reconstruction to establish genetic subgroups and evaluate potential genetic relationships with languages of New Guinea.

Further information:

<http://www.alor-pantar.org>

Project Leader:

Dr. Marian Klamer

Leiden University, The Netherlands

Principal Investigators:

Dr. Gary Holton

University of Alaska Fairbanks, United States of America

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University of Surrey, United Kingdom

The Kalahari Basin Area: a 'Sprachbund' on the verge of extinction (KBA)

(DFG, ESRC, FIST, NWO)

The KBA project attempts to untangle some aspects of the complex linguistic and population history of the southern African groups speaking languages other than from the Bantu family. These are commonly subsumed under the unsubstantiated concept of a 'Khoisan' family but might turn out to share certain traits because of convergence processes within a geographical area. The project will pursue a two-tiered approach, investigating southern Africa as a linguistic area from a broad perspective as well as offering fine-scaled studies of individual contact situations. The overall approach is a multidisciplinary one in involving linguists, molecular anthropologists and social anthropologists.

Project Leader:

Professor Tom Güldemann

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Ob-Ugric Languages: conceptual structures, lexicon, constructions, categories – An innovative approach to creating descriptive resources for Khanty and Mansi (Ob-Ugric languages)

(AKA, DFG, FWF, OTKA)

This project aims to provide online descriptive resources for two endangered Ob-Ugric languages Khanty (Ostyak) and Mansi (Vogul), consisting of a text corpus (for four different dialects), an e-grammar, e-dictionaries (four dialectal, an onomaseological and an etymological), and an e-library (bibliography with PDF-files or scans of rare old publications).

Project Leader:

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Referential Hierarchies in Morphosyntax: description, typology, diachrony (RHIM)

(AHRC, DFG, NSF, SNF)

The RHIM project explores morphosyntactic systems that are based on a hierarchy of referents: first and second person ranking over third, humans over non-humans, known referents over unknown ones. This hierarchy is known to influence the structure of grammatical relations (the basic ‘who does what to whom in an event’), giving rise to e.g. inverse morphology or differential argument marking. There have been only a few comparative studies on these phenomena, and many languages displaying them are seriously endangered. Based on fieldwork and documentation corpora, we aim at a better understanding of these systems from a typological and diachronic perspective.

Further information:

www.rhim.uni-koeln.de

Project Leader:

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Endangered Sign Languages in Village Communities (Villagesign)

(AHRC, DFG, NSF, NWO)

The case of sign languages in rural communities with a high incidence of, often hereditary, deafness is the latest major discovery in the field of sign language linguistics. For the first time, this project looks comparatively at a substantial number of these communities, in Thailand, Mexico (Yucatan Peninsula), South India, Turkey (Mardin), Ghana, Mali (Dogon region), Australia (Aboriginal communities in Arnhem Land), Jamaica, Indonesia (Bali) and an Algerian expatriate community in Israel.

The project investigates these sign languages and communities from the two complementary angles of linguistics and anthropology. Our diverse project team, which includes deaf researchers from the target countries, pays particular attention to ethical issues in working with these communities.

Further information:

www.uclan.ac.uk/islands

Project Leader:

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THE FOLLOWING NATIONAL FUNDING ORGANISATIONS SUPPORT THE EuroBABEL PROGRAMME:

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Danish Agency for Science, Technology and Innovation, Denmark

Suomen Akatemia/Finlands Akademi (AKA)

Academy of Finland, Finland

Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG)

German Research Foundation, Germany

Országos Tudományos Kutatási

Alapprogramok (OTKA)

Hungarian Scientific Research Fund, Hungary

Nederlandse Organisatie voor

Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek (NWO)

Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research, The Netherlands

Schweizerischer Nationalfonds (SNF)

Swiss National Science Foundation, Switzerland

Arts and Humanities Research Council

(AHRC), United Kingdom

Economic and Social Research Council

(ESRC), United Kingdom

National Science Foundation (NSF)

United States of America

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www.esf.org/eurocores



Tower of Babel
by Pieter Bruegel the Elder
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