

EuroBabel

Maarten Mous, LUCL, Leiden University



Universiteit Leiden
The Netherlands

BABEL

Better Analyses Based on Endangered Languages

BABEL history

- **Proposal for theme:
why this theme, why now,
potential for Europe**
- **Proposal for Call for proposals
convince member organisations
of ESF**
- **Call for proposals**

Proposers

- **Peter Austin**
- **Michael Fortescue**
- **Nikolaus Himmelmann**
- **François Jacquesson**
- **Maarten Mous (coordinating proposer)**
- **Mauro Tosco**

Why BABEL

- **Some slides from presentation to ESF**

BABEL

**let endangered
languages change
linguistics**

**and our ideas about
language, culture and cognition**

because

- **majority of the world's 6000 languages, both spoken and signed, are disappearing or becoming more like the languages of wider communication**
- **majority of the world's languages are not described and our knowledge is geographically biased**

and because

- **several documentation initiatives have produced new data**
- **these data have not yet had sufficient influence on our thinking about language**

Main purpose

- **promote empirical research on underdescribed endangered languages,**
- **both spoken and signed,**
- **that aims at changing and refining our ideas about linguistic structure in general.**
- **strengthening data collection by introducing new researchers to this field**

thus

- **our ideas about language are based on a small subset of the world's languages**
- **there are new categories, structures to be found**
- **and our ideas about what is common and what is rare are heavily biased**

Why now

- **Developments within society of linguists are promising for fieldwork linguistics**
- **Possibility of attracting substantially more linguists to work on these languages**
- **Goal: change of attitude among linguists, integration of empirical and theoretical approach**

new situation

- where the need is felt to present new insights for the wider scientific community
- where more scholars become familiar with analysis of primary language data and contribute to it
- where scholars can use the endangered languages of their country as an asset, also for their careers *

Dissemination

- **engage scholars generally and not restricting to those working on endangered languages:**
- **via existing general conferences**
- **publication in mainstream journals**

Networking

- **build networks for topics across language families and areas from within the BABEL theme**
- **organise training where researchers from all backgrounds meet**

What can BABEL projects achieve

- realise the goals for their topic
- strengthen each other's topics
- think about impact on scientific community
- think about image and appreciation of fieldwork related research in linguistic community

Common themes

- **society > language**
- **area vs genetic; language contact, prehistory**
KBA, AP, OU, V Sign,
- **lexical structure > grammatical structure**
V Sign, AP, OU, RHIM
- **referential hierarchies**
- **aspects of numerals: KBA, AP,**
- **expression of space: AP, KBA**
- **case relations: RHIM, OU,**

society > language

- **village sign**
- **Kalahari Basin Area**
- **Alor Pantar**
- **Ob Ugric**

Common methods, ethics, archiving

Impact of research

- **where and how to present results**
- **present together for impact?**
- **approachability of expertise**
- **accessibility of findings**
- **practices**
- **respect for facts**