

## Book Reviews

*Revitalising indigenous languages: how to recreate a lost generation*, by Marja-Liisa Olthuis, Suvi Kivelä, and Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, Clevedon, Multilingual Matters, 2013, xiv + 251 pp., \$169.95 (hbk), ISBN-13 978-1-84769-888-9; \$49.95 (pbk), ISBN-13 978-1-84769-887-2

*Revitalising indigenous languages: How to recreate a lost generation* is a remarkable and inspirational book that chronicles the language revitalization efforts, triumphs, and tribulations of the Complementary Aanaar Saami Language Education (CASLE) program in Finland. This text was collaboratively written by Marja-Liisa Olthuis, an Aanaar Saami (AS) woman who created the CASLE program and spearheaded efforts in reversing language shift (RLS), Suvi Kivelä, a journalist, Saami language archivist, and participant in AS language education, and renowned and prolific language rights activist and researcher, Tove Skutnabb-Kangas. The very first sentence of the introduction to this book primes readers to the unwavering commitment, conviction, and optimism the authors have for Indigenous/tribal, minority and minoritized (ITM) languages: ‘This book has a positive message: it is possible to revitalize a seriously endangered language!’ (p. 1). It is this prevailing positivity that moves readers to feel cautiously hopeful about the prospects of language maintenance and RLS.

The text comprises an introduction, six main chapters, and 18 Info Boxes that serve as appendices for statistics and supplemental details. The introduction sets the stage with the basic background information about AS and its endangered status. As a language with only a few hundred speakers, AS is categorized as a ‘severely endangered language’ according to UNESCO’s degrees of language endangerment. It also gives details about the three authors and their division of labor in writing various chapters. Chapter 2, written by all three authors, describe the rationale behind starting the CASLE program, namely that there needed to be a way to simultaneously generate and enlarge the number of AS-speaking youth and working generations in the community. Skutnabb-Kangas and Kivelä chime in with their own experiences and positionings with AS, the program, and the larger Finnish society. Chapter 3 goes into further detail about the Saami languages, its speakers, and reasons for AS language loss in the community, citing the role of schooling and heightened statuses of majority languages in creating socioemotional effects on language learning and language maintenance. Chapter 4 chronicles the CASLE method of language education, drawing upon current research in revitalization and language learning theories, including total immersion and language nests, master–apprentice training programs, and language documentation, all of which were utilized in the CASLE program. Chapter 5, the lengthiest of all the chapters in the book, recounts all aspects of the program from 2009 to 2010, including the in-class courses and out-of-the-classroom learning that took place with community members and elders. The 18 students, handpicked from strict selection criteria, namely that they already be multilingual, highly motivated, and committed to working with AS in their futures, underwent rigorous practical coursework in using AS in everyday language, oral production skills, and writing over a period of 49 weeks. In addition to acquiring linguistic knowledge, CASLE participants also immersed themselves in cultural knowledge, partaking in fishing outings and cooking traditional dishes, as well as doing practical training at AS workplaces. Chapter 6 looks at CASLE from an administrator’s (Olthuis’) vantage point, providing timelines, stages, and risk analyses of various potential pitfalls and providing adequate deliverables to various stakeholders. Chapter 7 details the gains and concrete results of the AS community since the CASLE program, from AS speakers moving beyond being ‘passive users’ of the language to becoming active once more to CASLE graduates using their language skills in the workplace. The authors then situate these results against other ITM research relating to language shift and revitalization in the contexts of the USA, India, Nepal, and other Latin American countries. The authors acknowledge that multiple factors, including market and non-market values for private and social purposes, are at play when it comes to language revitalization, and that ‘[l]anguage is communication, communication needs communities, and these communities have to be viable, economically as well as socially’ (p. 158). It is interesting to note that not only do the authors argue that AS has now risen two rungs from ‘severely endangered’ to become an ‘unsafe language’ by UNESCO standards, nine new jobs were created in AS language nests and the local primary schools for graduates of the CASLE program, contributing to AS’ economic viability in the region. The authors end with standing behind the belief that the CASLE program has met the needs of the community and provided appropriate support when it was needed, and that this has made the community and its

members more whole, and that sharing and transmitting AS entails ‘sharing the traditional ecological, cognitive, spiritual and ideological knowledge encoded within [AS]’ (p. 165).

Indeed, it is very difficult to find critique in a community finding and reclaiming its heritage through language, where elders and the younger generations reconnect and collaboratively rediscover value in their heritage language and consequently becoming whole again. As Kivelä herself writes,

[W]hen you see people becoming whole again ... you cannot but think that it must be right. It must be something that everyone belonging to a lost or stolen generation should strive for ... And we, the ‘others’, have to do everything we can to give them this chance. (p. 19)

This call to action is one that reverberates through the whole text and is one that is meaningful to both ITM and majority language speakers. Obviously, this book is not meant to provide an end-all ‘solution’ to revitalizing ITM languages, and readers will probably readily note that AS is rather unique compared to other ITM languages in terms of the amount of institutional funding and support, as well as scholarly publicity in the anthropological literature, it has received. Other factors, such as being able to choose CASLE participants through such a strict selection criteria and participants being able to dedicate a solid block of 49 weeks to learn AS, also seem quite distinctive. Nonetheless, speakers of other ITM languages will definitely be encouraged after reading this book and be led to consider how they can draw from these authors’ experiences and contextualize them in the case of their own languages. The project management section in Chapter 6 is particularly useful in this regard. I only have one slight comment about the Info Boxes and that is that, at times, they are a bit bulky, even for appendices; despite this, the Info Boxes are still useful for those who are interested in furthering their knowledge about relevant readings and research.

In sum, *Revitalising indigenous languages: How to recreate a lost generation* is an engaging book driven by the three authors’ personal experiences, dedication, and commitment to AS. The book is well suited for language revitalization researchers, graduate students interested in the topic, and ITM community members alike.

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