



David Harrison (left) and Anderson (center) listen to Charlie Mangulda in Australia.

KEEPING LANGUAGES ALIVE

The race to save languages with few speakers

WHEN ANY OF THE ELDERLY members of the Yuchi (*yoo-chee*) tribe of Oklahoma tells a joke in his native language, chances are that only four other people will get it. That's right: Only five people in the world speak

this American Indian tongue.

Experts say that every two weeks, a language disappears. At this rate, nearly half of the planet's 7,000 languages will be gone in 100 years. To draw attention to at-risk languages, the Living Tongues Institute for

Endangered Languages and the National Geographic Society have joined forces on a project called Enduring Voices. In September, the team announced the areas with the greatest number of endangered languages. The five hot spots are northern Australia, central South America, eastern Siberia, the south-western United States and North America's upper Pacific coastal zone.

"North America is in dire straits," Greg Anderson, director of Living Tongues, told TFK. He says 54 native languages in Washington, Oregon, and British Columbia, Canada, are in the most serious danger. Siletz Dee-Ni (*sih-lets dee-nee*), a language spoken on the Siletz reservation, in Oregon, is believed to have just one fluent speaker.

One of the biggest threats to these languages is that they are being replaced by dominant languages like English. But when an ancient, native language is lost, some of the speakers' history is lost too.

Researchers hope to document and revitalize these languages. "We are eager to fire up a new generation of people to get involved," says Anderson. "But there are simply not enough trained people to do the work that is necessary."

—Claudia Atticot

Dear TFK,

It is sad that girls in Afghanistan weren't allowed to go to school, and that they had to be taught in secret ["Tough Lessons," 10/19]. I am glad they have a chance to learn now.

May D., 10
Minnesota

It is terrible that Marion Jones didn't tell everyone the truth once she realized that she was using steroids and not just flaxseed oil

["Disgrace Under Pressure," 10/19]. Hopefully, this will be a lesson to all athletes who are thinking about using drugs.

Joe L., 10
Idaho

Anne Frank's chestnut tree is an important part of history ["Hope for a Giving Tree," 10/19]. It is good that people are trying to save it.

Jake B., 10
Connecticut

It is great that Laura White is teaching kids in

Atlanta, Georgia, how to swim ["Spotlight on Service," 10/19]. Her lessons could benefit a lot of children.

Kelly G., 10
Pennsylvania

Write to TFK at
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