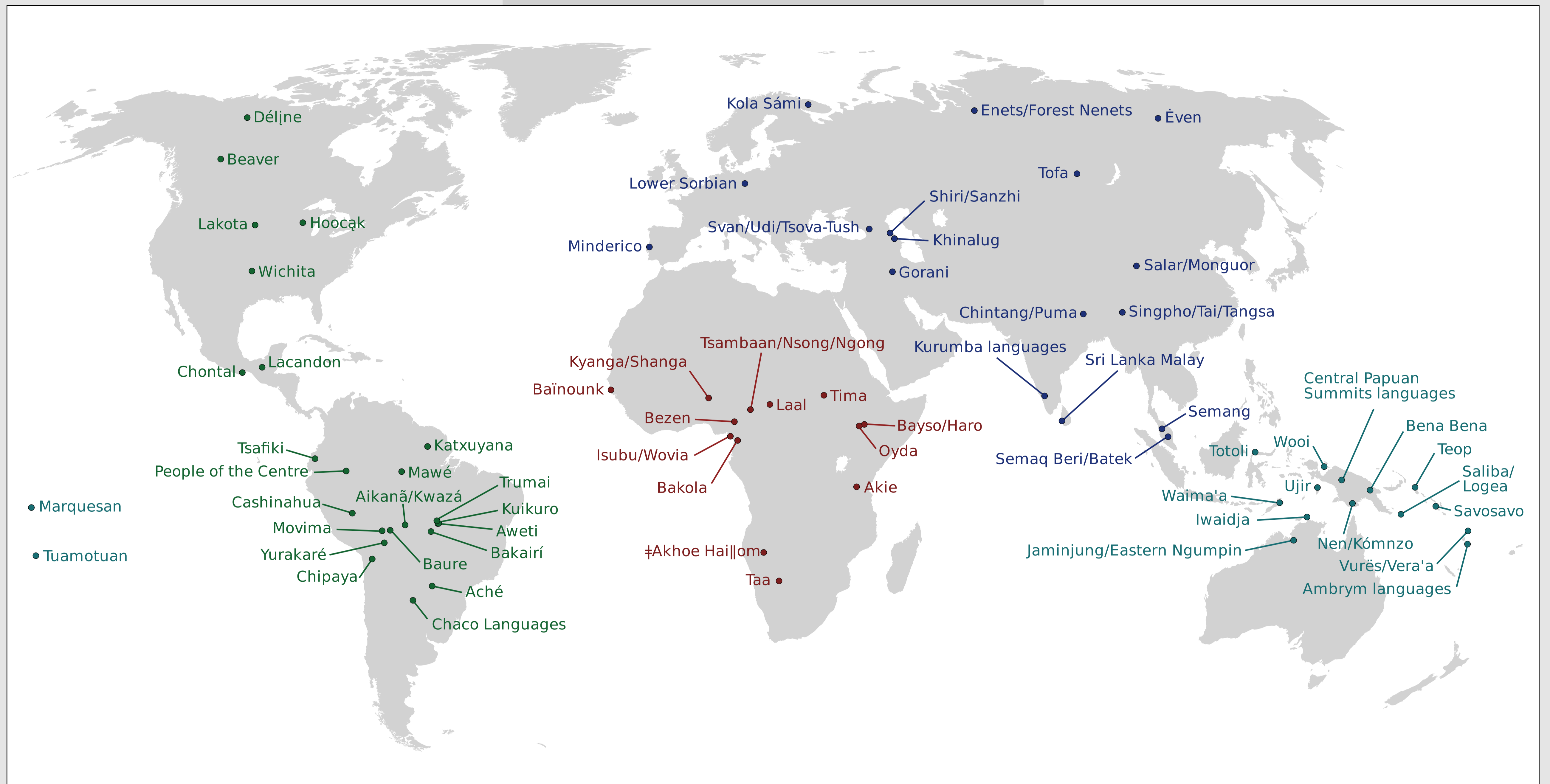




Dokumentation bedrohter Sprachen Documentation of Endangered Languages



DoBES projects worldwide

Language endangerment

Due to globalisation and urbanisation, the linguistic diversity of our planet with more than 6000 languages is severely threatened. Scientists estimate that only half of them will survive the end of the 21st century.

Since languages encode their speakers' traditions, their knowledge, wisdom and worldview, this language loss leads to a tremendous impoverishment of mankind's intellectual and spiritual culture.



The DoBES Programme

The DoBES programme is funded by the VolkswagenStiftung. It started in 2000 with a pilot phase of 8 language projects in the Brazil, China, Ivory Coast, Russia, Papua New Guinea and the USA, and one technical project at the MPI for Psycholinguistics in the Netherlands to explore the feasibility of documenting previously unresearched languages and setting up a digital language archive.

The main phase started in 2002; the last grants have been allocated in 2011. Altogether 85 projects, including symposia, workshops and summer schools have been funded with a total of more than 23 Mio. Euro.



The aims of the DoBES Programme

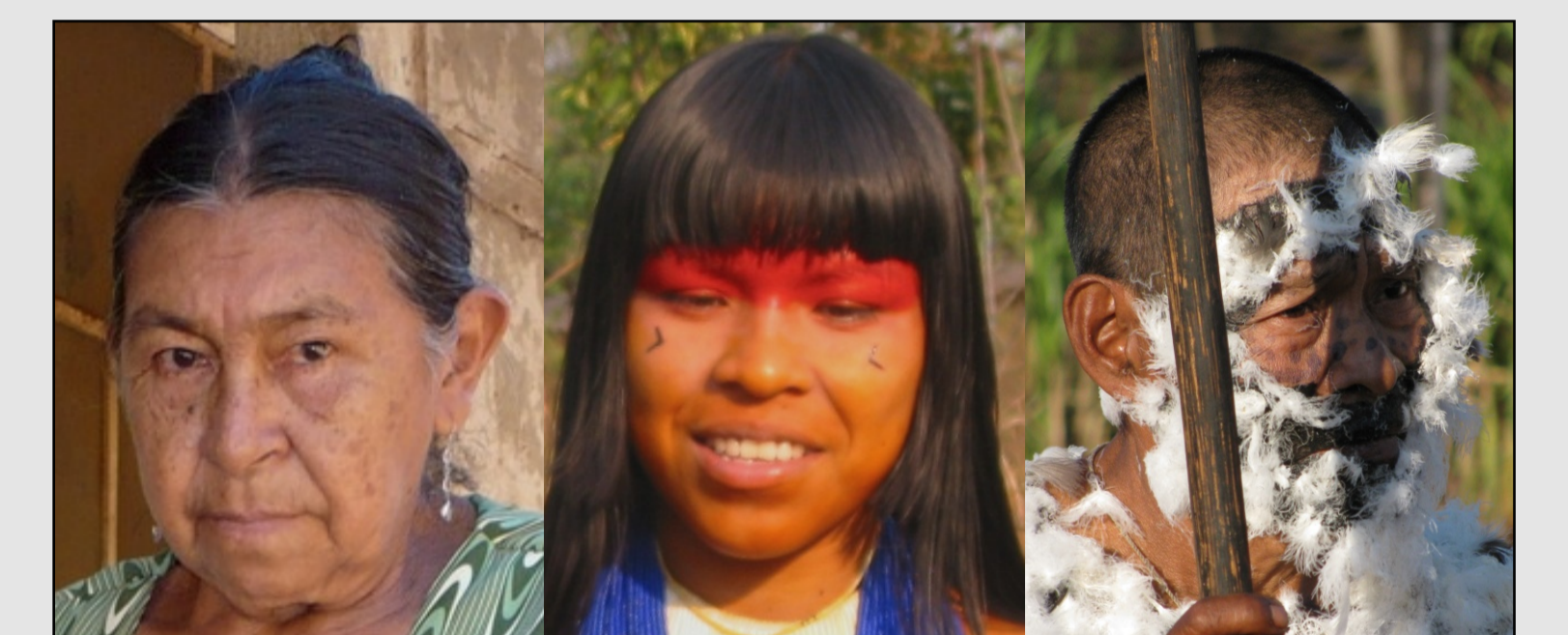
- » Produce and archive documentations of endangered languages
 - that provide authentic language data not only for linguistics, but also for other disciplines of the humanities and social sciences
 - that can be understood without prior knowledge of the documented language
 - that are accepted by the speech community and can be used for language maintenance and revitalisation
- » Develop and test new methods of researching, processing and archiving linguistic and cultural data.



Results

The projects produced audio and/or video recordings that have been transcribed, translated and analysed with the software tool ELAN and stored in The Language Archive with copies distributed all over the world (see the DoBES archive poster). All documentations contain traditional oral literature, personal narratives and descriptions of culture specific activities such as reindeer herding (Kola Sámi and Even in Siberia), pottery (Bainouk and Oyda in Africa) or bread-fruit fermenting (Marquesan languages in Polynesia). Many projects also aim at preserving the

indigenous knowledge of flora and fauna by recording descriptions and producing thematic encyclopedias in the vernacular with a translation. The multimedia technology developed by the MPI allows to go beyond language documentation and document silent communication (Akhoe), communication by drums (People of the Center) and gestures as well as songs, rituals and festivals (Iwaidja, Kurumba, Lacandon, Movima).



As is most clearly demonstrated by initiatives in Argentina (Chaco Languages Archive), Brazil (Prodoclin) and Indonesia (CELD Papua), the DoBES programme has given incentives to other institutions to get involved in the documentation of endangered languages so that this important work will be continued and further developed in the future after the conclusion of the DoBES programme.

Scientifically the DoBES programme contributes to a change of paradigm in linguistics because digital archives of multimedia language corpora provide language data in their multi-faceted contexts and allow other researchers to scrutinise the linguistic analyses, interpret the data differently and use them for new, possibly interdisciplinary research questions.

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