

Endangered languages, cultures and ecosystems: The case of Modern South Arabian

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Abstract

In this talk, I will discuss a community documentation project conducted on the Modern South Arabian languages in southern Oman between January 2013 and December 2016. I will begin by appraising the language/culture/ecosystem situation in the region, looking at the relationship between language, culture and the natural environment. I will then examine decisions taken during the documentation period, and discuss steps taken by the team and community members towards language revitalisation of the languages.

During the documentation period over 200 hours of audio material and 15 hours of video material were collected and archived at the Endangered Languages Archive, held at SOAS on topics relating principally to traditional culture and the relationship of humans to the natural environment. Revitalization processes have included the development of an Arabic-based orthography and children's e-books, collaboration on production of a pedagogical grammar of Mehri, international dissemination with native speakers, and work with the Mehri Center for Studies and Research based in al-Ghaydhah, Yemen.