

<p>Institution: University of Cambridge</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: UoA27</p>
<p>Title of case study: The linguistic heritage of the Modern Assyrian Communities</p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words) Professor Geoffrey Khan has worked closely with the communities of Assyrian Christians of the Middle East carrying out research on their spoken language which exists in numerous dialects, many of them highly endangered. He has established initiatives to preserve knowledge of these dialects for future generations; raised awareness within the communities of the endangered state of their language, stimulating them to preserve their linguistic heritage and empowering them to become directly involved with the process of documentation of the dialects. Training native non-academic speakers to undertake linguistic fieldwork to gather large quantities of grammatical and lexical data as well as recordings of descriptions of traditional life and various types of oral literature has also been key to this initiative.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words) Since the mid-1990s until the present Professor Geoffrey Khan (employed by the University of Cambridge since 1983) has been engaged in the documentation of Neo-Aramaic dialects. These are the last spoken vestiges of the Aramaic language, which has deep historical roots in the Middle East, the first attested records being datable to approximately 1000 BCE. Khan's research has concentrated on the North-Eastern Neo-Aramaic (NENA) group of dialects, which are spoken by Christians and Jews, whose original places of residence were in northern Iraq, south-eastern Turkey, and north-western Iran. All the Jews left the region in the 1950s and settled, for the most part, in the newly founded State of Israel. A large proportion of the Christian population has also left the region due to political conflict and discrimination. As a result of these upheavals the NENA dialects are now seriously endangered. Khan's research has involved the undertaking of fieldwork in communities of NENA speakers in various parts of the world. Most of the fieldwork on the dialects of the Jews has been carried out in Israel. The fieldwork on the dialects of Christians has been conducted among numerous communities, mostly those of refugees in various places around the world, including Europe, USA, Canada, Australia, the Caucasus and Central Asia. The considerable quantities of data that have been gathered in such trips have been processed and form the basis of several research products, including a series of books, articles, and an on-line database. The books include detailed descriptions of the grammar and lexicon of several dialects together with transcriptions and translations of spoken texts, such as folktales, descriptions of traditional life and customs, songs, etc.</p> <p>For more than a decade Khan has trained a series of graduate students and post-doctoral researchers in the field of Neo-Aramaic and has raised research grant income to fund projects with research teams working on the documentation of the dialects. One of the major projects, which was funded by the AHRC (2004-2009), resulted in the construction of an on-line database, The North-Eastern Neo-Aramaic Database. This database was designed to make accessible in an efficient manner grammatical descriptions and audio recordings of the dialects and in particular to facilitate comparisons across the dialects. This archival resource was a concept developed by Khan and was designed and constructed by him with the assistance of a web-developer. The project team employed by Cambridge University included the following research associates: Dr Eleanor Coghill (2004-2009; now at Universität Konstanz), Dr Roberta Borghero (2004-2009; now in Jerusalem); Dr Alinda Damsma (2008-2010, now at University College London).</p> <p>The native term of the language is Suret/Surayt and is subdivided into various dialects, each displaying distinctive linguistic features. There are some 150 different NENA dialects, each originally spoken in a particular village or town in the mountains of Kurdistan. The chief dialectal division within NENA is a confessional one: the Jewish dialects share a large number of features that differ from the Christian dialects. Within the same town Jews and Christians speak considerably different dialects. The NENA dialects exhibit numerous fundamental differences from earlier forms of Aramaic that are attested in written texts. Many of these differences have arisen due to the contact that the NENA dialects have had with other languages in the area, in particular</p>

Impact case study (REF3b)

Kurdish and Azeri Turkish.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)**Books**

1. G. Khan, *A Grammar of Neo-Aramaic. The dialect of the Jews of Arbel* (Brill, Leiden, 1999), 586pp. ISBN13: 9789004115101.
2. G. Khan, *The Neo-Aramaic Dialect of Qaraqosh*, (Brill, Leiden, 2002), 750pp. ISBN13: 9789004128637.
3. G. Khan, *The Jewish Neo-Aramaic Dialect of Sulemaniyya and Halabja*, (Brill, Leiden, 2004), 619pp. ISBN13: 9789004138698.
4. G. Khan, *The Neo-Aramaic Dialect of Barwar*. 3 vols. Vol. 1 *Grammar*. Vol. 2 *Lexicon*. Vol. 3 *Texts*. (Brill, Leiden, 2008), 2175pp. ISBN13: 9789004167650.
5. G. Khan, *The Jewish Neo-Aramaic Dialect of Urmi* (Gorgias, Piscataway, 2008), 624pp. ISBN: 978-1-59333-425-3.
6. G. Khan, *The Jewish Neo-Aramaic Dialect of Sanandaj* (Gorgias, Piscataway, 2009), 631pp. ISBN: 978-1-60724-134-8.

All outputs have been peer-reviewed and can be supplied by the University of Cambridge on request.

The NENA Database: www.nena.caret.cam.ac.uk

Large research grants: (i) AHRB, 'The North Eastern Neo-Aramaic Dialects'. PI: Geoffrey Khan (1 October 2004—30 September 2009) £526,705. The major web-based outcome of the research is the NENA database; (ii) **British Academy Research Readership** (1 October 2005—30 September 2007): £62,344.

Award: In 2004, Khan was awarded the Lidzbarski Gold Medal for Semitic philology by the Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft, the highest international accolade for Semitic Philology. The citation for the medal included a reference to Khan's work on the Neo-Aramaic dialects.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Assyrian Christian communities found in northern Iraq and north-western Iran, which are their original places of residence, and also in many refugee communities scattered around the world (in Europe, the USA, Canada, the Caucasus and Central Asia) speak over 100 dialects of North-Eastern Neo-Aramaic. Due to persecutions, nationalistic state policies, forced evacuation of settlements and migration of speakers to the West, the Aramaic language spoken by the Assyrian Christians (with all of its various dialects) has been listed by UNESCO's *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger* as: 'definitely endangered'.

RAISING AWARENESS

Over the last few years, Khan has spoken to numerous Assyrian communities and community leaders throughout the Assyrian Christian diaspora around the world about his work and raised their awareness of the endangered status of many of their dialects and the importance of documenting them [5.1].

Khan has stressed in particular the need for native speakers of the communities to be trained to carry out fieldwork and participate directly in the documentation of their linguistic heritage. There has been a very positive response to this engagement with the communities, evidenced, for example, by the interview with Homer Ashurian, the head of the Assyrian Universal Alliance, in a radio programme broadcast by Chicago's WCGO 1590 AM station on the 23rd of April 2012, in which he spoke about the importance of Khan's work for the community and encouraged members of the community to attend a lecture that was to be given by Khan in Chicago at Northwestern University. An example of concrete evidence of such positive response has been that of the Assyrian Universal Alliance Foundation, a leading US-based community group whose main focus is on community care, community cultural programmes and assisting refugees. In 2011 they provided financial support for a young Assyrian to undertake language documentation work in Iraq under Khan's guidance to help preserve their linguistic heritage (further details below).

Khan has been invited to address communities in public lectures in Europe and the USA. Some of these public lectures stand out for having raised considerable awareness about the language amongst the wider diaspora, e.g. the talk given to the Assyrian American Association of Southern California (on 10/04/11; approx. 100 attendees; uploaded into YouTube with over 438 views [by 31 July 2013]) [5.2], and the one at Northwestern University (10/05/11; approx. 200 attendees; 1,453 YouTube views [31 July 2013]) [5.3]. The latter, which included a Q&A session with members of the audience, has been subsequently republished on community organisation websites (e.g. ATRANEWS.com and the AUAF website); an Indian news website (Firstpost) [5.4] and an excerpted version was created and uploaded by an online forum discussant to a website (forumbiodiversity) [5.5]. On a number of other websites, the Northwestern lecture and Khan's research have been highlighted and recommended within debates about Assyrian identity and linguistic heritage (e.g. [5.6] and [5.7]).

In September 2011 the Iranian Assyrian community published an article about Khan's work and its importance for their community in a community magazine *Shāmīrām* (in Persian) [5.8]. In February 2013 an article about the linguistic documentation work of Khan was published in the *The Smithsonian Magazine* [5.9]. At the time of writing this report, the article had received 4.6k Facebook 'likes' on the Smithsonian website and numerous comments from members of the Assyrian Christian community. The contents of this article were reproduced in numerous media outlets in print and on the web, including the sites of Assyrian community organizations (e.g. [5.10]). After the publication of the article Khan was invited to give interviews to numerous newspapers, e.g. The Jewish Chronicle (8 Feb 2013), The Times of Israel (14 Jul 2013) and radio networks, e.g. Irish National Radio, 'Newstalk', 7th February 2013, US National Public Radio ('The Story') (1 May 2013), BBC Radio 4 ('Broadcasting House', 9 June 2013). These led to various other newspaper articles about his research, e.g. Nederlands Dagblad (1/9/2013, in Dutch). Khan's work among the communities has also inspired several poets to write poems about him and his efforts to preserve their language. [5.11]

PRESERVING HERITAGE

Much of the traditional lexicon and folklore is not known by the younger generations. These documentation projects have been instrumental in preserving knowledge of these endangered dialects for the communities. Khan's numerous publications have made available full descriptions of a variety of hitherto undescribed dialects. The NENA database, which was completed in 2009, holds details of 135 dialects and preserves audio recordings of songs and stories of over 33 dialects.

In addition to his publication programme and NENA database project, in 2011 Khan initiated the Modern Assyrian Language Documentation Project (MALDP). An AUAF-funded fieldworker, trained by Khan, has undertaken documentation among the Assyrian Christian communities of Iraq [5.12]. He has also undertaken outreach activities, under Khan's guidance, about the importance of preserving Assyrian linguistic heritage among communities in the Middle East, Europe, North America and Australia (2011-2013). In Iraq he has held training workshops in community centres in Dohok (August 2012, approx. 100 attendees) and Qaraqosh (August, 2012, approx. attendees) and distributed recording equipment. As one of the beneficiaries of Khan's training has stated: 'I really appreciate your help and advice. Thank you again for your help and your great works you [have] done and you [are] still doing for [the] Assyrian language.' [5.13]. The fieldworkers archive their recordings in the local community centres and send copies to Khan in Cambridge.

The recordings are uploaded onto Khan's online NENA database, the audio archives of which are opening accessible to the public and contain recordings of both Christian and Jewish dialects.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[5.1] Letters from: (i) person 1 (President, Nineveh Center for Research and Development); (ii) person 4 (President, Assyrian American Association of Southern California).

[5.2] Public lecture at: Assyrian American Association of Southern California (10/04/11). On YouTube in 5 parts <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zEILYaWTF4> (P1; 438 views)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=doEwLIC_z8E (P.2; 242 views)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=deR--LHjVHo> (P.3; 301 views)

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<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=glhltX44nGw> (P.4; 244 views)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=omJV-C3cqlc> (P.5; 146 views)

[5.3] Public lecture at: Northwestern: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hzy_fcWRIOU (1,453 views).

The video has been republished on:

[5.4] Firstpost: www.firstpost.com/topic/place/iran-lecture-of-prof-geoffrey-khan-may-10-2012-video-hzy_fcWRIOU-32-14.html;

[5.5] Forumbiodiversity – highlights from the lecture:

<http://www.forumbiodiversity.com/showthread.php/34276-quot-The-Language-of-the-Modern-Assyrians-and-its-Historical-Background-quot> (uploaded on 12/06/12; 71 views)

[5.6] Swedish (Assyrian) communities demonstrating an awareness of the research:

http://www.arameiska.se/Historia_kultur/David_Dag/Kritik_mot_Afram.htm

[5.7] Swedish discussion forum: <https://www.flashback.org/p21065818>

[5.8] Persian *Shāmirām* article.

[5.9] <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/ideas-innovations/How-to-Save-a-Dying-Language-187947061.html>

[5.10] <http://www.aina.org/ata/20130124182713.htm>

[5.11] Poem expressing appreciation of Assyrian community

[5.12] Statement from person 2 (AUA-funded fieldworker; native speaker trained to do documentation about the importance of this project).

[5.13] Email [25.3.2013] from person 3 (Vice President, Nineveh Center for Research and Development).