Dying Languages, Found in New York

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New York is such a rich laboratory for languages on the decline that the City University of New York has a whole laboratory devoted to documenting and preserving them.

But the library isn't just for the university's students. It's an arm of a larger effort to document endangered languages from around the world, known as the World Language Project. The library contains 47,000 books and more than 3,000 audio recordings.

The effort has to do with the inevitable consequences of globalization, which some linguists see as an existential threat to language diversity; others see it as an opportunity to explore the ways that language helps us understand the world.

In New York, researchers are studying the Garifuna, an African tribe in Central America that was exiled to the United States during the 18th century. They're also working on Vlashki, a language spoken by Istrian Croats, who came to New York in the 19th century.

The Garifuna have sprouted at the Yurumein House Cultural Center in the Bronx, and also in Brooklyn, where James Lovell, a public school music teacher, leads a small Garifuna music class.

The Istrians have organized a meeting in Queens to discuss the use of their language, Vlashki.

Researchers plan to canvass a tiny Afghan neighborhood in Flushing, Queens, for signs of the Dari and Pashto languages.

These are not just some of the languages that make New York the capital of language density in the world, according to Daniel Kaufman, an adjunct professor of linguistics at Columbia and New York Universities and is working with Professor Kaufman on the project.

"It is the capital of language density in the world," said Daniel Kaufman, an adjunct professor of linguistics at Columbia and New York Universities and is working with Professor Kaufman on the project.

"This is maybe the first time that anyone has recorded a video of the language being spoken in his native tongue," said Kaufman.

"So many African tribes in Darfur lost their languages. This is the land of opportunity, so they decide to assimilate." said Kaufman.

"One thing is for sure," said Kaufman. "The world is changing, and there are a lot of different things happening."

"Whole villages were emptied," said Valnea Smilovic, 59, who came to the United States from Croatia. "They don't speak their language."

"In Croatia, they don't associate with the Mamuju," he said. "They speak English and they speak Croatian."

While there is no precise count, some experts estimate there are more than 5,000 languages spoken in the world. That's far more than the number of species on the planet.

"There are 8,000 species of birds, and there are more species of languages," said Kaufman.

"There are so many different languages that are spoken in the United States that it's really hard to keep track," said Kaufman.

But Kaufman believes that the City University's work is important, not just for New York, but for the world.

"We have to start doing more research on endangered languages," said Kaufman.

"They are part of our cultural heritage. They are part of our history. They are part of our future."

"It is not just about the language itself," said Kaufman. "It's about the people who speak it."

"Many languages are not spoken by immigrant populations," Professor Kaufman said.

"In New York, we have many different languages spoken by immigrant populations," Professor Kaufman said.

"But in New York, we also have many different languages spoken by native populations," Professor Kaufman said.

"This is a great place to study language," said Kaufman. "We have so many different languages spoken here."

"We have to start doing more research on endangered languages," said Kaufman. "We have to start doing more research on endangered languages."