Welcome!

Wikitongues is a platform for every language in the world. We promote the use and preservation of every language and dialect, for the sake of every person and culture. This overview will help acquaint you with our organization and activities.

Our Mission

More than 7,000 languages are spoken and signed around the world, and as many as half may not survive the next eighty years. In more human terms, as many as half the world’s cultures are at risk of collapse. But it doesn’t have to be that way.

Thanks to changing social attitudes, positive shifts in politics, and the increasing availability of the Internet and digital tools, communities are making big gains toward sharing, preserving, and reviving endangered and minority languages.

Wikitongues is a united front around this welcome change. We’re an international volunteer community building the first public archive of every language in the world, raising awareness about linguistic diversity and rallying to defend it.

Want to get more insight into our daily work? Check out this microdoc from Great Big Story.
Oral Histories Guide

Wikitongues is building the first public archive of every language in the world, focusing primarily on videos of people using their native languages; you may have already seen this work on our YouTube channel, Facebook, or Wikipedia.

In linguistics, these language videos are known as ‘oral histories’. This section will serve as a reference of best practices for recording and captioning your own.

Wikitongues co-founder Daniel Bogre Udell with Luz, a speaker of the Amazonian Shipibo language, in Cusco, Peru.

Why Do Oral Histories Matter?

Freely available language documentation is an essential step towards preserving linguistic diversity for future generations: the more languages are documented, the easier they are to teach, learn, and sustain.

The spectrum of linguistic documentation is wide. Indeed, most researchers spend a lifetime documenting the many aspects of a single language. To name but a few
examples, you can map out inherent grammar structures, catalog unique sounds, or record the meanings of every word and phrase.

The oral history is a core component of what we might call 'early stage' language documentation, because it presents a raw example of language as it is candidly spoken. Both those looking to research the aspects of a language and those seeking to learn it can find value in a well-documented oral history. Perhaps most importantly, oral histories can offer a window into the life of a speaker or speakers.

**Best Practices for Recording**

Across the humanities and social sciences, oral histories are a popular methodology for documenting historical information about individuals, communities, and important events through planned interviews.

**Technical and Aesthetic Considerations**

The Wikitongues community comes from a diverse set of backgrounds and has access to different technical setups. Whether you’re using a professional camera and audio recorder, or just a smartphone, consider the following:

- **Clean audio is essential.** It’s important to record your interview with minimal background noise and audio interference. Avoid crowded hallways, busy streets, or background music.
- **Stick to landscape dimensions.** Though it is common for people to use portrait ratios when recording with smartphones, it is better to film with landscape dimensions; that is, with your phone horizontal rather than vertical. This better optimizes your video for online media players.
- **Smartphones make great audio recorders.** If you have access to a professional grade camera, but lack comparable audio equipment, your phone can be leveraged to record external audio. For iOS devices, we recommend *iTalk*. For Android, we recommend *Audio Recorder*. 
Interviewees should be framed clearly from the upper body. When using a smartphone, be sure to record in landscape proportions, rather than vertically.

What to Discuss in an Oral History

We believe that videos should attempt to be as natural as possible; commonly, people will get nervous in front of a camera or feel uncomfortable to start speaking, this often goes away after the first couple of minutes.

To help with nerves, it is good to chat with the interviewee beforehand (if this is available to you) about their interests, their language, their culture - all topics they can use during their recording! We do not provide questions for the interviews, as we want the narrative to be reflective of them and their lives. If they are having trouble thinking of something to say, or get stumped during the recording, you can always help encourage them and suggest topics or questions.

When You’re Faced with Time Constraints

A thorough oral history session can last an entire afternoon. In fact, our longest video is about an hour! We understand that most of the time, you won’t have this much time at your disposal. Perhaps the speaker you’re recording only has 15 minutes. Most of our videos are five minutes or less. That’s ok.

If you’re curious to know why we chose these methods of documentation, you can learn about our reasoning here.

Captioning and Translation

Though it is not mandatory to collect captions for your videos, it is ideal: captions will make your oral history a better educational resource.
If there isn’t time to provide captions, interpretations, or translations, we always appreciate a paragraph summary of topics covered in the video to add to the video description!

**Transcription versus Translation**

*Transcript* refers to the text of your interview in the native language or languages spoken, while a *translation* is a literal translation of the video transcript. If you can, secure both a transcript and translation into an international language.

You can do this in person after recording the video or by follow-up via email or phone.

**Format**

The ideal format for submitting transcripts and translations are .SRT files rather than loose text, because .SRT files sync automatically with most video and media players to create subtitles. Thankfully, .SRT files are easy to make.

To create an .SRT file, open up your preferred text editor and divide your transcript or translation by the lines they would appear as subtitles.

For example:

“Hello, my name is Joana. I am from Tarragona and Catalan is my mother tongue. I also speak Spanish and English.”

Becomes:

```
1
00:00:01,00 --> 00:00:03,00
Hello, my name is Joana.

2
00:00:03,03 --> 00:00:11,00
I am from Tarragona
And Catalan is my mother tongue.

3
00:00:11,06 --> 00:00:14,00
I also speak Spanish and English.
```

The above format adheres to the following two rules:

- Each subtitle is formatted with three line breaks:
○ The numerical sequence counter: 1, 2, 3, and so on.
○ The opening and closing time markers, which are formatted as Hours:Minutes:Seconds:Milliseconds and joined by -->.
○ The raw text of the subtitle.

- Subtitles should contain fewer than 40 characters per line of text. You can use websites such as https://wordcounter.net to double check your lines.

When you’re done creating your .SRT file, simply save it with the file extension .srt.

**Non-Latin Characters**

.SRT files support any character set supported by unicode, so whether your transcript or translation uses the Cyrillic alphabet, Arabic script, or any other writing system, that’s ok! There’s no need to romanize.

**Uploading Your Recording**

After you’ve recorded an oral history you can upload the video and any relevant documents to Dropbox, Google Drive, or another platform, then head on over to https://wikitongues.org/submit-a-video/.

**Licensing and Attribution**

**Attribution**

Our videos share attribution between the organization (Wikitongues), interviewers (those who record the video), and interviewees (those who appear in the video).

**Non-Commercial License**

By default, Wikitongues videos are licensed under a Creative Commons Non-Commercial Attribution 4.0 license, which allows for public reuse of the video for cultural, educational, and other noncommercial purposes, so long as the video is properly attributed.

**Open License**

Interviewees may opt-in to their interview being released under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 license, which allows for public release of the video for any reason, even commercial, so long as the video is properly attributed.
most commonly opt-in to the ShareAlike license because they would like to see their video contributed to Wikipedia.

**Securing Release**

For our purposes, paper release forms are not required. Verbal consent is acceptable. After your interviewee chooses their preferred license and while the video is recording, they should state, in the most international language they know, their full name, the date of the recording, and the license they prefer.

If linguistic or cultural barriers prevent you from clearly explaining the difference between Non-Commercial and ShareAlike licensing, we will release your video under a Non-Commercial to protect the privacy of the interviewee.