

JUNE 2011

◆ RARE OR WELL-DONE? ◆

When American Romantic poet James Russell Lowell wrote, "And what is so rare as a day in June? Then, if ever, come perfect days..." in 1848, we know he wasn't thinking about the rare languages it seems we handle every June. Though what comes our way is rarely (!) seasonal, requests for translation or interpreting services in Creoles such as Haitian are more frequent than requests for Jamaican or Louisianan and Papaminto.

We've also provided (written) translations from Afrikaans, Azeri, Swahili, Tibetan and yes -- Latin, as well as (oral) interpreters in Akan, Bassa, Hakka, Ibo, Igbo, Malayalam, Twi and Yoruba. Though amused at the creation of "Na'vi" by linguist Paul Frommer for James Cameron's movie "Avatar," our president would just once like to see a request for Karen (spoken by some 3 million people in Burma and parts of Thailand).



However, as Dr. K. David Harrison, a linguist and Director of Research for the Living Tongues Institute for Endangered Languages, pointed out, a language dies on our planet every two weeks. Out of the approximately 7,000 languages existing today, only 0.2% of the world's population interact in the approximately 3,500 rare languages.



So about half of all world languages have never been written down, and a language naturally disappears when the last person speaking it dies. Since no one is left to speak or hear it, that community's knowledge of culture, cuisine or even biology disappears, too. The five disaster areas for languages include North Australia, Central and South America, the North Pacific, the US -- Oklahoma (where only a few elderly individuals speak Yuchi, for example), Texas and New Mexico -- and Eastern Siberia, China and Japan, where well over 300 languages are in danger of extinction.

◆ THIS MONTH'S HIGHLIGHT ◆

We recently provided translation of a Sinhalese police report from Sri Lanka.



See some other rare languages we handle at translationaces.com.

◆ FEATURE ◆ Lingua Quiz!

- Mix & match: How to ask for your meat cooked RARE in:

(a) Italy	(1) seignant
(b) Germany	(2) casi crudo
(c) Mexico	(3) blutig
(d) France	(4) mal pasado
(e) Brazil	(5) al sangue
- True or false uses of *rare*!
 - Welsh rarebit* is rabbit cooked medium rare.
 - A *bajji* is a *rara avis*.
 - Rarefied* gas has a low density.
 - You're *rarin'* to go if your car is revved up.
 - Yttrium is a *rare earth metal*.



ANSWERS:

- (a) = (5); (b) = (3); (c) = (2); (d) = (1); (e) = 4
- (a) = False, it's a meatless cheese-on-toast dish
(b) = Not exactly! *Rara avis* is literally a rare bird but can mean a rarity in general, and a *bajji* is a rare (almost extinct) dolphin. Hmmm.
(c) = True, especially at gas stations in New Jersey!
(d) = True, but see (c).
(e) = True, it's one of 17 such elements.