

## **Letter of motivation for the nomination of Matthias Brenzinger**

Linguapax Asia nominates Matthias Brenzinger for the Linguapax Award 2017. Matthias Brenzinger stands out in several ways. He is a first-rate scholar of seminal importance in the field of language endangerment and revitalization; he has been a pioneer of this field and has remained relevant for three decades by now; he has devoted a substantial part of his time in support of endangered language communities, and he has been a facilitator of numerous projects, studies and initiatives, readily sharing his time and energy for scholars and activists alike. Last but not least, he has been involved with numerous languages and communities, first and foremost in Africa but also in Europe, the Americas, Australia and in Asia. He has made important contribution to endangered languages and supported endangered language communities in China, Japan and in Korea.

Mathias Brenzinger studied African languages at the University of Cologne under the supervision of Bernd Heine and worked there for more than 20 years. As an effect of his activities there, Cologne has become one of the leading research centers on language endangerment and African linguistics in Europe. He was one of the first to devote his attention entirely on language endangerment and revitalization, and he has produced some of the most important books on this topic. Matthias has also been the main author for the UNESCO assessment scale of language endangerment that is used around the world for a quick but reliable assessment about language vitality and endangerment. His framework is also a practical hands-on tool to understand where to start with language maintenance and revitalization. His analysis of language replacement has resulted in approaches of language replacement trajectories used around the world, irrespective of the socio-economic setting in which language endangerment is happening. This underlines the fact that he has grasped both the universal mechanism underlying language shift and loss without having lost sight of the many different ways in which this may happen around the globe. Matthias is also one of the worldwide leading scholars linking the fields of language and perception. He has conducted highly original work on how people orient themselves in space through language, on ethno-botany, and on how local knowledge manifests in local language.

His interest in the languages and communities he studies is genuine. Matthias Brenzinger has shown as much interest in the everyday concern of the communities he studies as in their languages. He is as conversant about poverty, disease, lack of access to education, malnutrition and other hardships. As a matter of fact, he has also published a book on the HIV/AIDS crisis in Africa and his

contribution to the field of language endangerment and poverty are inspiring. Matthias Brenzinger unites two important characteristics that define great scholars. He has an original and curious mind and he is compassionate about the people and the cultures he is involved with.

Over the past 30 years, Matthias Brenzinger has conducted many years of fieldwork in Africa and in Asia, and has assisted a great number of language communities there in their efforts to maintain and develop their languages. He has developed practical orthographies for a number of languages, and he has helped communities to develop teaching materials and curricula. Matthias Brenzinger has shared his knowledge and compassion on endangered languages and their maintenance on countless occasions in a great number of invited talks around the world. His influence on scholars in the field is enormous. He is respected by everyone. It is impossible to ignore his many contributions to the field.

Matthias Brenzinger is on the editing and advisory board of various journals, has been advising study programs around the world, has been the general secretary of World Congress of African Linguistics for many years, has organized numerous symposia on endangered languages, contributed to all three editions of the UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger (where he was the responsible editor for African languages), and has been a launch member of Endangered Languages Project by the Alliance for Linguistic Diversity. The energy and devotion to his work stands out.

After his appointment to the University of Cape Town in 2012, he immediately set up a Centre for African Language Diversity (CALDi) as well as The African Language Archive (TALA). He has entered those communities which were most in need of support. His recent work on and for the N|uu language, which has four speakers left, underlines everything which has been said about him above. It serves as model of responsible scholarly work which empowers communities and benefits scholarship.

Matthias Brenzinger has been a visiting professor at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies and at the University of Kyoto for one year respectively. During this time, he worked together with Japanese Africanists but also with scholars of language activists in Asia. He has been an early supporter of Ryukyuan language revitalization and is a founding member of the Ryukyuan Heritage Language Society in Japan. He has also worked closely with scholars and activists on Jeju Islands in South

Korea. The Jeju and the Ryukyuan language revival movements owe much to his engagement and they would fare less well if he would not have shared his time, energy and knowledge with everyone who cares about the future of the local languages there. He remains closely associated with many scholars and language activists in Asia. It is for these reasons that Linguapax Asia nominates Matthias Brenzinger as their candidate for this year's Linguapax Award.

**Book written and edited by Matthias Brenzinger (selection)**

1992 *Language Death*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

1994 (with Bernd Heine & Ingo Heine) *The Mukogodo Maasai. An Ethnobotanical Survey*. Köln: Rüdiger Köppe.

1998 *Endangered Languages in Africa*. Köln: Rüdiger Köppe.

2007 *Language Diversity Endangered*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

2012 (with Anne-Maria Fehn) *Proceedings of the 6<sup>th</sup> World Congress of African Languages*. Köln: Rüdiger Köppe.

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Attachment I: How I became a linguist

Attachment II: Extract of CV of Matthias Brenzinger

Attachment III: Cover of co-edited book on the Nluu language