

Many language scholars have learned of language obsolescence and the rise of endangered languages worldwide. The endangered language advocacy that has emerged in the past half-century is generally well-received by academics and public audiences because of the ostensibly objective picture they draw and the prescription they give that humanity unite in 'saving' these dying tongues. Few scholars have criticized this movement for the ethically fraught complications they entail in already marginalized communities. This honors thesis examines the patterns in rhetoric employed in ten of the most accessible endangered language campaigns -- National Geographic's Enduring Voices Project, or The Living Tongues Institute, for instance -- and contextualizes their commonalities into a wider discussion of the ethics of linguistic fieldwork. My primary methodology has included research, interviews with three present linguists who have conducted fieldwork, and an examination of the mission statements of major conservation organizations. I have compared my findings with a personal ethnographic perspective from the spring of 2012 of a grassroots revitalization project in a community in the Peruvian Amazon. Ultimately I intend to provide a guide of sorts for would-be conservationists and documentation workers to the potential complexities of this type of academic fieldwork. By contextualizing the debate in a greater ethical discourse, and comparing the two types of advocacy movements, I hope to promote a more conscious form of advocacy and a more thoughtful rhetoric that puts the social well-being of the communities before any academic aims.