

# Museums of language and the display

*by* Sayid Marifatulloh

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# <sup>1</sup> Museums of language and the display of intangible cultural heritage

edited by Margaret J.-M. Sönmez, Maia Wellington Gahtan, and Nadia Cannata, London and New York, Routledge, 2020, 334 pp., \$157.09 (Hardcover), ISBN 9781138589483

Yunita Laila Zulfa, Frida Akmalia & Sayid Ma'rifatulloh

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## BOOK REVIEW

<sup>1</sup> **Museums of language and the display of intangible cultural heritage**, edited by Margaret J.-M. Sönmez, Maia Wellington Gahtan, and Nadia Cannata, London and New York, Routledge, 2020, 334 pp., \$157.09 (Hardcover), ISBN 9781138589483

<sup>2</sup> In *Museums of Language and the Display of Intangible Cultural Heritage*, the authors bring the reader into how language has become an important heritage to be preserved in the midst of globalisation where the need to connect with each other makes people need a language that can be understood by each other. The fact that people are starting to leave languages that may not or less needed in global communication makes these languages will gradually be abandoned by their users and very likely to become extinct. However, language observers and academics see the importance of preserving language, one of which is by building a language museum as a platform to maintain the existence of language and as a relic of science and civilisation of a <sup>4</sup>tion as the signs of their identity. The book consists of three main parts presenting the museums of individual languages; museums of languages, linguistics, and language groups; and museums of writing.

Part I, chapters 1–7, makes known about museums of individual languages comprising several museums in Europe and Africa. Started from 1) The Afrikaanse Taalmuseum en-Monument where African is considered as the youngest language, followed by 2) The Lithuanian Hearth Language Museum, which is the oldest living Indo-European language. 3) Sòn de Lenga Espaci Occitan Museum of Occitan Language and Culture, preserving occitan language as its users are spread in Italy, Spain, and southern France. Moreover, Occitan is famous as the language of poetry which cannot be separated from the European culture. 4) The Adventurous World of the German Language, initiated by Fruitbearing Society which brings the high pride of German language. Besides displaying the history of the language, the museum also provides learning facilities for

academic visitors. 5) The English Project is dedicated to around 2 billion English speakers around the world where this shows that English has greatest contribution to world culture. In addition, the museum future project is to build library involving the roles of academics from schools, colleges, and university department. 6) Dove il si suona, preserving Italian language, begins by conducting several exhibitions such as in Florence and Switzerland. The success of the exhibition leads to the establishing the permanent museum in 2019.

The authors highlight that most museums individual languages provide information about the history of their preserved language and its development up to the modern era. The map of the language users as well as their dialects and the way they use their language in artistic communication such as song, folklore become one interesting objects to display. Also, the first part succeeds in showing the innovative way of presenting the languages by using digital media, games, and interactive platforms may provide learning facilities for academic visitors.

The second part of the book focuses on the Museums of languages, linguistics, language groups, and universal language. Within this part, the chapters specifically discuss several linguistic museums and language groups from various countries (in terms of the purpose of the museum being established, design, and target market). Chapter 9 introduces the Mundolingua museum from France. Accessibility of exhibitions is one of the principles that apply in this museum. So, there are lots of objects and machines to touch and try. Chapter 10 is written by Elaine Gold about The Canadian Language Museum (CLM). CLM's mission is to promote and appreciate all the languages spoken in Canada and their role in nation building. Ottar Grepstad in the eleventh chapter presents The Ivar Aasen Centre, rsta, Norway (The oldest language

museum) which is located at the guest house of Tuan Ivar Aasen in West Norway (the most prominent linguist in Norway and one of the first modern linguists in Europe). The twelfth chapter describes Esperanto and planned languages (the aims and history of the museum and project the department of Planned Languages, written by Bernhard Tuider). The Esperanto Museum in Vienna is the only <sup>2</sup> museum in the world to hold permanent exhibitions of international languages. Furthermore, *celebrating languages and multilingualism in the UK and beyond: A pop-up museum of languages for the UK* set down in chapter five. In short, the pop-up language museum is a good first step towards realising what is expected (it will become a permanent museum). The last chapter in this section deals with Eurotales: A museum of the voices of Europe ditulis oleh Nadia Cannata, Margaret J.-M. Sönmez, and Maia Wellington Gahtane. Eurotales, stands for 'A Talking Atlas of Linguistic Culture in European Sites', is a work-in-progress museum that aspires to provide a dynamic portrayal of Europe's languages and linguistic cultures.

The third part, along the chapters 14, 15 and 16, features museums of writing, which present, respectively, the Musée Champollion in Figeac, the World Writing Museum Project in Seoul, and the displays dedicated to ancient writing in the Shanghai Museum. In order to study languages from the past, scholars had to use written documentation, in the presence of which they attempted to and succeeded in inferring forms and developments of language and language groups unaccounted for in writing, but lacking which they could not have proceeded in their analysis. This is one of the reasons for the strict interdependence of discourses of language and writing in the nineteenth century.

In chapter 14, Lebreton points out that many of the world's most prestigious museums, such as the British Museum and the Louvre, have developed sections about the birth of writing in recent years, but when Musée Champollion was conceived, it was a very original and unique idea because there were no other museums in the world treating the subject from the birth of writing to the present day and throughout the world. While there are museums dedicated to languages, there remain very few museums dealing with exactly the same theme, that is, museums dedicated to scripts are rare. He presents brilliantly his idea, which was ambitious for a small town and has been a resounding success, with visitors travelling from all over the country and even from beyond to see Champollion's birthplace and learn about the history of writing.

World writing <sup>7</sup> in a museum setting is explored by Yang and Kim in chapter 15, looking at planning of the *national museum of world writing in Korea*. The *chapter* outlines the museum's mission is to provide a platform for studying and understanding past cultural history, as well as to portray it via a variety of world texts. The museum will focus on the relatively less recognised and studied areas of writing, such as Southeast Asia and Eurasia, with the goal of fostering cultural variety and creativity in our society through a better understanding of world literature. The authors are basing their museum planning on two foundational principles: 1) exhibits at the National Museum of World Writing must aspire to universality while representing the heterogeneity of world writings; and 2) exhibits should provide a platform on which to interweave the diverse specificities of writings, taking the exhibits far beyond being physically presented by the artefacts, and focusing primarily on their meanings and values as intangible cultural hegemonies. <sup>3</sup>

By bringing *the ancient Chinese writing system and Shanghai Museum's collection of artefacts*, chapter 16 identifies that the development of writing systems marks a significant turning point in humanity's long history, indicating the transition from an ancient to a more developed civilisation. History, ideas, concepts, and feelings, which were once difficult to describe in pictures, could finally be recorded, preserved, and transmitted across distance and time. In this chapter, Liang Ge focuses on the formation and evolution of the ancient Chinese writing system as it relates to the Shanghai Museum's collection of ancient Chinese writing.

This book is very interesting to read by all people from various scientific fields and also people who are not involved in the world of academia because this book presents an overview of language museums in various parts of the world in a light (not rigid) scientific style. In addition, reading this book can justify the saying 'books open windows to the world'. This book is able to open our knowledge about the types of language museums from various countries, in terms of history, background, concepts, objectives, and challenges faced. However, the images presented in this book are still in black and white. So that, it is likely to make readers easily bored. If the pictures are made in colour, it will be more interesting. Finally, reading this book has given us new inspiration, to start activating language museums in our country (Indonesia). With this language museum, it is hoped that it can immortalise the languages of various tribes where Indonesia is a country consisting of many tribes, which of course have different languages.

Yunita Laila Zulfa  
*Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia*  
✉ [yunitalailazulfa@upi.edu](mailto:yunitalailazulfa@upi.edu)

<sup>6</sup>  
Frida Akmalia  
*Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia*  
✉ [fridaakmalia26@upi.edu](mailto:fridaakmalia26@upi.edu)

Sayid Ma'rifatulloh  
*Universitas Hasyim Asy'ari*

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