



18 October, 2009

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Sorosoro website launch - Peter K. Austin

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On Tuesday 6th October at the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris, the Sorosoro Project of Fondation Chirac held a press conference and launch of their new website (currently only available in French but with English and Spanish versions in the works). The launch was hosted by Rozenn Milin, Director of the Sorosoro project, and attended by ex-president Jacques Chirac, who gave a thoughtful speech about the need to preserve and support linguistic and cultural diversity.

The launch included short presentations reporting on collaborative research projects by Colette Grinevald for Guatemala, Jean-Marie Hombert for Gabon, and Stéphane Robert for Senegal. The reports included sample videos made by professional film makers funded by the Sorosoro Project who accompanied linguists on their fieldwork in these three countries. The quality of the films, which are subtitled in French and can be seen on YouTube, is spectacular, and streets ahead of the somewhat amateurish "home video" that linguists have tended to record when working alone. (Some of the material submitted to the ELAR archive at SOAS, for example, is poorly lit, out of focus, with poor sound quality and either unedited or so poorly edited that it is, in my opinion, frankly unwatchable.) It is to be hoped that in the future the Sorosoro Project, and other funders, will sponsor more work of this type that combines the skills of professional film makers with the local knowledge of the people, languages and cultures developed by linguists and anthropologists, and does so in a sensitive and visually appealing way.

The Sorosoro website also features a *Planisphère des langues* that includes searchable Googlemaps that provide the locations of over 5,000 languages, with basic information about their names and genetic affiliations. I understand that in future the database underlying the maps will be extended to include other relevant data where reliable information is available. The website also includes a quiz, links to other projects, and a calendar of events.

The website launch concluded with a speech by a representative of the major sponsor *Orange*, Jean-Yves Larrouturou, who is manager in charge of Africa, the Middle East and Asia. Mr Larrouturou spoke of his own personal experiences of linguistic diversity growing up as a French Basque, and his speech included some remarks in Basque. (Rozenn Milin, the Project Director, is a native speaker of Breton, so minority languages of France were well represented.)

On the Friday before this event the newspaper *Le Monde* ran a three page feature on "a fragile linguistic diversity" that highlighted some of the projects to be discussed at the launch on the following Tuesday, giving the Sorosoro Project excellent press coverage.

As a member of the Sorosoro Project Advisory Board I felt privileged to have been invited to Paris to see the progress that the Project has been making.