An Interview with APPLE Lecture Speaker Dr. Ross Perlin

Ashley Beccia, Kelly Frantz, Sean Hughes, Miriah Ralston

INTRODUCTION

On April 26th, 2024, the *Studies in Applied Linguistics and TESOL (SALT)* journal interviewed Dr. Ross Perlin, an invited speaker for the 2024 APPLE Lecture Series hosted by the Applied Linguistics and TESOL program at Teachers College, Columbia University.

 Dr. Ross Perlin is a linguist, writer, and translator focused on exploring and supporting linguistic diversity. His book *Language City: The Fight to Preserve Endangered Mother Tongues in New York* was just released by Grove in the US and the UK. Since 2013, he has been co-director of the Endangered Language Alliance in New York, managing research projects on mapmaking, documentation, policy, and public programming for urban linguistic diversity. He also teaches linguistics at Columbia. His writing has appeared in the New York Times, The Guardian, Harpers, and elsewhere. His first book, *Intern Nation: How to Earn Nothing and Learn Little in a Brave New Economy,* ignited national conversation about unpaid work. He has an MA in language documentation and description from the University of London (SOAS) and a PhD in linguistics from the University of Bern.

 We thank Dr. Perlin for his participation in this interview.

THE INTERVIEW

Here is the link to the full interview.

Background

1. You have a broad background in endangered languages, from your dissertation work on Trung and Himalayan languages to the many disparate languages you currently focus on here in New York City. What has inspired you to take on this difficult area of research? [Q1 Video]

The Endangered Language Alliance[1]

2. You are the co-director of the Endangered Language Alliance. Can you tell us a little bit about the Alliance and its mission? [Q2 Video]
3. How can people get more involved in supporting the Endangered Language Alliance? [Q3 Video]

---

[1] The Endangered Language Alliance: https://www.elalliance.org/

Language City: The Book

4. You've been working as co-director at the Endangered Language Alliance alongside Daniel Kaufman for the past decade. What made you decide to write a book? Could you speak a bit about your inspiration for writing the book and your writing process? [Q4 Video]
5. How did you select the six individuals featured in your book as representatives of the diverse linguistic tapestry of New York City? [Q5 Video]

Language Endangerment and Linguistic Diversity

6. In the title of your new book, you liken language to biological organisms using the word "endangered." Linguists have drawn other ecological metaphors to language, such as evoking complex dynamic systems theory to study language from an ecological system perspective. From your view, what are the parallels between language and ecology? [Q6 Video]
7. The concept of "killer languages" like English and Spanish is mentioned in your book. Can you explain how these dominant languages pose threats to linguistic diversity, and what measures can be taken to mitigate these threats? [Q7 Video]
8. In the first chapter of your book, you ask, "Can Babel—the real contemporary New York experiment, not the Biblical myth—actually work?" (p. 8). How hopeful do you feel currently about whether this "Babel experiment" will work? What needs to happen? [Q8 Video]

Language Education in New York City

9. Many members of the Teachers College community and attendees of the APPLE Lecture are involved in language education. This comes as no surprise given the linguistic landscape of New York City, a hub of both language learning and language loss. With your expertise in and experience with languages in the New York City context, what message would you share with language educators in the city if you had the opportunity? [Q9 Video]

REFERENCES

Perlin, R. (2024). *Language city: The fight to preserve endangered mother tongues in New York*. Atlantic Monthly.

Perlin, R. (2011). *Intern nation: How to earn nothing and learn little in a brave new economy*. Verso.