The E-MELD Project:

School of Best Practices in Digital Language Documentation

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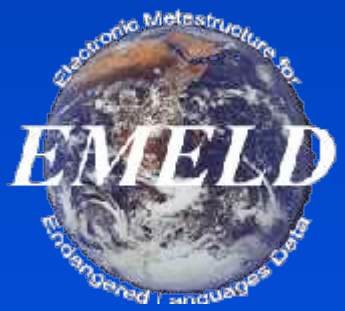
Linguistic Society of America
2005 Annual Meeting, Oakland, CA

The E-MELD Project

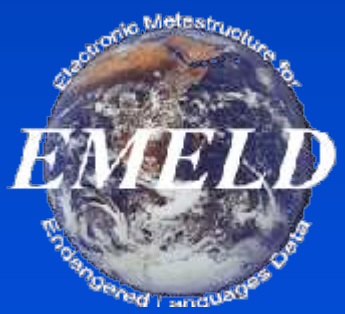
- **Electronic Metastructure for Endangered Languages Documentation**
- 5-year, NSF-sponsored project, begun Sept 2001
- Original Participants:
  - The LINGUIST List
    - Eastern Michigan U
    - Wayne State U
    - U of Arizona
  - Linguistic Data Consortium (UPenn)
  - Endangered Languages Fund



E-MELD Objectives:

To aid in …

- …the preservation of endangered languages documentation
- …fostering community consensus about best practices in the digitization of language data

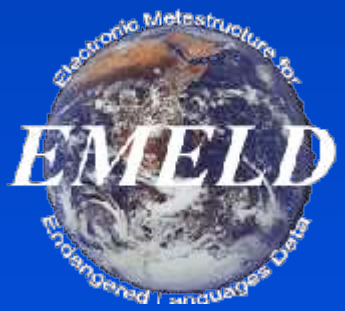


What are Best Practices?

Practices designed to insure that digital language resources :

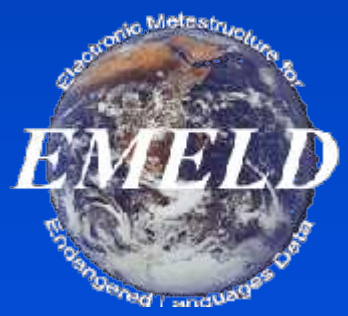
- endure through time.
- can be reused by others, both now and in the future.

-Bird & Simons 2003



Why Best Practices?

The impending "Digital Dark Age"



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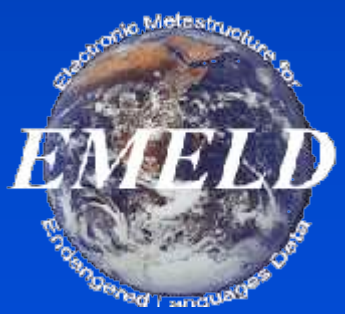
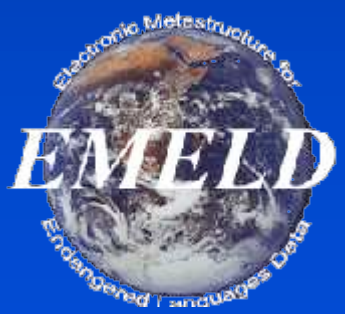
An impending "Digital Dark Age"

Future historians may see our present age as another Dark Ages since so much information documenting our current civilization is recorded digitally and may have vanished.



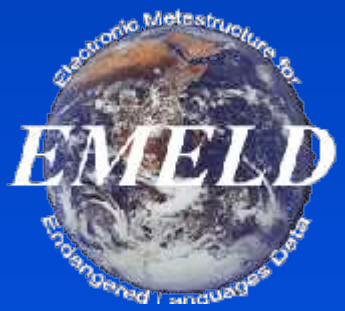
A paradox of writing history
(fr. Gary Simons, LSA 2004)

- The more advanced the writing technology, the less durable the written product.
- From most durable to least durable:
  - Clay tablets and stone
  - Velum
  - Papyrus
  - Paper
  - Digital word processing



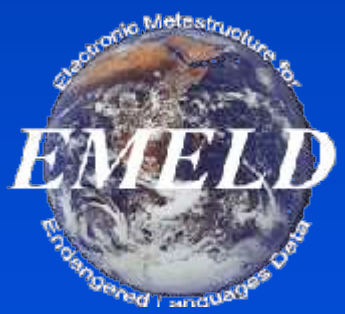
Hardware devices are ephemeral
(fr. Gary Simons, LSA 2004)

- Removable media on personal computers advance over 25 years:
  - 8-inch floppies
  - 5.25-inch floppies
  - 3.5-inch floppies
  - Zip drives
  - CD-Rs
  - DVD-Rs
  - Memory sticks?



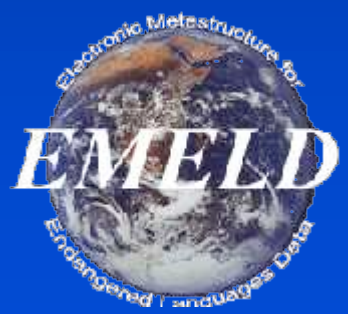
Software formats are ephemeral
(fr. Gary Simons, LSA 2004)

- Software vendors change file formats and functionality with each version.
- When we use a proprietary single vendor format, we lose access to the data when the software is obsolete.
- For instance,
  - Microsoft Word files from the 1980s cannot be read by current versions of Word



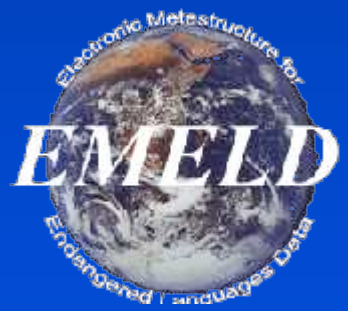
Goal: School of Best Practices

- To encourage linguists to think of themselves as creating archive-ready documentation for the benefit of future generations
- To facilitate this undertaking by providing information, models, tools and support



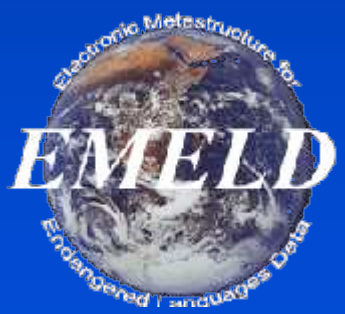
Some Best Practices

- Distinguish between
  - archival form: The form in which information is stored for access long into the future.
  - working form: The form in which information is stored as it is created and edited
  - presentation form: The form in which information is presented to the public.
- Recommendations primarily concern archival form.



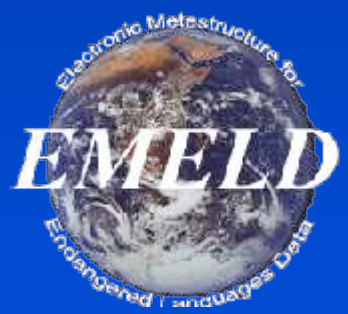
Some Best Practices

- Employ file formats that offer LOTS;
  - L = Lossless
  - O = Open (standards and formats)
  - T = Transparent (or at least well-documented)
  - S = Supported by multiple vendors
- Ex: For text files: plain text with XML markup



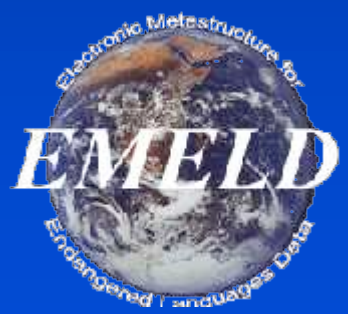
Some Best Practices (cont.)

- For character encoding, use Unicode
- For language identification, use Ethnologue / OLAC language codes
- Create metadata in a standard format (e.g., OLAC or IMDI) and make it available to a search engine
- Deposit archival copies in an established archive



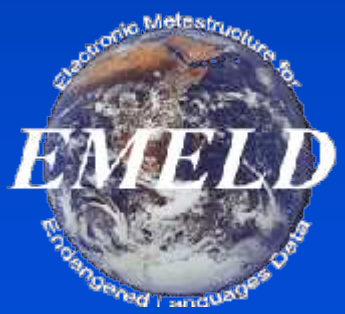
Organization of the School

- Entrance Hall: orientation
- Classroom: lessons & tutorials
- Reading Room: bibliography
- Work Room: online work
- Tool Room: links to tools
- Help (incl. Ask an Expert)
- Case Studies: documentation of 10 ELs digitized according to best practices



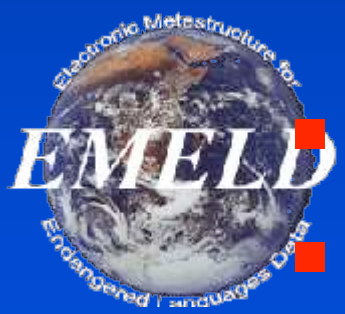
Case Studies (to date):

- Documentation from 8 ELs:
  - Mocovi
  - Monguor
  - Tofa
  - Saliba
  - Biao Mien
  - Kayardild
  - Potawatomi
  - Ega
- Also W. Sissala, Chorote, Nivacle



Developed by:

- E-MELD Project Participants
- The LINGUIST List Crews (2001-4)
  - Team Leader: Steve Moran
- E-MELD Data Providers: Harrison, Buszard-Welcher, Solnit, Grondona, Dwyer . . .
- Consultants: Simons, Hughes, etc.
- 2001-2004 Workshop Participants

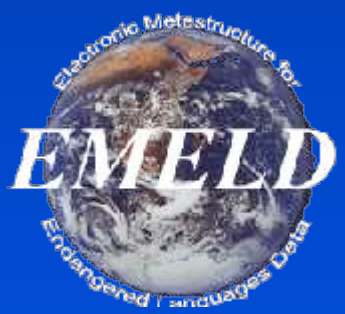


E-MELD Workshops

- 2001, Santa Barbara, CA: The Need for Standards
- E-MELD 2002, Ann Arbor, MI: Digitizing Lexical Information
- E-MELD 2003, Lansing, MI: Digitizing Texts
- E-MELD 2004, Detroit, MI: Databases and Best Practice
- E-MELD 2005, Ann Arbor, MI: Linguistic Annotation: Ontologies & Terminology

E-MELD School of
Best Practices in Digital Language Documentation

http://emeld.org/school/



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