

Article Option Cheatsheet

Edit Post Add New

At no loss for words in the Amazon

Permalink: <https://news.usc.edu/57979/at-a-loss-for-words/> Edit View Post Get Shortlink

Add Media Visual Text

Paragraph

Deep in the Amazon, Evangeline Alva had just awoken from a nap when she heard her first words in Desano.

"A man said to me 'Good morning, sleepy head,'" the linguistics major at the USC Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences recalled of her research trip to the indigenous town of São Gabriel da Cachoeira.

It's a weird language, all the suffixes sound like guttural sounds we make in English to affirm or negate things. I was saying things like *Wunyungmaaninna* for good morning.

Alva

"He spoke first in Portuguese, which I understood, and then repeated the greeting in Desano. At first I was totally perplexed," she said. "Desano is incredibly difficult to understand because it's a nasal language and speakers tend to talk very quietly, mumbling under their breath."

Documenting Desano

Luckily for Alva, who speaks an impressive total of 10 languages, she had grown up speaking another nasal language, Konkani, from South West India. Nevertheless, Desano presents many unique challenges, even for a seasoned linguist.

"It's a weird language," Alva said. "All the suffixes sound like guttural sounds we make in English to affirm or negate things. I was saying things like *Wunyungmaaninna* for good morning."

Alva, who has minors in advertising and consumer behavior, traveled to this destination this past summer to document

Path: p

Word count: 1345 Last edited by Kristina Batiste on March 28, 2014 at 9:36 am

Story settings

Subtitle

Undergraduate Researcher Documents a Dying Language

Byline

Featured Image layout

Choose how to display the featured image on the article page.

Article text width

Related stories

Search...

Dental journal salutes USC alum with reprint of trend-setting article POST +

Pastore awarded for her inspirational teaching POST

Shrinking California child population signals major changes for state POST

Featured Image

Remove featured image

Excerpt

Deep in the Amazon, Evangeline Alva had just awoken from a nap when she heard her first words in Desano.

Excerpts are optional hand-crafted summaries of your content that can be used in your theme. [Learn more about manual excerpts.](#)

Author

Susan Bell

Publish

Preview Changes

Status: Published Edit

Visibility: Public Edit

Revisions: 8 [Browse](#)

Published on: Dec 19, 2011 @ 12:35 [Edit](#)

[Move to Trash](#) [Update](#)

Categories

All Categories Most Used

- Humanities
- Photo
- Policy/Law
- Politics/Society
- Science/Technology
- Social Impact
- Top Story
- Uncategorized
- University
- Video

[+ Add New Category](#)

Tags

Separate tags with commas

Global Research

[Choose from the most used tags](#)

1. Use Blockquote, class="offset" p class="attribution"
2. Select 2-3 Categories
3. Subheads: use Heading 3
4. Select 3-5 relevant tags
5. Write a subtitle that's supports the narrative
6. Select alignment for featured image
7. Optional: Manually select related stories

8. Optional: set a picture as featured (don't if no good art)
9. Write a hook that interacts with the featured image and headline to engage readers
10. Select the author from the drop down list. If they are NOT in the list, write their name in the byline field above; request bio and picture, and send to WS for addition.

At no loss for words in the Amazon

- 5 Undergraduate Researcher Documents a Dying Language
- 6
- 8



10
by Susan Bell
December 19, 2011
[f](#) [t](#) [in](#) [e](#)

Photo: To help USC Dornsife undergraduate Evangeline Alva understand adjectival usage in Desano, a local language consultant describes the significance of the image on the cover of a book about indigenous tribes in the Amazon. (Photo/Gelson Paulo Costa Aguiar)

Deep in the Amazon, Evangeline Alva had just awoken from a nap when she heard her first words in Desano. "A man said to me 'Good morning, sleepy head,'" the linguistics major at the USC Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences recalled of her research trip to the indigenous town of São Gabriel da Cachoeira.

"He spoke first in Portuguese, which I understood, and then repeated the greeting in Desano. At first I was totally perplexed," she said. "Desano is incredibly difficult to understand because it's a nasal language and speakers tend to talk very quietly, mumbling under their breath."

3 Documenting Desano

Luckily for Alva, who speaks an impressive total of 10 languages, she had grown up speaking another nasal language, Konkani, from South West India. Nevertheless, Desano presents many unique challenges, even for a seasoned linguist.

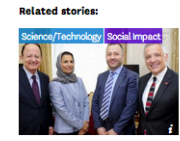
"It's a weird language," Alva said. "All the suffixes sound like guttural sounds we make in English to affirm or negate things. I was saying things like *Wunyungmaaninna* for good morning."

Alva, who has minors in advertising and consumer behavior, traveled to this destination this past summer to document Desano, now spoken fluently by only 150 people in Brazil. (A different Desano dialect is spoken in Colombia, where the number of fluent speakers is thought to be higher.) One of the first linguists to study Desano, Alva, at 21, is also almost certainly the youngest to do so. While in Brazil she helped create a language revitalization program to provide

1
"It's a weird language, all the suffixes sound like guttural sounds we make in English to affirm or negate things. I was saying things like *Wunyungmaaninna* for good morning."
Alva

"I lived among the natives, ate their food, studied their culture and traditions, and learned their history through transcribing and translating legends and folk tales. I couldn't have asked for a better research experience to help me with my future."

- 4 More stories about: Global, Research
- 7



Qatar University joins iPodia alliance
"iPodia is a smart idea that enables cooperation across campuses," says the vice president and chief academic officer of Qatar University.
[EDIT](#) Mar 13



USC Marshall team awaits international competition
The students will be representing their university and the entire country.
[EDIT](#) Mar 21



New institute favors economic thinking
The New York-based institute supports economics scholars by providing money, advice and access to thousands of like-minded individuals.
[EDIT](#) Mar 21



At USC Marshall, spring break serves as springboard for globetrotting
Freshmen will travel to Hong Kong, New Delhi and Chile during a nine-day trip.
[EDIT](#) Mar 17