This commemorable year began with SIL Executive Director Michel Kenmogne attending the official UNESCO launch of the 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages. As a featured speaker and indigenous Cameroonian, Dr. Kenmogne addressed those gathered from around the world to initiate this year dedicated to promoting and protecting indigenous communities: “When we talk about languages, it’s not only about signs and symbols, it’s... about real people.”

Our founder, Cameron Townsend, recognized this a century earlier while living among the Kaqchikel people. His Kaqchikel guide and friend, Francisco “Frisco” Díaz (pictured below), invited Townsend into local community life and forged an illustrative partnership that formed the model for generations of SIL linguists. In November, SIL representatives joined the local community and many organization partners in Guatemala to celebrate how the work alongside the Kaqchikel has expanded into collaborations with thousands of communities worldwide.

SIL is a global faith-based nonprofit that works with over 1,600 local communities to develop language solutions that expand their possibilities for a better life.

SIL’s work is fueled by a desire to see people flourishing in community using the languages they value most.

SIL advocates, builds capacity, and works with local communities, governments and development agencies to apply language expertise that advances meaningful development, education and engagement with Scripture.

Audited financial statements:
sil.org/financial-information

A message from the Executive Director

For more than 85 years, SIL has worked alongside local communities and partners to celebrate and support the vibrant diversity of the world’s more than 7,000 languages. Each of these languages represents a community. Each of these languages is someone’s mother tongue. And each of these languages matters—because people matter.

This understanding began to take shape for SIL nearly 100 years ago when our founder, Cameron Townsend—inspired by his faith—set out on a journey to live alongside the Kaqchikel people of Guatemala. Hoping to connect with the local Kaqchikel community, Townsend began learning their language. In doing so, he observed how the freedom to use the languages they value most, particularly the mother tongue, allows people to build the connections needed to thrive in their physical, emotional and spiritual lives. A century later, it is that revelation that continues to guide us.

As we approach the Decade of Indigenous Languages, which begins in 2022, we look forward to working alongside local and global partners in continued celebration of the value each community, language and culture brings to the world. Together we pursue language solutions that expand possibilities for people to flourish using the languages that matter most to them.
Serving Endangered Languages

South America’s Orinoco Basin is the traditional home of the Piaroa community, whose language is reported as ‘threatened’ in Ethnologue. However, an important resource created in September now helps protect this vulnerable language—a digital Piaroa language keyboard. This essential tool was produced and made available to users worldwide through SIL’s keyboard creation software, Keyman.

Buying, communicating and learning online is an increasing global trend, but less than 8.5% of the world’s 7,117 languages are supported for web use. Technologies—like keyboards, fonts and publication tools—play a pivotal role in opening opportunities for people to use their languages in online spaces. More than 4.3 billion internet users estimated in 2019, and an even higher demand generated by recent 2020 COVID-19 events, makes bridging the online language gap more important than ever to the future and health of under-resourced communities.

855+ Million People Impacted

As of February 2020, SIL works alongside 1,366 communities in 104 countries. The work we do together makes language solutions available for more than 855 million people worldwide.

Serving Endangered Languages

- Partner-led
- SIL-managed
- Key Contributor

SIL’s Role

Depending on need and context, SIL plays a variety of roles in each language program, as shown by the graphic (left).

- Linguistics
- Translation
- Scripture Engagement
- Anthropology
- Trauma Healing

Consulting

SIL’s 532 consultants contribute a variety of language-related knowledge and expertise to language programs worldwide.

1,650 Language Programs

SIL’s involvement in 1,650 language programs worldwide is carried out through three streams of engagement:

1. Linguistic analysis
2. Scripture access/engagement
3. Literacy, education, and development

4,000+ SIL Staff

SIL staff includes 4,054 people from 85 countries, who work alongside thousands more partners and volunteers from local communities worldwide.

Bloom Library

- 52,469 books created (2019)
- 159,522 books created in 330 languages (total)
- 59,168 users from 175 countries (total)

Keyman Keyboards

- 189 keyboards added (2019)
- 678 keyboards (total)
- serving 1,869 languages (total)

Paratext (a joint project with UBS)

- 1,262 new projects registered in 748 languages (2019)
- used by 10,103 users in 172 countries (2019)
- serving over 2,700 languages

Webonary

- 38 dictionaries added in 2019
- Dictionaries in 224 languages (total)

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- Dictionaries in 224 languages (total)

Other Contributions

Ethnologue is SIL’s comprehensive resource for language intelligence, cataloguing the details of the 7,117 known living languages.

- SIL’s Chief Research Officer compiled and released new Ethnologue research on the latest language loss statistics, helping to create accurate projections and inform current strategies in the preservation of at-risk languages.
- The 21st edition of the Ethnologue was released in both web and book (3-volume) formats.

Publications

In addition to Ethnologue, SIL language experts produced these books in 2019:

- Language and Culture Archives

SIL’s digital archive of language resources provides a wealth of materials to support local communities, governments and development agencies in education, literacy and language preservation efforts.

- 2019 was a record year, adding over 5,400 items to end the year with 60,897 total items.
- 130 more languages are now represented in the Archives (totaling 4,203 languages).