Multilingual Education

2006 Update
A Two-Way Bridge

I remember the sparkle in the schoolboy’s eyes, delighted with his success. He had just carefully written a set of consonants and vowels including the tones that the teacher had dictated. I also saw the deep emotion on the African researcher’s face. He was experiencing a rare moment—when the results of one’s efforts are fulfilled right before one’s eyes. The words on the chalkboard were not from the national language, the usual language of education, but from the local African language.

That day I was visiting a multilingual experimental classroom that was part of a pilot project cosponsored by the University of Yaounde and SIL Cameroon. For three years children developed reading and math skills in their own local language, with one daily class period devoted to the oral learning of French or English. In the fourth year the medium of instruction shifted to one of the official languages, French or English.

Many children from ethnic minority language groups have to cross from their home language to the school language with little help. But in this case, a two-way bridge had been built, starting with the foundation of literacy and math skills in their mother tongue and then crossing over to class instruction in the national language. Such a multilingual education bridge opens up not only a passage of hope and opportunity, but also provides an avenue for the local community to receive health and other vital information from broader languages sources.

John Watters, Ph.D.
Executive Director
SIL International works with language communities worldwide to facilitate language-based development through research, training and advocacy.

SIL surveyors help to document the world’s endangered and undocumented languages.

SIL linguists serve as technical advisors, teachers, consultants and facilitators.

SIL facilitates community efforts to produce written descriptions of its language data.

Additional Multilingual Education stories: www.sil.org/literacy

SIL’s participation in multilingual education involves serving as an advocate for and with local communities, linking them to supportive resources and helping each build capacity to develop appropriate programs.

John Watters, Ph.D.
Executive Director
People learn best when they learn in a language they understand well.

Multilingual education (MLE) makes quality education possible by adapting conventional instructional methods and materials to fit a local culture. It makes a pathway across the cultural and linguistic barriers that block minority language speakers from learning and living within the wider language and culture. Since MLE programs require careful development and training, SIL provides consultant help to build the capacity of community educators and national program designers to create effective multilingual education programs.

Ethnic Minority Language Discoveries

“I thought that my language [Quechua] was not equal to the majority language [Spanish]. I believed that was true until I began studying with people from other countries to document my culture, my language and how to write it. As I began to discover the letters I needed and analyzed the grammar, I realized that my language is just as good as any other. My language has morphological, syntactic and semantic structures,” said Peruvian student Édison Convercio Ibarra.

Seventeen other students made similar discoveries about their own languages. They came from 16 language communities in Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico and Peru to attend an SIL-sponsored course taught at the Universidad Ricardo Palma in Lima, Peru.

This was the first time most of the students had intensely analyzed the grammars of their languages. The 10-month course was designed to give speakers of ethnic minority languages a strong foundation in applied linguistics, enabling them to participate in language development in their own communities by gaining a strong understanding of their own languages. Several of the students are currently bilingual school teachers or directors of schools.

Another student, Bibiana Mendoza Garcia from the Mixteco language community, described the goal of this applied linguistics program: “My fellow students and I see the need for such training and are considering how to pass on what we learn to others who haven’t had the chance to study this way.”

Ethiopia
SIL conducted an MLE planning workshop as part of a five-year pilot project with the Ethiopian Regional Culture Bureau. The project includes making primers, training teachers, monitoring and evaluating primary school classes and making further recommendations for five languages of the Benishangul-Gumuz Region.

Thailand
SIL and Mahidol University held a training workshop in Bangkok, Thailand, for 60 participants from governments, NGOs, universities and language communities to plan MLE programs in 12 countries. A repeat workshop in 2007 will add UNESCO and UNICEF sponsorship.
Advocacy

If you don’t speak the language, how do you ask for help?

SIL supports those ethnolinguistic communities whose voices often are not heard—those who want to express their needs to the individuals and agencies that can help them achieve their education goals. There are various levels of advocacy, from raising the awareness among support agencies of MLE objectives and mobilizing start-up program facilitators, to continuing relationships with MLE graduates.

Advocacy in Papua New Guinea

“We have a few books written in our language, but why aren’t we reading them? How can I encourage our children to read and write in their own language?”

These questions expressed the burden that grew into a vision for James Warebu—daytime classes filled with children learning to read and write Usarufa and evening classes for adults.

Mr. Warebu knew about the Papua New Guinea government’s desire that children be educated first in their mother tongue before bridging into the national language. But he knew he needed help to give this opportunity to Usarufa children. He consulted with various SIL staff members and attended several SIL-led workshops that confirmed to him that one of the main hurdles facing Usarufa literacy was the need for a revised alphabet.

His enthusiasm was contagious. Family and friends joined the fight to rescue their language from extinction. Several attended an SIL-conducted alphabet design workshop followed by a trial alphabet class, and then reading primers were produced. As classes began, the adults were thrilled that the younger generation was now speaking their mother tongue more fluently. Adults eagerly began joining literacy classes.

Through an SIL PNG program, a consultant will assist in facilitating some language development goals for the Usarufa people by working for 18 months as an advocate with national and international NGOs. Spurred on by the community’s enthusiasm and commitment, supported by SIL’s advocacy and encouraged by the ability to link to vital resources, Mr. Warebu’s dream is being fulfilled.

Bangladesh

SIL is facilitating workshops aimed at helping Bangladeshi NGOs partner with local language communities. This series of workshops encourages each NGO’s staff to develop a model MLE program in one community served by that NGO partner. In 2006, five partnering NGOs and language communities participated in four of the workshops.
Multilingual Education Bridge

Many local language communities are, in reality, multilingual. In addition, some want to communicate in the national language and possibly also in an international language. MLE programs promote first-language literacy skills, providing the means to meet broader multilingual goals.

Successful multilingual education enables mother-tongue speakers of non-dominant languages to build a culturally and linguistically appropriate educational foundation in their home language first. Then they can successfully cross over the bridge to one or more additional languages. MLE provides the opportunities for lifelong learning in the local as well as national and international languages.
Many hands make light work.

This proverb aptly describes the benefits of partners working together to help language communities establish multilingual education (MLE) programs. Each partner contributes its own particular resources and expertise. Strong educational programs that help students bridge to national and international languages can be built through the combined efforts of government agencies, NGOs, universities and donors. MLE programs that link multiple resources enable more active involvement by the local community, which increases the likelihood of a sustainable MLE program.

Resource Linking in South Asia

Sixty teachers sat spellbound as they listened to David Pujari describe a never-before-taught letter from the alphabet chart during a multilingual education (MLE) workshop. Although Mr. Pujari is from an ethnic minority people group in India—and not a formally trained teacher—his presentation gained him instant respect.

“David was a model teacher, but it was the effort of Mrs. Hannah Alex that led Mr. Pujari to be a confident teacher, capable to teach 60 professionally trained ethnic minority teachers,” wrote the facilitator of the government-sponsored MLE workshop.

As a highly acclaimed professional teacher, Mrs. Alex provided a vital link to instruction for David. Similarly, she has received MLE training from several of SIL’s international consultants throughout the past six years. At the government’s invitation, SIL consultants, along with national counterparts like Mrs. Alex, instructed teachers from 18 local languages throughout two Indian states during 2006.

Mrs. Alex works with the Asha Kiran Society in holistic service that promotes MLE. Because of the urgency of wanting to begin the MLE program in 2007, the government has asked Asha Kiran Society to partner with them by being responsible for the complete training of three of the language groups.

In response to ongoing requests from governments and NGOs, and invitations from local communities, SIL’s consultants continue to serve all by linking partners and resources to assist ethnic minority communities as they strive to meet their MLE goals.

Sudan

SIL is providing technical support in planning UNESCO’s Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE) in southern Sudan in cooperation with the government’s Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology. Research to establish appropriate alternative learning opportunities shows the need for adult literacy assessment and then a three to four-year pilot program to include bilingual education.

MALAYSIA—In response to a UNESCO request to SIL, the Dayak Bidayuh National Association and SIL staff have been implementing an MLE project in five Bidayuh groups since July 2006.

AFRICA—Participants from six east African countries attended HIV/AIDS awareness workshops sponsored by SIL and several partner organizations as part of their continued emphasis on health and education for less advantaged peoples. Original songs were composed to accompany HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment materials written in culturally appropriate story form. All were recorded for audio playback, and the booklets were translated and printed in eight local languages plus five languages of wider communication.
SIL scholars and consultants develop concepts and programs that contribute to initiatives in MLE (see chart at left)

SIL consultant participation examples:

- At the 105th American Anthropological Association conference, SIL consultants organized the session "Mother-Tongue Education for Speakers of Ethnic Minority Languages."
- An SIL Asia literacy consultant assisted UNESCO Hanoi to adapt an SIL and UNESCO Bangkok publication as part of UNESCO’s Literacy Initiative for Empowerment.
- An SIL consultant working in Papua New Guinea presented a paper at the 34th Annual Conference of The Australian and New Zealand Comparative and International Education Society’s Global Governance, Educational Change and Cultural Ecology.
- The Jamaican Language Unit of the University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica, invited SIL bilingual education experts to conduct an evaluation of its pilot bilingual education program.
- An SIL international educational consultant attended The White House Conference on Global Literacy, hosted by First Lady Laura Bush in the USA.
- SIL literacy and education consultants attended and presented a paper at the Southeast Asian Ministries of Education Organization annual meeting.

Selected SIL consultant publications:

- First Language First: Community-based Literacy Programmes for Minority Language Contexts in Asia
- Explaining Multilingual Education: Information on Some Tough Questions
- Manual for Developing Literacy and Adult Education Programmes in Minority Language Communities
- Eritrea National Reading Survey (Ministry of Education research report—curricula in nine languages)
- Castellano C (textbook series, vol. 3, for Peruvian indigenous bilingual teachers teaching Spanish as a second language)

www.ethnologue.com/bibliography.asp
Sixty Years of Service to the People of Peru

The Peruvian government expressed its gratitude to SIL for 60 years of working alongside Peruvians in their language development efforts. “Thank you for serving as a bridge so that the minority groups of the highlands and the jungle can raise their heads in pride rather than be bowed in humiliation,” said Juan Reymundo, a provincial Academic Coordinator of Bilingual-Intercultural Education for the Peruvian Ministry of Education.

Dr. John Watters, SIL Executive Director, also addressed the celebration gathering. “Sixty years of service represents the lives and efforts of three generations from various nations, all wanting to serve the language communities. We in SIL are deeply grateful.”

SIL has worked together with the Peruvian government and other partners in language development, literacy, bilingual teacher training and translation in over 70 languages of Peru.

Asia to Africa—SIL Bird Flu Materials

In Mali, SIL field personnel joined the Comité Technique de Coordination de la Lutte Contre la Grippe Aviaire* sponsored by the Ministère de l’Elevage et le Pêche** to produce bird flu awareness materials. Language teams culturally adapted the SIL-developed booklets and posters, translating them into Bambara and French, languages of wider communication, plus eight local languages.

His Excellency Amadou Toumani Touré, Mali president, examined the translated bird flu materials displayed at an agricultural exhibition. Members of the prevention committee recognized the importance of having materials prepared even though there is not currently a documented bird flu outbreak in Mali. Other language field teams and agencies have translated the materials into local languages in Mozambique, Indonesia and Central America.

*S Technical Committee for the Coordination of the Fight Against Bird Flu
**S Ministry of Livestock Breeding and Fishing

Papua New Guinea honors SIL

SIL has served the peoples of Papua New Guinea (PNG) for over 50 years. To commemorate SIL’s service to the nation, the government of PNG issued six postage stamps. Each stamp portrays a different aspect of SIL’s contribution. At an anniversary celebration Sir Paulias Matane, Governor General of PNG, stated, “From the bottom of my heart, I salute SIL for the good work that they have done—and are doing—in Papua New Guinea. I pay tribute and express my sincere thanks, appreciation and gratitude.” During an embassy reception in New York, Prime Minister of PNG, Sir Michael Somare, awarded SIL International the Independence Anniversary Medal of Appreciation.

Newly Released SIL fonts

“Bravo, I can already use this font as it is!” a literacy specialist wrote about Andika, a sans serif font released in trial form by SIL International. Andika was developed especially for literacy use, taking into account the needs of beginning readers and writers. The font uses clear, easy-to-perceive letterforms.

Also released in 2006 was the official version of Charis SIL Unicode—a proportionally spaced serif font providing improved readability in long printed documents. Charis SIL fonts comprise a single family for Latin and Cyrillic-based writing systems, whether used for phonetic or orthographic needs. Including the previously released Doulos SIL font, all three fonts families are released under SIL’s Open Font License.

New Executive Director in 2008

The SIL International Board of Directors has appointed Fredrick A. Boswell, Ph.D. candidate (Vrije Universiteit, Netherlands), as Executive Director Designee of SIL. He will take office in January 2008 after the current director’s mandatory eight-year term limit has expired. Boswell has been with SIL since 1987 and has been involved in language development in the Solomon Islands since 1989. In addition, he served for six years as the International Translation Coordinator and recently as the Vice President for Academic Affairs at SIL’s International headquarters in Dallas, Texas.
7500 W. Camp Wisdom Road  
Dallas, Texas 75236-5629 USA  
Phone: 972 708-7400  
Fax: 972 708-7350  
E-mail: info-sil@sil.org  
Web: www.sil.org

For language-related resources and software, visit: www.ethnologue.com

Corporate Officers
President  
Carolyn P. Miller, L.H.D.  
Vice President  
Barbara L. Trudell, Ph.D.  
Secretary  
Eugene C. Burnham  
Treasurer  
David T. Cram, CPA  
General Counsel  
Robin R. Green, Esquire

International Administration
Executive Director  
John R. Watters, Ph.D.  
Associate Executive Director for SIL Administration  
Peter Wang, M.D.  
Associate Executive Director for SIL Operations  
Clare O’Leary, Ph.D.  
Vice President for Academic Affairs  
Fredrick A. Boswell, Ph.D. Candidate  
Vice President for Corporate Communications  
Carol A. Dowsett  
Vice President for Finance  
Eleanor L. Berry, CPA  
Vice President for Personnel  
Daniel G. Butler  
Vice President for Strategic Initiatives  
Doyle Peterson  
Executive Director, JAARS, Inc.  
James S. Akovenko  
Africa Area Director  
John W. Hollman, Ph.D.  
Nairobi, Kenya  
Americas Area Director  
Kenneth E. Schmitt, Ph.D.  
San Jose, Costa Rica  
Asia Area Director  
Larry B. Jones, Ph.D.  
Manila, Philippines  
Eurasia Area Director  
Neil Carleton  
High Wycombe, Bucks, England  
Pacific Area Director  
Norman R. McGuire  
Indooroopilly, Queensland, Australia  
International Relations Director  
Alan B. MacDonald  
Washington, DC, USA

Board of Directors
Finance Coordinator, SIL Pacific Area  
David Bosma  
International Translation Consultant, SIL Eurasia Area  
D. Richard Brown, Ph.D. Candidate  
President, Wycliffe USA  
Robert M. Creson  
Director, Wycliffe Norway  
Sigmund Evensen  
Chief Administrator of the Global Scripture Fund, American Bible Society  
Marco A. Herrera  
Director, Cameroon Association for Bible Translation & Literacy  
Michel Kenmogne, Ph.D.  
Director of Orality, International Mission Board  
Grant I. Lovejoy, Ph.D.  
Training Coordinator, SIL Americas Area  
Stephen A. Marletti, Ph.D.  
President, SIL International  
Carolyn P. Miller, L.H.D.  
President, Graduate Institute of Applied Linguistics  
David A. Ross, Ph.D.  
Director, SIL Cameroon  
George F. Shultz  
Director, SIL Indonesia  
Mark H. Taber  
Director of Academic Affairs, SIL Africa Area  
Barbara L. Trudell, Ph.D.  
Chairman, Wycliffe UK Board of Directors  
Roger W. Welch

Affiliated Organizations
Canada Institute of Linguistics  
Langley, British Columbia, Canada  
www.canil.ca  
Graduate Institute of Applied Linguistics  
Dallas, Texas, USA  
www.gial.edu  
International Museum of Cultures, Inc.  
Dallas, Texas, USA  
www.internationalmuseumofcultures.org  
JAARS, Inc.  
Waxhaw, North Carolina, USA  
www.jaars.org  
Wycliffe International, Inc.  
Dallas, Texas, USA  
www.wycliffe.net

About SIL International
SIL International is a faith-based nonprofit organization dedicated to facilitating language development within minority language communities through linguistic research, translation and practical service.

As a nongovernmental organization, SIL has special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations and with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). SIL offers training in applied linguistics at many institutions around the world. Course topics include phonetics, phonology, grammar, linguistic research, cultural anthropology, sociolinguistics, literacy, translation and program planning.

SIL operates on contributions from individuals and organizations interested in various aspects of language development. Major contributors include affiliated member organizations of Wycliffe International.

SIL makes its services available to all without regard to religious belief, political ideology, gender, race or ethnic background.

For more about SIL International, including audited financial statements, visit our website: www.sil.org

SIL Language Statistics
6,912 Languages spoken in the world  
2,072 (2.3 billion) Total languages impacted (speakers)  
1,379 (612 million) Active language programs (speakers)  
over 1,000 Active literacy programs  
over 2 million Number of readers trained  
over 6,000 Active personnel  
over 60 Nationalities of SIL personnel  
25,820 Published works  
These statistics offer the most current estimates available.