

First-Language: Bridge to New Possibilities

Outside a bookshop in Fundong, Cameroon, a school supervisor who trains teachers and develops curriculum was greeted by a young boy. The supervisor asked, "Do you attend school?"

"Yes sir, I am in class three."

"Can you read?"

The boy answered confidently, "Yes, I can read in Kom and in English."

Now quite impressed with this young student, the supervisor asked, "Can you also write, or can you only read?"

"I can read and write."

The supervisor bought a piece of chalk from the nearby bookshop and wrote two sentences in Kom and two in English on the cemented veranda—the boy read all four sentences. Then he handed the chalk to the boy, who wrote two long sentences in Kom and two in English. A growing crowd—witnessing the difference that mother-tongue education can make—began to applaud. Among those in the crowd was the boy's mother, her eyes brimming with tears of joy and pride.

Why was the crowd surprised? Education is usually conducted in English, a language that Kom children encounter for the first time when they begin school. Therefore, most young students struggle with the basics of reading and writing, rarely achieving any level of fluency before Grade 5. This boy, however, attends a Kom mother-tongue school which is part of an ongoing SIL Longitudinal Studies Project. When students receive instruction first in the language they know best, the difference can be dramatic—even young students become fluent readers of their mother tongue, which becomes a bridge to fluency in the language of wider communication.

During this past year, SIL has worked alongside hundreds of communities as they produced materials and implemented plans for multilingual education and literacy. Language revitalizing efforts such as these allow the mother tongue to continue to serve a community's changing needs and provide a bridge for reaching broader multilingual goals.

This *Update* highlights a few of our service opportunities during 2011: the release of two new fonts, the launch of the *ScriptSource* website, training sessions, materials development and the presentation of our research. We are privileged to work in partnerships and networks that advocate for the speakers of ethnic minority languages.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fredrick A. Boswell".

Fredrick A. Boswell
Executive Director





Launch of *ScriptSource*

The newly launched *ScriptSource* website provides valuable information about the scripts and alphabets used to represent the world's languages. It also offers a platform for collaboration and development of software that supports writing systems, such as fonts and keyboards.

ScriptSource reflects SIL's deep commitment to producing tools which support language development for all people. Together with the *Ethnologue*, *ScriptSource* allows researchers, teachers and language community members to quickly locate vital information about languages and scripts.

<http://www.sil.org/sil/news/2011/scriptsource.htm>

Linguistic and Cultural Diversity Online

Of the nearly 7,000 languages spoken today, researchers estimate only 300-500 are represented on the Internet. *The Second International Conference on Linguistic and Cultural Diversity in Cyberspace* brought specialists from around the globe to Yakutsk, the capital of the Sakha Republic, in the Russian Federation. Delegates gathered to exchange information and pursue better solutions on behalf of all language communities.

SIL's representative to both the 2008 and 2011 conferences, Woody McLendon, presented SIL's position as follows:

We believe that every language has inherent value, and that speakers of minority languages and other interested parties should have the tools and techniques available to protect and enhance their cultural and linguistic heritage. In many cases around the world, we have witnessed renewed language vitality as members of a language community are equipped with the capacity to use their language in new and different areas of life.

<http://www.sil.org/icc-2011>



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Cameroonian Linguist Makes Significant Contributions

Grace Tabah had nearly completed her MA in linguistics at the University of Buea when she learned that SIL's Misaje Cluster Project (language development among seven related languages in Cameroon's North West Region) was seeking additional linguistic researchers. "I had received a firm footing in theoretical linguistics. I was really delighted to hear of this opportunity to do some practical fieldwork," explained Grace.

In addition to her MA studies, Grace has the added advantage of being from Ndu, which borders the Misaje area. Her easy rapport with the people in the community has helped her in many aspects of the work--collecting language data, staffing literacy courses, analyzing the languages and developing writing systems for two of the Misaje Cluster languages, Cung and Naami. The communities have eagerly embraced the writing systems, and the work is in the final stages of review.

"I am currently analyzing tone in Cung, which has been a challenge for me," added Grace. "I really enjoy phonology, though, so tone studies are a great opportunity to dig deeper."

Grace is just one of a number of Cameroonian linguists who have contributed significantly to language development projects in their country. SIL joins with communities and local, national and international partners to support language development efforts around the world.



Script Support

Digital Implementation for Writing Systems

SIL provides software tools for language and cultural data with support for complex scripts. Computer adaptation of scripts with complex behaviors opens the door to the benefits of digital communications, such as word processing, text messaging and the Internet. These fonts are also powerful tools for the production of printed materials. A community's ability to use their mother tongue in these practical ways can be a factor in the continued vitality of that language.

<http://scripts.sil.org/Home>

Andika—SIL's Literacy Font

In 2011 phase three of the *Andika* literacy font project was released with a full set of over 2,100 characters, enabling its use with the many diverse languages that use the Roman script. Literacy materials require fonts designed for the special needs of beginning readers. *Andika* is an easy-to-read, Unicode-compliant sans serif font with special alternate glyphs (shapes) for several letters and numbers. Since readability is a major goal, SIL font designers have fine-tuned *Andika* to be clear even in low-resolution environments. The new features are documented on the SIL website where the font is available for free download.

<http://scripts.sil.org/Andika>

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Annapurna SIL

Named for a section of the Himalayas in Nepal, *Annapurna SIL* is a font for the Devanagari script, which is used to write more than 120 Indo-Aryan languages of South Asia. *Annapurna SIL* provides a Unicode-based font family with support for these diverse languages. The calligraphic design reflects the familiar stroke contrast of the broad pen nib commonly used for handwriting *Devanagari*. The font was designed to be readable, compact and attractive, suitable for high-quality publications. *Annapurna SIL* makes use of state-of-the-art OpenType® and Graphite technologies.

<http://scripts.sil.org/AnnapurnaSIL>

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Longstanding Partnership Renewed in Ethiopia

In August a new Memorandum of Understanding was signed by representatives of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and SIL Ethiopia. This agreement formalizes the commitment to continued partnership. In response to an invitation by local leaders, SIL began language development work in Ethiopia in 1973. Since then SIL and Addis Ababa University have collaborated on the linguistic research of approximately forty of Ethiopia's eighty-five living languages. Registered and licensed by the Ministry of Justice's Charities and Societies Agency, SIL Ethiopia cooperates with government agencies, Ethiopian churches and other partners in their language development efforts.

<http://www.sil.org/eth-mou>

Sixty Years of Partnership with the University of North Dakota

In 2011 SIL and the University of North Dakota (UND) celebrated sixty years of partnership in linguistics training. The SIL-UND program prepares students to work in local languages around the world, offering an MA in linguistics and a graduate certificate in literacy. In addition to spoken languages, most courses include the analysis and acquisition of signed languages, a special focus of the program, with Deaf people involved as students and staff.

<http://www.sil.org/sil-und60>



New Academic Partnerships in Malaysia and Papua New Guinea

SIL is continually building new mutually beneficial partnerships with organizations and institutions around the world. Two new working partnerships for academic and professional cooperation were formalized this year with Universiti Malaysia Sabah and Papua New Guinea's University of Goroka. These agreements are pathways to joint research, academic exchange and student development.

<http://www.sil.org/training/welcome.htm>



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FieldWorks Training Promotes Language Documentation by Mother Tongue Speakers in Malaysia

Sixty participants, many from the ethnolinguistic minority communities of Sabah and Sarawak, took part in a workshop which provided training in the use of SIL's *FieldWorks* language documentation software. The workshop was held at Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) and was co-sponsored by the Centre for the Promotion of Knowledge and Language Learning at UMS, the Kadazandusun Chair of UMS, the UMS Association of Mixed-Methods Researchers and SIL Malaysia.

Participants gained practical skills in using *FieldWorks* to document the languages spoken in their home communities. Many participants are already in the beginning stages of starting a community-based dictionary. In addition to the training component, the workshop also provided opportunities for researchers to discuss issues pertaining to language and culture documentation.

It is our hope that participants in this week's workshop will learn to use the FieldWorks software as a tool for both dictionary compilation and also for storing ethnographic data, with a view to documenting their cultural heritage and developing more literacy materials in their mother tongues.

—UMS Vice Chancellor Professor Datuk Seri Panglima Dr. Kamaruzaman Ampon

FieldWorks Language Explorer (FLEX) provides the tools needed by professional linguists and anthropologists while remaining accessible to any researcher with basic computer skills. The software supports tasks ranging from data entry to the preparation of data for publication.

<http://fieldworks.sil.org/flex>

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Academic Publications

SIL International Publications offers more than two hundred titles documenting seventy-seven years of linguistic and cultural research conducted by SIL personnel. Seven new works were released in 2011, including *The Kifuliiru Language*, a two-volume work documenting the structures and processes of this Bantu language. Kifuliiru is spoken by 400,000 members of the Bafuliiru community in the Democratic Republic of Congo.



About SIL

SIL International® is a faith-based nonprofit organization committed to serving language communities worldwide as they build capacity for sustainable language development. SIL does this primarily through research, translation, training and materials development.

As a nongovernmental organization, SIL has special consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and formal consultative relations with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Training is offered by SIL at many institutions around the world. Course topics include linguistic analysis, language documentation, cultural anthropology, ethnomusicology and arts, sociolinguistics, literacy, multilingual education, translation and language 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 Global Alliance. SIL makes its services available to all without regard to religious belief, political ideology, gender, race or ethnic background.

Involvement in Language Development by SIL and Related Staff

6,909	Languages spoken in the world (<i>Ethnologue</i>)
More than 1,980	Active language projects (1.6 billion people)
More than 4,200	Active personnel
More than 60	Nationalities of SIL staff

For over 75 years, more than 15,000 people have been trained through cooperative programs between educational institutions and SIL.

These statistics offer the most current estimates available.

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Background graphic fonts: Andika, Annapurna SIL, Charis SIL, and Spanish Sign Language.

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