



SIL International® is a faith-based nonprofit organization committed to serving language communities worldwide as they develop the skills and capacity necessary to preserve and revitalize their languages. As an international nongovernmental organization (INGO), SIL actively participates in networks and partnerships—with government organizations, local groups and other INGOs—which are vital to the support of minority language communities in their own language development efforts.

Growing out of one man's concern for people who spoke languages lacking written alphabets, SIL was started by W. Cameron Townsend in 1934 as a small summer linguistics training program. It has expanded to an organization of more than 4,400 people from over 86 countries. SIL has conducted linguistic analysis in more than 2,590 languages spoken by 1.7 billion people in nearly 100 countries. SIL makes its services available to all without regard to religious belief, political ideology, gender, race or ethnic background.

Language research and documentation are core contributions SIL makes to the world's understanding of languages, and these areas of study involve more than 80 full-time language assessment specialists. As a leader in research of the world's languages, SIL has surveyed over 2,500 languages, contributing unique and significant data to the *Ethnologue: Languages of the World™*, a reference volume cataloging the world's known living languages. Approximately 3,000 languages still need assessment.

Grants from private corporations, foundations and government agencies assist SIL in its literacy and other related projects. Resources are also provided by affiliated organizations in various parts of the world. Major contributors include member organizations of Wycliffe International which promote the translation of Christian Scriptures into the world's languages where appropriate.

Language Development

SIL supports language communities by building their capacity to develop their language to meet their changing needs. Language development can include activities such as linguistic research, orthography development, Bible translation, terminology and dictionary development, curriculum and materials development, and teacher training.

Working alongside a community to document its unique language affirms the value of the language and its speakers.

Linguistics

Applied linguistics is the foundation for SIL's work. SIL's field linguists work in partnership with ethnolinguistic minority language speakers to collect and analyze language and culture data. Linguists do quality research and mentor others to produce linguistic descriptions—phonologies, grammars and dictionaries.

SIL facilitates the publication of research in linguistics, anthropology, ethnomusicology and other disciplines. Its own published research is made available to libraries, governments and international agencies.

Literacy and Multilingual Education

Life-long education enables minority language communities to gain the knowledge and skills to meet their needs and achieve their goals. SIL supports communities in their efforts to develop education programs that enable children and adults to become fluent readers and writers in their own mother tongue and also gain fluency in a language of wider communication.

Through multilingual education, minority language communities build positive bridges with languages of wider communication without sacrificing their heritage language and culture. Developing written literature and using the mother tongue in education raises the status of the language and sustains it as a means of communication within the community.

Language Technology

Technology brings much of the world together, yet can also be a barrier to participation of ethnolinguistic minority communities in the global community. For this reason, SIL facilitates the research and development of computer software solutions needed to study languages and publish literature in a variety of writing systems. Further software development for non-Roman scripts is underway.

SIL joins with partner organizations to create innovative technical approaches that support many ethnic minorities in their linguistic analyses and literature development. The availability of cutting-edge technology at the grassroots level results in added input and discoveries from local communities.



Capacity Building

SIL personnel work as technical consultants alongside local communities to conduct language-related workshops to train community leaders. SIL also helps community leaders to establish partnerships with other supporting agencies to develop the community infrastructures necessary to sustain their language development programs. In partnership with academic institutions and other organizations, SIL offers courses in applied linguistics and related fields at more than 20 locations around the world.

Partnerships

As an international nongovernmental organization (INGO), SIL partners with government organizations, local groups and other INGOs. 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).



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