



Australian Society for Indigenous Languages

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releasing the power of words



50
years of service

19 August 2011

Committee Secretary
 House of Representatives Standing Committee on
 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs
 PO Box 6021
 Parliament House
 CANBERRA ACT 2600
 AUSTRALIA

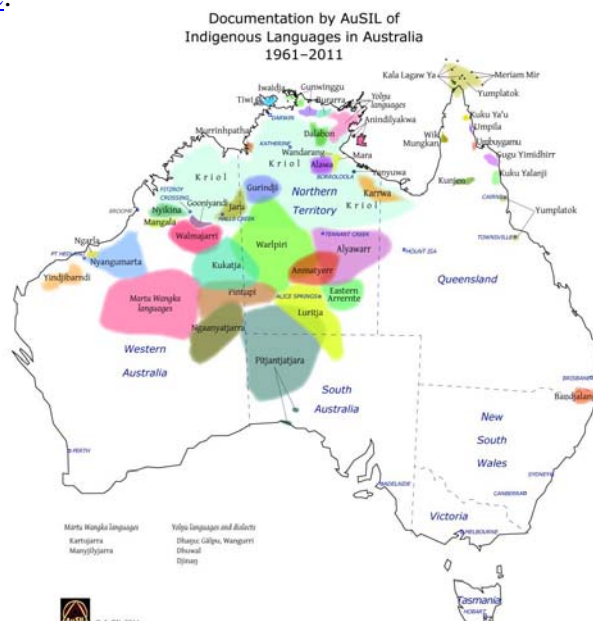
Re: Inquiry into language learning in Indigenous communities

To the Committee,

First, we would like to congratulate you on the Inquiry, the Terms of Reference, and the 8 July 2011 Media Alert. These are encouraging as they show an increasing level of awareness of the issues and the research related to indigenous languages in society and in education, as well as the urgent need to improve the status quo.

AuSIL is this year celebrating 50 years of service in indigenous communities around Australia (both Aboriginal and Torres Strait), and we have recognised expertise and experience behind the insights that we would like to share with this Inquiry. To get an overview of the language communities where we have worked, see the Map below. To see a sample of some resources AuSIL has produced, see our website at: www.ausil.org.au.

In addition to AuSIL's direct partnership and service in indigenous language communities, we have also published books and articles, organised several public forums with leading Australian and international experts in multilingual education, interacted with politicians, and interacted with the media on the topic of your current Inquiry. Some of these resources are available on our [website](http://www.ausil.org.au).





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Executive Summary of AuSIL submission on Indigenous languages

Decades of research and experience show that meaningful recognition of indigenous languages, along with their deliberate and systematic incorporation into programs in the education, health, justice, and job training sectors, along with reasonable cross-cultural training and orientation of service providers are critical to Closing the Gap. The evidence consistently indicates that doing so gives significantly better outcomes in:

- literacy,
- Standard English proficiency,
- school retention rates,
- learning in all subjects,
- reduction in antisocial behaviour,
- as well as progress towards achieving the Millenium Development Goals.

Not doing so will continue to contribute to low levels of performance in all these sectors, and seriously impede the goals of Closing the Gap.

Too many 'experts', decision-makers and service providers in these sectors continue to ignore the language factor—to everyone's peril.

While we may talk about these things in terms of improved "performance" and "outcomes", many of our Indigenous friends and colleagues talk about them in terms of "respect".

Regarding

The benefits of giving attention and recognition to Indigenous languages

AND

The contribution of Indigenous languages to Closing the Gap and strengthening Indigenous identity and culture

The benefits fall broadly into several categories:

1. Improved educational quality, efficiency and performance: there is over 60 years of research around the world and in Australia to support the fact that early education in one's first language is the key to educational success in multilingual societies. As counter-intuitive as it might seem, this also results improved proficiency in second languages such as Standard English,
2. Social, political, and economic participation: Indigenous community leaders and parents that we talk to consistently want their children to be able to function fully and responsibly in *both* the traditional language and culture *and* in Standard English and the mainstream culture and job market. It is not an *either/or* situation (*either* traditional language *or* English); it is a *both/and* situation (*both* traditional language *and* English). People who think they want *either/or*, and that indigenous parents do not want their children to be proficient in Standard English are misinformed.
3. More effectively and sustainably achieving development goals such as the Millenium Development Goals: (See attached resource below.) Language has been shown to play a crucial role in:
 - a. eradicating poverty and hunger
 - b. achieving Education for All (universal primary education)
 - c. promoting gender equality and empowering women
 - d. reducing child mortality
 - e. improving maternal health
 - f. combating various diseases, including HIV/AIDS
 - g. ensuring environmental sustainability
 - h. developing meaningful partnerships for sustainable development.
4. Social equity and equality: This is a very complex issue. We are not there yet, and a significant part of this is due to individuals, policy-makers, programs, and service providers ignoring the language factor.
5. Multilingualism, pluralism: People who are bilingual and bicultural are enriched, and can often see legitimacy in more than one point of view. People who are monolingual and monocultural are the ones who are impoverished. The dominant Anglo culture from which many of the service providers come, often does not understand or value this.
6. Strong and stable social identity, human rights, indigenous rights: These issues are known to be powerful and real, particularly to minorities and to the socially and economically disadvantaged. Whether they are acknowledged and addressed with respect, or ignored or dismissed can have positive or negative political implications. If a minority group is not afforded the same respect and protections given to other groups by their government, why should they remain loyal and productive citizens? Having recently experienced their civil rights arbitrarily taken away with the suspension of the Racial Discrimination Act for the enactment of the Northern Territory Emergency Response (commonly known as the Intervention), with statistics indicating that in the NT an aboriginal person is 8 times more likely to be pulled over by the police than a non-indigenous person, with the removal of their languages from the teaching-learning process in the government school programs, and in at least one case with the local

language forbidden from being used on school property, why should Indigenous people feel their language and cultures and persons are respected and protected?

7. Impact on language maintenance, language endangerment, and revitalisation: Societies with a strong language and cultural identity tend to be fairly stable. Societies that are well along the way to losing their language and culture (and therefore identity) tend to be destabilised, confused, and without frameworks and mechanisms for problem solving, which increases the burden on government, programs, and service providers.

In support of the above statements, we attach the following electronic documents:

1. **Indigenous languages in education: what the research actually shows**. (AuSIL, 2009; *filename: 2 AuSIL-Grimes-Indig lgs in education.pdf*). This booklet briefly summarizes 60 years of academic research and is written in plain English. While focusing primarily on language-in-education issues, it also touches on the link between language and identity, and antisocial behaviour, and includes an extensive **Bibliography** to back it all up.
2. **Why languages matter: meeting Millenium Development Goals through local languages**. (SIL International, 2008; *filename: 3 SIL MDG 2008.pdf*)

[NOTE: we can provide you with hard copies of these two resources upon request. Please let us know how many you need.]

Regarding

The potential benefits of including Indigenous languages in early education

AND

Measures to improve education outcomes in those Indigenous communities where English is a second language

AND

The educational and vocational benefits of ensuring English language competency amongst Indigenous communities

60 years of research shows that well designed and well implemented multilingual education programs (MLE) result in programs where:

- children learn better (fact: children learn best in the language they understand best; in all subjects including maths and science, not just reading and writing)
- the evidence is also overwhelming that with well designed and well implemented MLE programs, children are likely to learn Standard English better
- children stay in school longer and reach higher levels of education
- children are less likely to repeat a year, and less likely to drop out
- pass rates are higher for a greater number of children
- teachers can use more effective teaching methods
- using local languages allows more local content, which facilitates greater participation from the parents and community. All of these factors together are known to produce better educational results than input from just the school alone.
- children in marginalised and at risk populations tend to increase their social mobility (which includes jobs)
- children acquire better literacy skills, which concurrently stimulates improved adult literacy in the community
- several studies have shown that good MLE programs are cost effective within just a few years.

In support of the above statements, we provide the following electronic documents:

1. **Indigenous languages in education: what the research actually shows.** (AuSIL, 2009; *filename: 2 AuSIL-Grimes-Indig lgs in education.pdf*).
2. **Multilingual Education.** (SIL International, 2009; *filename: 4 SIL MLE 2009.pdf*)

[NOTE: we can provide you with hard copies of these two resources upon request. Please let us know how many you need.]

Note also that in addition to significant individual and academic research in this area, there are several international organisations publishing similar findings over many years, and also developing programs that are consistent with the research findings. These include: World Bank, UNESCO, UNICEF, SIL International, Save the Children, and others.

We would also alert you to a major report recently released on this topic, listed below. (While it is not published by AuSIL or SIL International, we can provide you with an electronic copy upon request.)

Gove, A. and P. Cvelich. 2011. *Early Reading: Igniting Education for All: a report by the Early Grade Learning Community of Practice*. Revised edition. Research Triangle Institute.

Regarding

Measures to improve Indigenous language interpreting and translating services

A message that cannot be understood is useless. So the government or NGOs may have messages they want to communicate that are pure gold in the education, health, justice, and community governance sectors, but if they are using English words and structures not widely known in Indigenous circles, or poorly translated, then those messages are lost.

A large part of what AuSIL does is translation into Indigenous languages. So we have thought a lot about it, done it a lot, trained a lot of people to do it well, and developed Cert III and Cert IV courses for Indigenous Translators. Some observations:

- Many service providers in the health sector, the justice sector, or those providing training in education, are not aware of available translation and interpreting services.
- Many people requesting translation and interpreting services are not aware that they may be using *language for special purposes*. A generally competent translator or interpreter may not know the specific concepts and vocabulary and practices for specialised technical fields, and may need additional training or orientation for that sector. Interpreting in court, translating a health brochure, interpreting for a politician, or translating the Bible, use overlapping but different translation principles, and protocols for what is considered 'best practice'.
- Many people requesting translation and interpreting services aren't aware that there are many different Indigenous languages actively spoken in Australia. Just asking for "an aboriginal interpreter" may not get them one that speaks the language of their target audience.
- Many people requesting translation and interpreting services are not aware that if they first rewrite and repackage the material they want to communicate to avoid certain English structures that are not widely understood by Indigenous people (like passives and abstract nouns), then they significantly increase their chances of getting their message across successfully, either in English or in a translated form.

[For examples of what we are talking about here, see the attached joint AuSIL-NAAJA

resource: **“Helpful hints for cross-cultural communication in the Top End.”**
filename: **AuSIL-NAAJA Communication Hints.pdf**]

- Talking with people in the justice and health sectors who use interpreter services regularly, it is clear there is much room for additional training to raise the bar for existing translation and interpreting services.

The Federal and State governments are some of the worst offenders in packaging messages in ways that almost ensure they cannot be understood, and cannot be translated easily. Good government-speak is often a bad way to communicate with their intended target audience.

[NOTE: AuSIL has some electronic resources available on our website at www.ausil.org.au, and others in hard copy.]

Regarding

The effectiveness of current maintenance and revitalisation programs for Indigenous languages

We're sorry, but in the Northern Territory we are forced to ask, “What maintenance and revitalisation programs?” And that is with a population that is around 30% Indigenous.

A couple of years ago, when there were still a few government bilingual schools in the Northern Territory, they were under resourced and under funded. Nevertheless, test results show that most of them were *performing as good as or better than* fully funded and fully resourced mainstream schools! This should come as no surprise, since it is what all the other research around the world and in Australia predicts.

It should also come as no surprise that a year after the Northern Territory government stopped all bilingual programs, and implemented their “English only” policy, both NAPLAN scores and attendance dropped off significantly in the former bilingual schools (by as much as 30 percentage points in some cases). Note that “English only” is a term used in the wording of the original NT-DET policy document, even though the government has since shied away from that phrasing—but the practice and effect and perception is the same. (On the AuSIL website: www.ausil.org.au, Devlin 2010 MP3 and PDF files carefully exposes the post-bilingual era failures using the NT government's own statistics and NAPLAN results.)

Imagine the results we might get if we had well designed, well implemented, fully funded, and fully resourced MLE programs backed by political will, rather than continually undermined? Surely Australia could become a world leader in MLE circles, and show the way for others. As it is, we must hang our heads in shame, and acknowledge that many of our poorer neighbours have more informed policies and better implemented programs than we do.

Some common mistakes in implementing MLE programs in the Northern Territory and elsewhere include:

- Using English only as the Language of Instruction (LoI); learning is impeded, and cognitive development is hindered; many students and parents lose motivation to continue participating in school. The **bi-** in ‘bilingual’ means ‘two’.
- Using Indigenous language only; learning does happen, but bridging to the mainstream does not happen; learning is not sustained into the higher levels of education, partly because the resources at the higher levels are not available in the indigenous languages. As above, the **bi-** in ‘bilingual’ means ‘two’.
- When teachers realise that learning will not happen unless they use the indigenous language as the Language of Instruction, but they only bridge to English in an ad hoc way, this results in limited English proficiency for the students, and does not reach the

levels of proficiency desired by either the parents or the educational system. For MLE to work well, it has to be deliberate and systematic, rather than ad hoc.

- Likewise, when the Indigenous language is taught only in an ad hoc way, and not reinforced by interaction with the grandparent generation outside of school, this results in limited proficiency of the Indigenous language for the students, and does not reach the levels of proficiency desired by the parents or the community. As above, for MLE to work well, it has to be deliberate and systematic, rather than ad hoc.
- If a bilingual school (private or government) has the best teachers, orthography, materials, curriculum, funding, and community participation, but are assigned teachers, principals, and decision-makers that do not understand or do not believe in an MLE approach, the whole thing is undermined. The political will has to also be there for it to work.
- It is easy for the uninformed to confuse a *bilingual* program and a *revitalisation* program. We saw this confusion by the NT government when they initially announced their “English only” policy, treating the two as the same thing. The two are very different. Briefly, a *bilingual* program utilises the living and viable language spoken everyday in the homes of the students as their first language, or “mother tongue”. The students already know the language. They use it as a vehicle for learning to read and for other kinds of learning as well, including as a bridge to learning the national or mainstream language. A *revitalisation* program aims to revive a heritage language no longer used by most or all of the community, by teaching it to people who associate it with their social and ethnic identity, but do not speak it. They want to learn it.

[NOTE: there are several references to studies that back up these statements in the Bibliography of the attached resource: *filename: AuSIL-Grimes-Indig lgs in education.pdf*.]

Regarding

The effectiveness of the Commonwealth Government Indigenous languages policy in delivering its objectives and relevant policies of other Australian governments

Mixed signals are being sent. On the one hand, maintaining indigenous languages and cultures is extremely important for the multi-billion dollar tourism industry. On the other hand, support and space for indigenous languages in the education sector gets removed altogether.

Going on impressions, it seems the Commonwealth dabbles in showing trivial support for some revitalisation programs, while ignoring the maintenance of strong and viable Indigenous language communities.

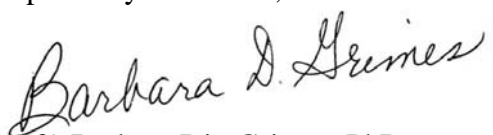
And effectively the Commonwealth has no policy on Indigenous languages that makes any difference to anyone. That is because the policies that really make a difference for good or for ill are at the State and Territory level, particularly with regard to education, but also in the health and justice sectors. Under the current dynamics, these policies overshadow and undermine anything that the Commonwealth might care to do, no matter how well informed it might be. Until these issues are addressed, does it really matter what the “Commonwealth policy” is?

Australia has the expertise, but it is not being listened to.

We would be willing to suggest a dozen or so names of informed and experienced Indigenous and non-indigenous experts from various universities and NGOs around Australia to work with the government as a Working Group towards framing real solutions, if that were deemed useful.

Please let us know if we can assist you further in this Inquiry.

Respectfully submitted,



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- (Adjunct) Professor of Linguistics, Department of Linguistics, School of Culture, History & Language, College of Asia & the Pacific, Australian National University. Canberra

Attachments:

1. **Indigenous languages in education: what the research actually shows.** (AuSIL, 2009; *filename: 2 AuSIL-Grimes-Indig lgs in education.pdf*).
2. **Why languages matter: meeting Millenium Development Goals through local languages.** (SIL International, 2008; *filename: 3 SIL MDG 2008.pdf*)
3. **Multilingual Education.** (SIL International, 2009; *filename: 4 SIL MLE 2009.pdf*)
4. **“Helpful hints for cross-cultural communication in the Top End.”** (AuSIL & NAAJA, 2011; *filename: 5 AuSIL-NAAJA Communication Hints.pdf*)

Indigenous languages in education: what the research actually shows

Charles E. Grimes, Ph.D.



Australian Society for Indigenous Languages, Inc.
2009

Title: *Indigenous languages in education: what the research actually shows*

Author: *Charles E. Grimes*

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Cartoons by June Jacob, ©2003 used with permission.

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Cover by: Gordon Thompson

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(64 pages + ii, A5.)

KEY WORDS: language in education; bilingual education; multilingual education; MLE; language and social identity; language and social stability; minority languages; mother tongue; endangered languages; literacy; language policy; Australian aboriginal languages; indigenous rights; language rights; community-based education; second-language learning; English curriculum; aboriginal English; Kriol; creoles in education; language shift; language death; education for all

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Indigenous languages in education: what the research actually shows

Charles E. Grimes, Ph.D.¹

“Children learn better if they understand the language spoken in school. This is a straightforward observation borne out by study after study (Thomas and Collier, 1997; Dutcher, 1995; Patrinos and Velez, 1996; Walter, 2003). Even the important goal of learning a second language is facilitated by starting with a language the children already know. Cummins (2000) and others provide convincing evidence of the principle of interdependence—that second language learning is helped, not hindered by first language study. This leads to a simple axiom: the first language is the language of learning. It is by far the easiest way for children to interact with the world. And when the language of learning and the language of instruction do not match, learning difficulties are bound to follow.”

(World Bank 2006:3)

“The level of development of children's mother tongue is a strong predictor of their second language development.”

(Cummins. 2000)

¹ The author is a member of an indigenous minority group. He is also an Adjunct Professor of Linguistics, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University; a Linguistics Consultant with the Australian Society for Indigenous Languages (AuSIL), which is affiliated with SIL International, a partner organisation with UNESCO in language development and multilingual education (MLE); and Translation Coordinator at the Language & Culture Unit, GMIT, Kupang, Indonesia.

“The most powerful factor in predicting educational success for minority learners was the amount of formal schooling they received in their L1.” *(Thomas and Collier, 1997, reporting on an 11-year study of 42,000 minority language speakers in the USA.*

www.ncela.gwu.edu/ncbepubs/resource/effectiveness/)

The gap in the Northern Territory

With something like 30% of the population of around 200,000 of the Northern Territory being indigenous, and those indigenous citizens speaking several dozen heritage languages, it is clear that the Northern Territory is multilingual, perhaps to a greater degree than any other state or territory in Australia. (See www.ethnologue.com for a listing of languages in Australia.) This presents special challenges for education, health, the job market and the criminal justice system, just to name a few key sectors.

But with something like 80% of the prison population being disproportionately indigenous, and the disproportionate lack of indigenous people employed in the mainstream community (also as a result of being educationally disadvantaged), it is clear that past and current policies and practices of the Northern Territory government (both current and past) in relation to the role of language in education, and cross-cultural communication in other sectors such as health and the criminal justice system, are for the most part ineffective. And as the addage says, ***“If you keep doing what you've always done, you will keep getting the results you've always gotten.”*** So it is time for the NT government to show the courage of taking a fresh look and a more informed approach to education in indigenous communities, and pursue a better understanding of the role of language in undergirding current problems in education, health, the job market, and the criminal justice system.

Around the world (including Australia), the fields of linguistics, sociolinguistics, and English as a Second Language (ESL) have made huge advances in the past several decades, as have studies of issues facing speakers of minority languages in mainstream education (see attached bibliography). But there is a big gap between these fields, and the attitudes and practices of general educators, policy-makers, and the national curriculum in education for the subject of English as it is taught in schools, which has for the most part been fairly static for decades and assumes that students are native speakers of Standard English. The latter field is either ignorant of, or chooses to ignore the developments in the former fields, even though the demographic of English-speaking countries such as Australia is increasingly multilingual, and the proportion is increasing of children in schools who do not come from homes where Standard English is the primary language. There is a move in some countries to force the educators through legislation to become aware of and accommodate many of these advances in related fields which are directly relevant to the language-related challenges faced in education and society.

This gap between what the research actually shows and the policies and practices in Northern Territory schools relating to language issues is quite glaring. The specifics of this are well documented in Simpson, Caffery and McConvell (2009), and in Devlin (2009). It does not speak well of the NT government, nor of its commitment to making a real difference in indigenous communities. It is time for a significant change in direction—but one that is better informed on the issues.

The World Bank (2005:1) observes:

“Fifty percent of the world’s out-of-school children live in communities where the language of schooling is rarely, if ever, used at home. This underscores the biggest challenge to achieving Education for All (EFA): a legacy of non-productive practices that lead to low levels of learning and high levels of dropout and repetition.”

The Northern Territory government ultimately wants their indigenous citizens to be part of:

- stable communities, who are
- both literate *and* competent in the national language—English;
- have a strong sense of identity and pride in their unique ethnic heritage (there can be no community stability without this);
- stay in school at least through most of secondary school, and preferably beyond;
- are productive and contributing members of society in whatever rural or urban community in which they live.

Worldwide experience and decades of research (including in Australia and the Northern Territory—see attached bibliography) show an overwhelmingly unified picture that:

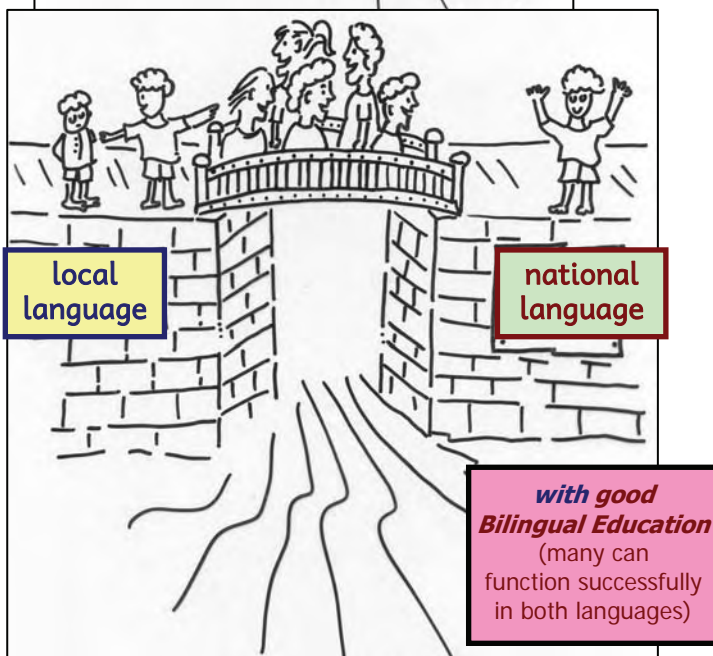
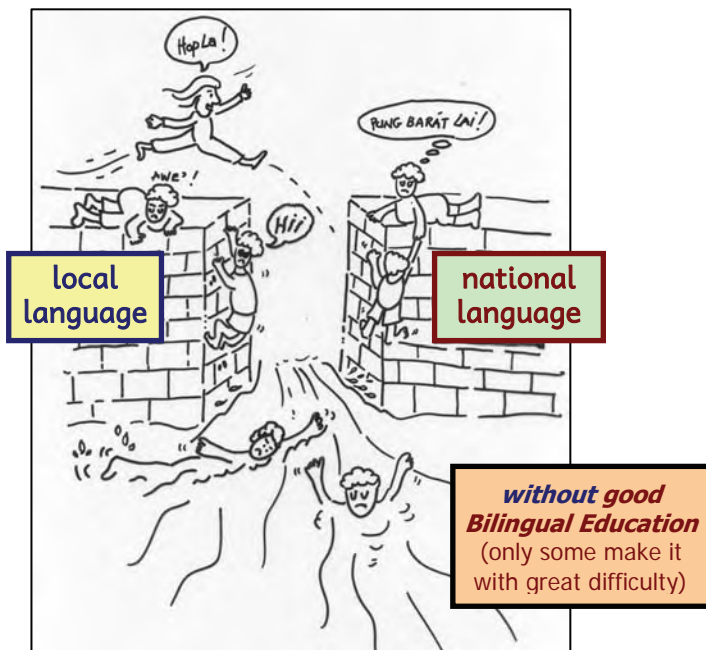
- People who speak more than one language competently are not only enriched by it, but true bilinguals can also see the legitimacy of and appreciate multiple perspectives in ways that monolinguals can't. They have greater opportunities of participation and advancement in multiple communities.
- People who can function competently in *both* the national (majority) language and the local (minority) language tend to 'succeed' in both worlds (*bilingual*). They are the ones who become respected community leaders within the community, can represent the interests of the community to outsiders, and can also participate fully in mainstream society.
- In contrast, members of indigenous communities who are not fully competent in *either* the national language *nor* in the local language (*semi-lingual*), tend to be frustrated. They do not have a complete or mature cultural or linguistic framework for problem-solving, and they also

aren't accepted by their own societies as having a legitimate voice in community affairs. Semi-linguals are often involved in anti-social behaviour.

- Where the government and educational system promotes only the national language and does not make space for or actively discourages the legitimate roles and use of local languages, this has been shown to contribute significantly to lack of self worth, marginalisation, and for some, active resentment. These also contribute to anti-social behaviour.
- Literacy is far more effective when the basic skills are done in the 'mother tongue'—the language most actively used in the home. The research supporting this is overwhelming.
- Education that bridges from the local languages, eventually transitioning fully into the national language is far more effective and far less destructive than education that only functions in the national language from the start. This is especially true for communities in which a local language continues to have important roles for communication and identity, and the national language (i.e. English) is not the main language used in the homes. Again, the research supporting this is overwhelming.

A graphic illustration

The following cartoons are commonly used to graphically illustrate the experience and frustration of children speaking minority languages around the world without and with a good bilingual education program. The cartoonist of this particular version, June Jacob, is a native speaker of a stigmatized minority language and has experienced these struggles for herself. She is now an educator who advocates for good multilingual education programs. (Cartoons ©2003 June Jacob, used with permission.)



Perceptions contributing to the problem

- Bilingual education (or multilingual education), like other programs, can be done well or be done poorly. Policy-makers often dismiss the whole idea of bilingual education where it has been poorly thought through or poorly implemented, even though the poor practice may be in only a small number of communities. This seems to be true in the Northern Territory as well.
- There is a misconception among some policy-makers that ‘bilingual education’ means the local language is taught, and the national language isn’t. However, the ‘bi-’ in bilingual means ‘two’. The goals of well implemented bilingual education programs are to help the students achieve full competence in *both* languages—not just one or the other. And this is healthy for the whole of society. Poorly implemented bilingual education programs may get this wrong.

Summary of research findings

The World Bank (2005) summarizes the findings of extensive and recent research relating to educating children initially in their own language and transitioning them to the national language. These are all outcomes that we assume would be valued in the Northern Territory.

- Children **LEARN BETTER**. This is supported by study after study.
- Children in rural and/or marginalised populations **STAY IN SCHOOL LONGER**.
- Children in rural and/or marginalised populations **REACH HIGHER LEVELS OF EDUCATION** overall.
- Children in rural and/or marginalised populations **INCREASE SOCIAL MOBILITY**.

- End-of-primary **PASS RATES ARE HIGHER** in statistically significant ways where effective MLE programs have been implemented.
- Use of a language that children understand allows teachers to use more active and **MORE EFFECTIVE TEACHING METHODS**.
- First language teaching has been linked to **BETTER ACQUISITION OF LITERACY SKILLS** that also bridge over to the second or national language.
- First language teaching has also been linked to **RAISING ACHIEVEMENT LEVELS** in a variety of academic subjects, including mathematics.
- Children in good bilingual education programs have been shown to be up to 5 times **LESS LIKELY TO REPEAT** a year.
- Children in good bilingual education programs have been shown to be up to 3 times **LESS LIKELY TO DROP OUT** of school.
- The two points above are all the more significant because children receiving instruction in first languages are **OFTEN FROM MORE AT-RISK POPULATIONS**.
- The use of local languages for instruction often leads to inclusion of **MORE LOCAL CONTENT** in the curriculum and **GREATER PARTICIPATION** of parents and community members as classroom resources. The whole community benefits by this sense of inclusion.
- As parents see their children successfully learn to read and write in their own language, the parents are often motivated to attend literacy classes as well. **ADULT LITERACY** improves.
- **COST ANALYSIS** shows that after only a very few years, good bilingual education programs that are well implemented are actually cheaper for the budget, and also

tend to produce more productive members of society and fewer dysfunctional members of society than traditional “national language only” approaches to education.

Implications for the Northern Territory

It is not true that an ‘English-only’ policy (even if just for the first 4 hours of school) will necessarily help indigenous children learn English better. The research shows it is very likely to further marginalise them and contribute even further to low self-esteem and low achievement in learning outcomes.

The research also shows that indigenous students are **MORE LIKELY TO LEARN ENGLISH BETTER** if they have a well-designed and well-implemented bilingual education program in their indigenous language.

Furthermore, to try to claim that indigenous communities in the Northern Territory are the exception to the patterns found in similar communities throughout the world, elsewhere in Australia, and even in the Northern Territory itself, is not only ill-informed, but it is irresponsible.

Informal polling of teachers over a period of ten years around the NT shows that many can teach for years in communities like Tennant Creek and Katherine without ever realising that their indigenous students are not native speakers of Standard English. So the teachers never dream of approaching their students as second-language speakers of English, or benefiting from the many language-in-education studies that would help them be more effective teachers. The same informal polling also shows that many school teachers in the NT are unaware of the existence of Kriol and Aboriginal English, both of which are well recognised by sociolinguists—*these varieties based on English are not Standard English, but have their own grammar and vocabulary*. And therefore, these teachers also do not benefit from lessons learned about creoles in education that even have professional journals dedicated to the topic.

Many school teachers also do not recall having been given even basic orientation to the multilingual and multicultural nature of the Northern Territory. Surely there is room for improvement here.

Without the political will to implement good MLE programs, the best policies (which we don't yet have in the Northern Territory), the best curriculum, the best materials, and the best teachers, with full community support cannot pull off what is known to be the 'best practice' for education in indigenous communities. The research is unified and overwhelming. So it is puzzling why it continues to be ignored by government policy-makers and general educators in the Northern Territory.



Bibliography of research relating to language, social identity, social stability and education in multilingual societies

NOTE: Entries preceded by an asterisk (*) are either about Australia, involve Australian scholars, or are affiliated with an Australian institution. 273 out of 691 entries (39%) are marked in this way. There may be others on this list I am not aware of.

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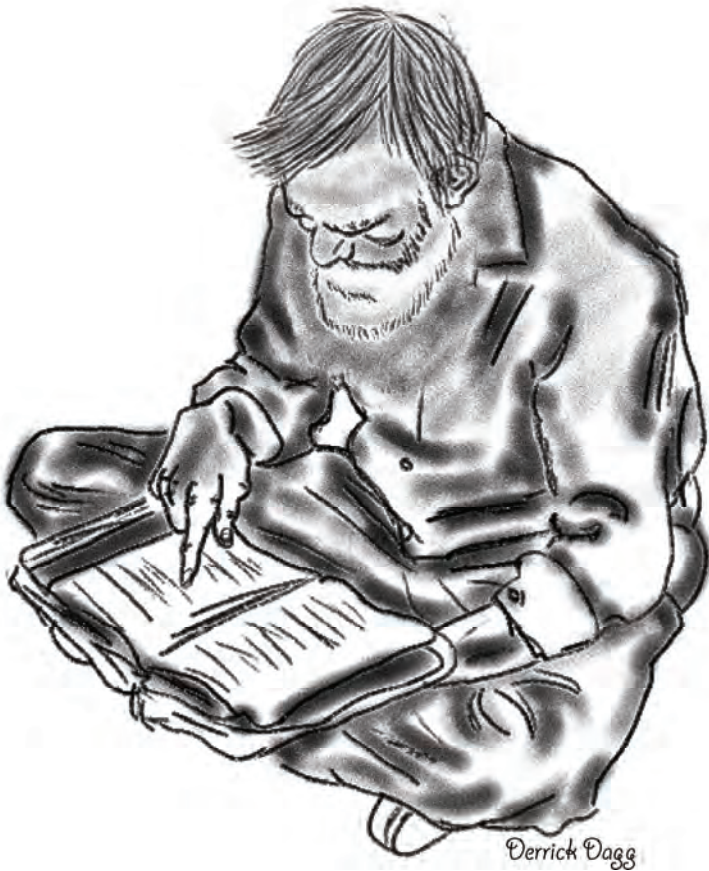
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Why Languages Matter

Meeting Millennium Development Goals through local languages



“Languages are indeed essential to the identity of groups and individuals and to their peaceful coexistence. They constitute a strategic factor of progress towards sustainable development and a harmonious relationship between the global and the local context. They are of utmost importance in achieving the six goals of Education for All and the Millennium Development Goals on which the United Nations agreed in 2000.”

Koïchiro Matsuura
Director General, UNESCO

Millennium Development Goals

In 2000 these goals were officially adopted by 189 United Nations member states with the agreement to achieve them by 2015.

- 1

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8
- Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

Achieve universal primary education

Promote gender equality and empower women

Reduce child mortality

Improve maternal health

Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases

Ensure environmental sustainability

Develop a global partnership for development



Why Languages Matter

Meeting Millennium Development Goals through local languages

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) focus the work of advocates, aid workers, governments and NGOs as they partner with local communities. Language-based development plays a significant role in giving communities the tools to work out steps to meet these goals.

Many of the poorest people speak mother tongues that are not national or international languages. Poverty, lack of access to primary education, inequality and disease are daily challenges for them.

- Can the development of minority languages become key to helping people create their own way of successfully meeting the challenges in their lives?
- Can writing systems for mother tongues and multilingual education become tools for people to build a better present and a better future?
- Are the long-term results worth the investment of money and time?

The answer to each of these questions is yes!

Throughout the world, communities are discovering that by using their languages in new arenas of their lives, they can begin discovering solutions to the challenges stated in the MDGs. SIL International assists in strengthening language communities worldwide.

Illustrated on these pages are some practical examples of how languages matter.

Language-based development is a series of ongoing planned actions that a language community takes to ensure that their language continues to serve their changing social, cultural, political, economic and spiritual needs and goals.



Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger

Azanga, the local literacy supervisor for the North Ngbandi language group of the Democratic Republic of Congo, was encouraged to see that his years of hard work brought far-reaching benefits. Kamba, chief of the Monzomboli village, became the first in his community to attend adult literacy classes in his mother tongue. After he read in one of the literacy primers that soybeans are rich in protein, he encouraged everyone in his village to plant them. He later learned from another booklet about the components of a proper diet, and again encouraged his community to eat from each food group daily so they could improve their health through nutrition.

Sokpè, a farmer in Togo, worked hard for years struggling to provide for his family. While attending the Ifè adult literacy class in his village, Kotsadjo, he read an Ifè primer on the topic of managing finances and resources. Sokpè was impressed by the story of a farmer who learned the skill of weaving, which enabled him to supplement farm income. Sokpè put these management ideas into practice and began breeding chickens and goats in addition to his farming. The income from his breeding business raised his annual income and helped pay his children's school fees.

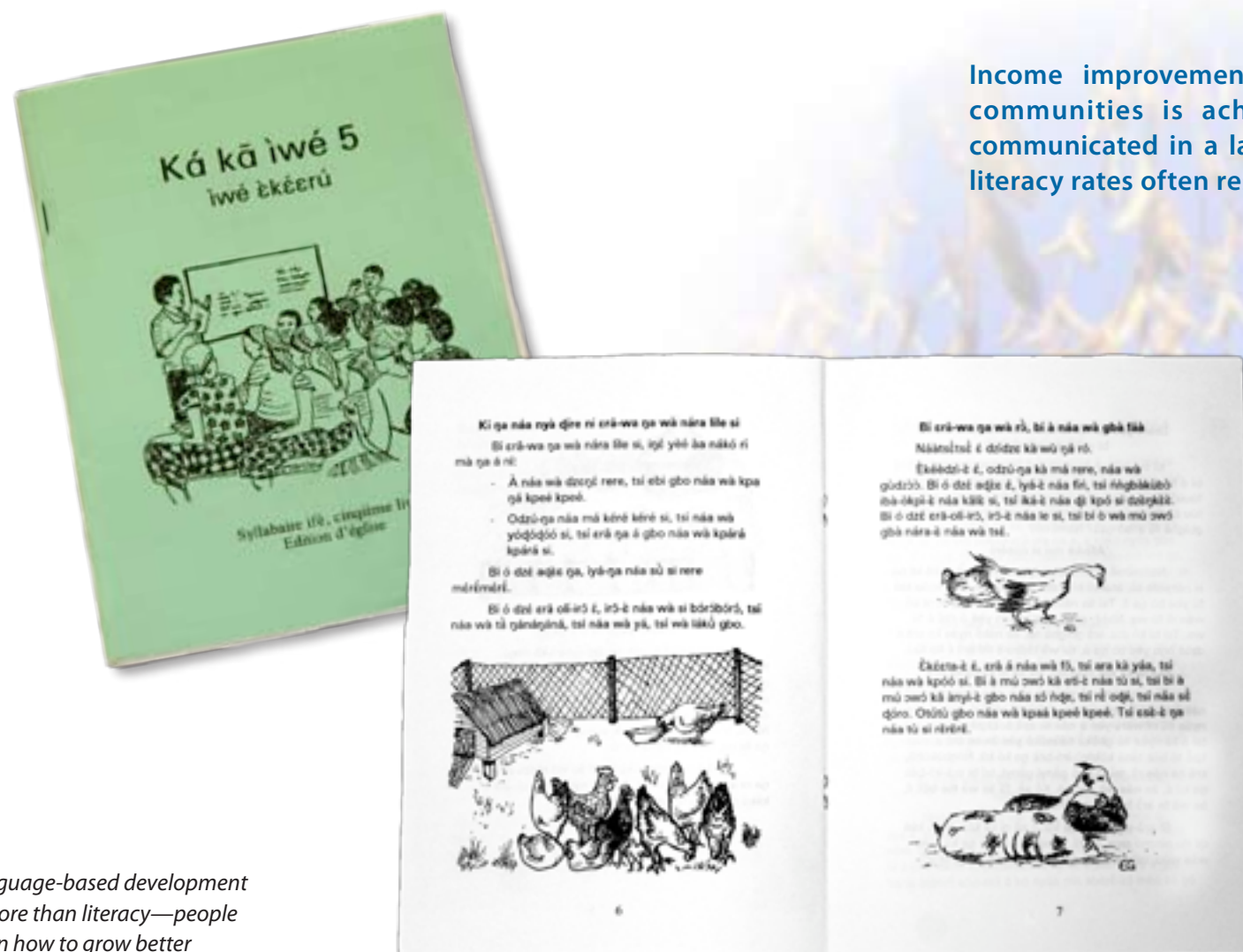
"In order to reduce poverty, the adult education program should be mediated in languages that enable the learners to be confident to participate in the discussions and activities of their education and economy."

Mompoloki Bagwasi,
The role of language in adult education and poverty reduction in Botswana.
University of Botswana

Income improvement and hunger relief within ethnolinguistic communities is achieved when life-changing information is communicated in a language that people understand well. Higher literacy rates often result in higher per capita incomes.



Language-based development is more than literacy—people learn how to grow better crops, such as soybeans, and how to improve their diets.



Culturally-appropriate education enables community members to manage their development activities and resulting income and enjoy an improved quality of life.



Achieve Universal Primary Education



Yousif and his family attend a mother-tongue mobile education program designed to be compatible with the seasonal migration of their flocks.

Like his nomadic father and grandfather before him, Yousif was a shepherd in the mountainous terrain of West Asia. And like his ancestors, the continual travels limited his access to primary education. Nomadic peoples are often illiterate because those wanting education for their children must either sell their flocks and settle in poor urban areas or send their boys away from home to attend school.

But Yousif and others in his family began attending an innovative mobile schooling program. Adults and children started reading and writing in their mother tongue and transferred their literacy skills to the national language and then to basic English. Evening classes were held only during the summer and winter grazing seasons due to seasonal migration. One season, when Yousif’s family was unable to migrate, he enrolled in a government school; the teachers were amazed that a nomadic child could read with such fluency. Even though Yousif had completed only the two-year mobile program, he was promoted to grade four.

Victor, a bilingual primary school teacher in the village of Santa Maria Ocotán, Mexico, wanted to study the effect of mother-tongue education in his first grade class. He taught his students all of their subjects in Tepehuan, although most of the teaching materials were in Spanish. Another first grade teacher used only Spanish. At the end of the year, the test scores on the standardized government tests for the students taught in their mother tongue surpassed those for the students taught only in Spanish, even though the tests were in Spanish.



Students’ high learning competency scores in Spanish, when taught in Tepehuan, were compiled for a research project at the Pedagogical University of Durango, Mexico.

Primary education programs that begin in the mother tongue help students gain literacy and numeracy skills more quickly. When taught in their local language, students readily transfer literacy skills to official languages of education, acquiring essential tools for life-long learning. The results are the growth of self esteem and a community that is better equipped to become literate in languages of wider communication.



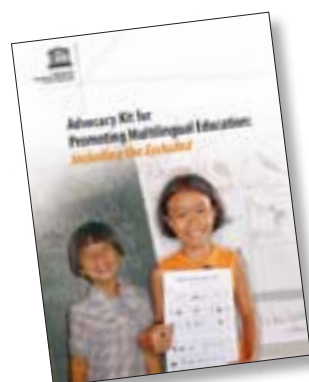
Learning to read occurs most easily in the language the learner speaks best.



“Fifty percent of the world’s out-of-school children live in communities where the language of schooling is rarely, if ever, used at home. This underscores the biggest challenge to achieving Education for All (EFA): A legacy of non-productive practices that lead to low levels of learning and high levels of dropout and repetition.”

“In Their Own Language... Education for All”, World Bank Education Note, p. 1, June 2005

Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women



Fah (pictured on left) is on the cover of the Advocacy Kit for Promoting Multilingual Education: Including the Excluded, a collaborative publication of five booklets by UNESCO-Bangkok and SIL.

www2.unescobkk.org/elib/publications/110/

Raised in Huay Chompue village in Northern Thailand, Fah is the youngest of five children. She grew up speaking her mother tongue, Bisu, and Northern Thai, as well as listening to the Central Thai language on television. When Fah started school, however, she struggled with reading and writing Central Thai.

Then Fah attended a literacy class in her village and learned to read and write Bisu using a Thai-based script. Her Central Thai reading and writing skills improved dramatically, her confidence rose and her grades at school improved. Her sister, a teacher, is convinced that it was the mother-tongue literacy class that made the difference.

Margarita knows the impact of losing her mother tongue and her cultural identity. Growing up in a small Andean town in central Peru, she first learned to speak the Quechua of her parents and grandparents. But when she started attending school, her family insisted she speak only Spanish, even at home. With difficulty, she learned enough Spanish to complete five years of school before she had to quit to care for her siblings and the family's sheep. Undaunted, Margarita studied at night to finish her primary education and beyond, ultimately earning a university degree in psychology. Using that knowledge and her skills, Margarita founded a volunteer organization that provides social, psychological and educational help to hundreds of displaced and sometimes abused Quechua women and children—using the language they understand best.

Margarita's students grasp literacy concepts when interacting with Quechua alphabet and word charts, even when used in Spanish-taught classrooms.



Nearly two-thirds of the world's 875 million illiterate people are women. In ethnolinguistic communities, boys are often encouraged to interact with others in languages of wider communication. Girls, however, are typically expected to stay close to home where the local language is often the only language used. Research shows that girls and women who are educated in languages familiar to them stay in school longer and achieve better results than those who do not get mother-tongue instruction.

Multilingual education, beginning in the mother tongue, improves opportunities for educational access and achievement for girls and women.



"The learner's mother tongue holds the key to making schooling more inclusive for all disadvantaged groups, especially for girls and women."

Carol Benson,
Girls, educational equity and mother tongue, p.1,
2005, UNESCO-Bangkok

Reduce Child Mortality

Basile has noticed an improvement in the overall health of people in his Waama community in Benin since the advent of literacy classes in his mother tongue. People used to have long-term illnesses, and many children died in infancy. But when people learned to read in Waama, they gained access to basic health information in their own language. Mothers learned the importance of going to health centers for prenatal check-ups and seeking treatment for illnesses. Many Waama lives are being saved because crucial health and wellness knowledge is now available in their mother tongue.

The mortality rate for children under five years of age is reduced when information about disease prevention and treatment is presented in local languages. Conversely, poor understanding can lead to dangerous or even fatal misinformation. Ethnolinguistic communities can combat diarrhea, malaria and other common illnesses when they have the resources and capability to obtain essential health knowledge.

“One additional year of education for the female population can avert six deaths per thousand in child mortality rates.”

John Peasbody, et al.
Policy and Health: Implications for Development in Asia, 1997, Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press

“Educating girls for six years or more drastically and consistently improves their prenatal care, postnatal care and childbirth survival rates.”

UNICEF
www.unicef.org/mdg/maternal.html

Improve Maternal Health

The Soumraye people of Chad conduct a three-year literacy program in 37 villages. During the first two years, students learn the Soumraye alphabet and gain basic literacy skills. In the third year, they concentrate on various reading materials that include booklets about clean water, planting trees, HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention, treating and preventing intestinal and respiratory illnesses and medicinal use of local plants. One mother who finished the three-year literacy cycle said, “I am learning a lot through the health booklets in Soumraye, and I have successfully used local plants to treat some symptoms such as coughing and diarrhea.”

A mother is better able to care for herself and her family when she is literate in her mother tongue and has access to health information in a language she understands well. Language-based development facilitates the introduction of new concepts and the accurate translation of new terminology.



Health education is ineffective when language barriers prevent access to essential information.



Soumraye literacy primers cover a variety of topics on practical living.



Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Other Diseases

In a culture where information is often relayed through songs, dance and plays, the people of Papua New Guinea (PNG) are receiving life-saving education in a culturally relevant medium. A DVD titled *Get AIDS—Get Trouble* dramatizes how HIV/AIDS affects the family when one member contracts the disease. Produced and performed in one of PNG's trade languages, Melanesian Pidgin, the DVD has been translated into several local languages.

PNG is vulnerable to HIV/AIDS. Low literacy rates and lack of access to reliable media sources mean that many face this new sickness with misconceptions. A booklet that accompanies the DVD clearly describes causes, preventative measures, consequences and the care needed for victims. The booklet has now been translated and printed in more than 30 PNG languages. Funding from the National AIDS Council of PNG has helped to cover printing and distribution costs.

People in ethnolinguistic communities are vulnerable to HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases due in part to the lack of essential information in the mother tongue. Reading materials in local languages that discuss hygiene, nutrition, and the prevention and treatment of diseases have proven to be effective in improving general health and life expectancy. The availability of culturally-relevant information dispels misconceptions surrounding HIV/AIDS.



Nukna people celebrate the new HIV/AIDS storybook.

"Illiteracy does not directly contribute to the spread of the human-immunodeficiency virus (HIV). However, as illiterate women and men have no access to written information, they remain unaware of many... issues affecting them that are increasingly being communicated through printed materials."

Making the Connections: Why Literacy Matters for HIV Prevention, 2007, UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning

"Language, knowledge and the environment have been intimately related throughout human history. This relationship is still apparent, especially in indigenous, minority and local societies that maintain close material and spiritual ties with their environments. Over generations, these peoples have accumulated a wealth of wisdom about their environments and its functions, management and sustainable use."

*Terralingua
www.terralingua.org*

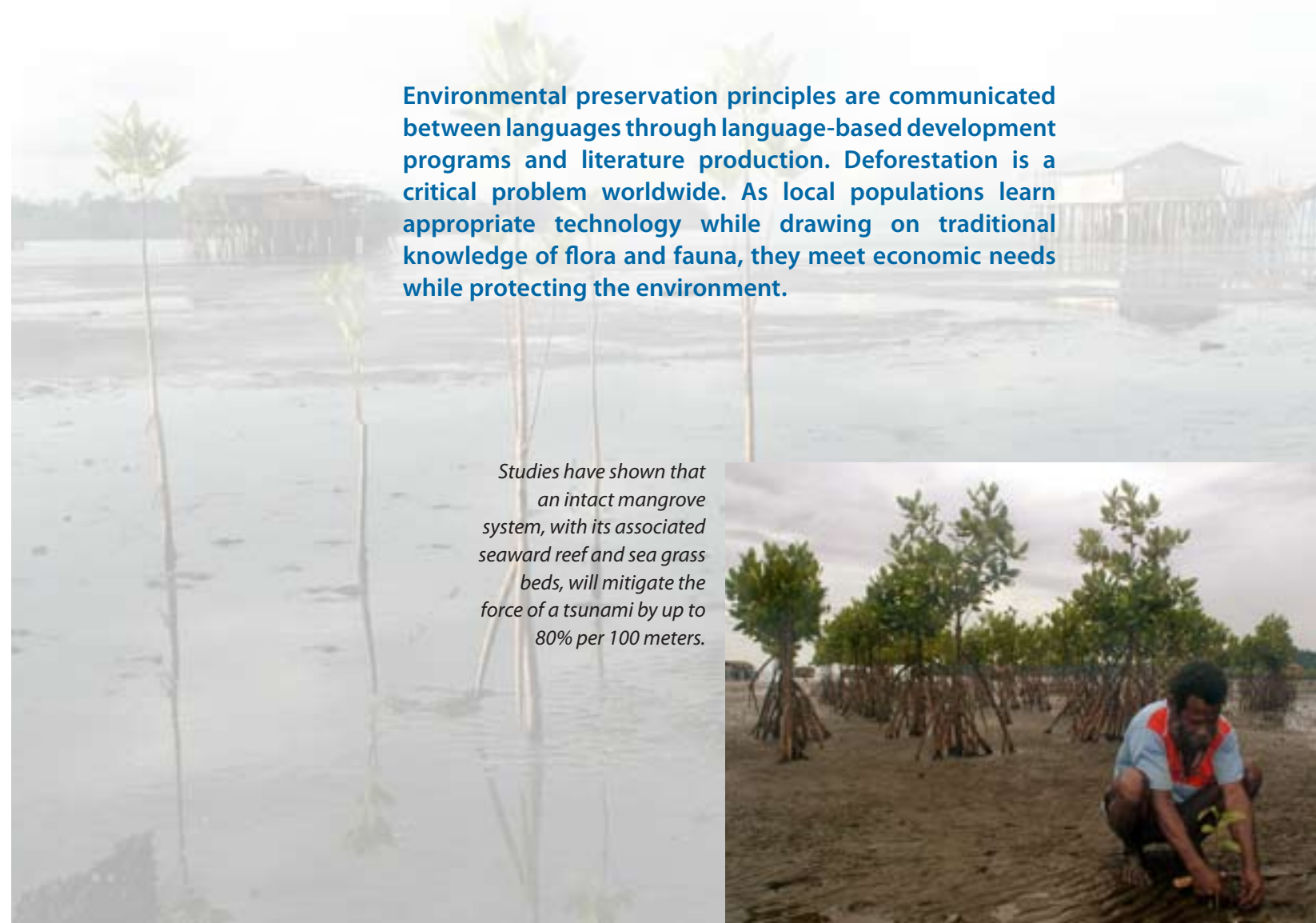
Ensure Environmental Sustainability

Agus had wondered why ocean tides were now destroying coastal areas of his Ambai village in Papua, Indonesia, that had survived intact for generations. Then, during a mother-tongue-based development program, he and the community learned that clearing the mangrove areas had resulted in soil erosion. Mangrove ecosystems—among the most productive and biologically complex ecosystems—support a wealth of life while providing a natural breakwater between land and sea.

Armed with this information in his own language, Agus began the daunting process of replanting the mangroves in his community. Recently, a group of Indonesian government officials visited the island to examine the Ambai development program. Their visit opened a dialog about the funding needed to establish a multi-year mangrove revitalization project.

Environmental preservation principles are communicated between languages through language-based development programs and literature production. Deforestation is a critical problem worldwide. As local populations learn appropriate technology while drawing on traditional knowledge of flora and fauna, they meet economic needs while protecting the environment.

Studies have shown that an intact mangrove system, with its associated seaward reef and sea grass beds, will mitigate the force of a tsunami by up to 80% per 100 meters.



Develop a Global Partnership for Development

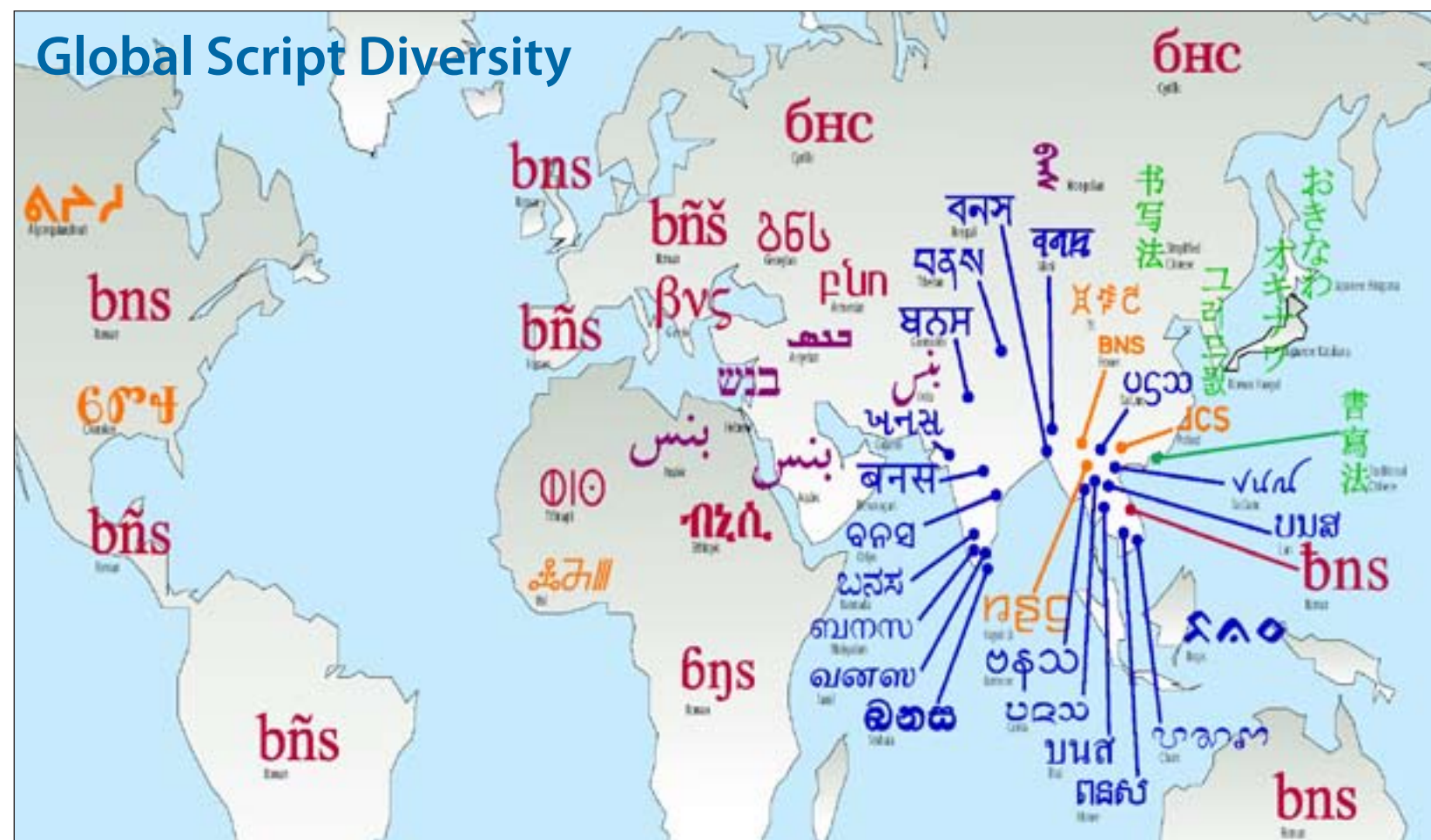
Through a dynamic partnership of various groups around the world, speakers of several closely-related languages of Vietnam now have a font that is usable on computers and the Internet. The new typeface reflects the traditional hand-written Tai Viet script that is used informally in several languages spoken in the northwest provinces of Vietnam and surrounding areas. The fonts originally created 20 years ago for this script are incompatible with current computer systems. Participants at a UNESCO-sponsored workshop in Vietnam in 2006 developed a standardized encoding for the script with input from ethnolinguistic communities in Vietnam and immigrant populations in other countries. Funding came in part from the Script Encoding Initiative of the University of California at Berkeley, and the Unicode Consortium accepted the resulting encoding proposal.

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

*Multilingual capabilities
open doors to expanded
communications and
information access that
implement new technologies.*



Global Script Diversity



<http://scripts.sil.org>

In cooperation with partners, the development of computer-adapted non-Roman fonts grants access to the benefits of new technology, which allows information and communications to be more widely available.

Global partnerships among ethnolinguistic communities and national and international societies require communication and mutual understanding. Mother-tongue revitalization ensures that a language continues to serve the changing goals of its speakers and provides a bridge for the community to meet its broader multilingual goals by acquiring a language of wider communication. Language-based development facilitates the broader exchange of traditional knowledge as well as making the benefits of global information and communications technologies available.

"In addition to building ICT* infrastructure, there should be adequate emphasis on developing human capacity and creating ICT applications and digital content in local language, where appropriate, so as to ensure a comprehensive approach to building a global Information Society."

*Tunis Commitment, World
Summit on the Information
Society*

*Information and Communications Technology

7500 W. Camp Wisdom Road
Dallas, Texas 75236-5629 USA
www.sil.org
www.ethnologue.com
www.sil.org/sil/global/



Language Facts

- There are 6,912 languages in use today.
- Approximately 100 scripts are used in the world.
- Hundreds of languages still need a writing system, with one-third needing a non-Roman or complex script.
- Thousands of languages are endangered when parents no longer teach their language to their children and speakers stop using it in everyday matters.
- There are more than 200 known signed languages for the Deaf. The grammars and vocabularies are unrelated to local spoken languages.



The purpose of SIL is to build capacity for sustainable language-based development through research, translation, training and materials development for ethnolinguistic minority communities. SIL recognizes that genuine multilingualism promotes unity in diversity and international understanding.

As a nongovernmental organization, SIL has special consultative status with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations. SIL is a founding member of Maaya, the World Network for Linguistic Diversity.



Multilingual Education



Multilingual Education

A Two-Way Bridge



Studies demonstrate that learning is most effective when the instruction is received in the language the learner knows best. This simple truth extends from basic reading and writing skills in the first language to second language acquisition. In multilingual education programs (MLE) that start with the mother tongue, learners use their own language for learning in the early grades, while also learning the official language as a classroom subject. As learners gain competence in understanding, speaking, reading and writing the language of education, teachers begin using it for instruction. This instructional bridge between the community language and the language of wider communication enables learners—children and adults alike—to meet their broader multilingual goals while retaining their local language and culture.

This booklet addresses several important aspects of MLE:

- The voices of ethnolinguistic minority communities are often not heard. Therefore, advocacy is appropriate for these communities to meet their MLE needs.
- Conventional instructional methods are not adequate for MLE programs. Educators at both community and national levels need to develop their capacity to design and implement MLE programs.
- Developing a writing system for a non-dominant language is a challenging but essential early step in developing an MLE program.
- MLE not only requires the commitment and resources of the local community, but also the resources and expertise available from government agencies, NGOs or others. Resource linking brings the partners together so that each one contributes its own particular resources.
- MLE gives children and adults a firm foundation for continuing to learn throughout their lives.

Listen to this young woman from Southeast Asia: “To learn at school is difficult because I don’t know how to speak the national language.” By working together, we can help her and millions like her succeed in school and—with an identity firmly rooted in their own culture—become aware of, and participate in the wider world.

SIL participates in MLE by serving as an advocate for and with local communities, linking them to supportive resources and helping each build capacity to develop appropriate programs.

www.sil.org/literacy

The Components of Sustainable Multilingual Education Programs



MLE programs require innovative thinking and cooperation among individuals, communities, organizations and agencies. This diagram displays the essential components of the strongest programs.

Advocacy

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

The voices of ethnolinguistic communities are often not heard—they need an advocate to assist them in expressing their needs to the agencies and individuals that can help them achieve their education and development goals. There are various levels of advocacy, from raising the awareness among agencies that support multilingual education (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 would need help to give this opportunity to Usarufa children. He consulted with various SIL staff members and attended several 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 alphabet design workshop followed by a trial alphabet class. Then they produced reading primers. 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.

An SIL consultant assisted 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.



An Usarufa man reads the program for the opening ceremony of the literacy project.



James Warebu and SIL advocate David Wake celebrate the ground-breaking for the Usarufa Literacy Resource Centre.



CHINA—Provincial government leaders from the People's Republic of China celebrated the official opening of a bilingual education preschool program for the Shilong Bai people to supplement the adult mother-tongue literacy program. SIL facilitated the adaptation of modern teaching techniques to this village setting where local language use was formerly limited to oral expression.

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. Five partnering NGOs and language communities participated in four of the workshops.

Capacity Building

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 creates a bridge over 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, MLE consultants can assist community educators and national program designers in building their capacity 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 a course taught in Spanish 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.”



Participants learn to confidently transfer to others what they learned as they take leadership in documenting and preserving their linguistic and cultural heritage.



Every day students and teachers alike learn something new.

GUATEMALA—Children in Guatemala watch an Ixil video “My Heart Language,” written and filmed by an Ixil video crew. It was created to teach Ixil people to read their language. This local team now writes, films and edits their own videos, and they are ready to help others do the same.



Ethiopia

As part of a five-year pilot project with the Ethiopian Regional Culture Bureau, SIL conducted an MLE planning workshop. 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

Mahidol University and SIL held training workshops in Bangkok for 60 participants from governments, NGOs, universities and language communities to plan MLE projects in 12 countries. UNESCO and UNICEF sponsored the workshops.



MLE Bridge

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

Successful MLE 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 use that foundation as a bridge to one or more additional languages. MLE provides the opportunities for lifelong learning in the local as well as national and international languages.



Writing Systems

Writing System Design

Before a language can be used in the classroom, the language must have a written form. The development of a writing system (orthography) for a language is a complex and challenging task. It requires careful analysis of how a language is constructed. What are the various sounds the language uses and what would be the best way to represent them? What script should be used? To answer these and other questions, linguistics and literacy consultants work with language communities, universities and governments in the process.

Community-based workshops and mentorships are effective means to equip individuals to do linguistic analysis and sociolinguistic research, and to provide training in writing-system design and standardization issues. This participatory approach to writing system development fosters community interest and ownership of the result and is crucial to the success of a writing system and a language development program.

Orthography Design Workshops

“Orthography development is like mining for gold. It takes a lot of work to get there, but when you finally arrive, you’ve reached a real treasure!” exclaimed a workshop attendee.

Printed materials in the Kuria language of Tanzania were not widely used. At an orthography workshop, the Kuria writing system was reviewed. The local team discovered that the problem wasn’t with the orthography, but instead with the assumptions of readers that the Kuria language was constructed like the trade language, Swahili. Workshop participants uncovered several significant differences between the writing systems of Kuria and Swahili. With this awareness and minimal instruction, they could more easily begin reading their mother tongue.

Speakers from related languages also attended the workshop. The participants learned from one another and exchanged encouragement for their efforts. Since the Simbiti language is related to Kuria, the Kuria orthography became a starting point for developing the Simbiti writing system.

Seeing his language in print, a Simbiti speaker exclaimed, “A veil has been lifted from my eyes about my language. It has so much beauty!”



Workshop participants use their knowledge of the language in analysis exercises.



SIL has produced computer fonts for a variety of complex Roman and non-Roman scripts around the world so that script-related issues will not hinder language communities in their materials production. Available for download at <http://scripts.sil.org>



PAPUA NEW GUINEA—Two-week Alphabet Design Workshops (ADW) give an opportunity for local-language teachers, trainers and community members to write stories in their own language, discuss and choose orthographic options, produce a trial spelling guide and begin compiling a dictionary. The ADW method relies on speakers' perceptions of their language, and consequently reflects the sound system in its cultural context as viewed by the speakers of the language. SIL assisted the Papua New Guinea Department of Education to produce trial orthographies for over 100 languages with funding provided by the Australian government.

Cambodia

The orthography development process for the Kuy speakers in Cambodia is faced with the challenges of a broad phonemic inventory, the use of the complex Khmer script and the fact that few Kuy speakers have adequate literacy skills in that script. Despite these complications, the community’s contribution and participation in the process has been significant. Language awareness meetings, an orthography workshop and a language committee—all lay a good foundation for the Kuy speakers to embrace their new writing system.

Resource Linking

Many hands make light work.

This proverb aptly describes the benefits of partners working together with language communities to 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.

MLE Teacher Training in Bangladesh

“I had applied for teacher job but I did not know any details. Later I learned about MLE,” Suma Khyang said during a teacher-training workshop. “I was to teach Khyang children in their mother tongue. I felt confused—we had no books in our language because it is only spoken. If we started mother-tongue instruction,” she wondered, “would parents send their children to class? If no children came, how long would my job last?”

In preparation for the new school term, teachers attended an MLE workshop held in Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh. They learned that early education is most effective when students are instructed in their mother tongue. The participants produced mother-tongue materials that could be used by teachers from the local community in order to implement the new curriculum.

Activities like these help to build instructional bridges between the community language and languages of wider communication. When students learn basic reading and writing skills in their first language, they are able to meet their broader multilingual and educational goals while retaining their local language and culture.

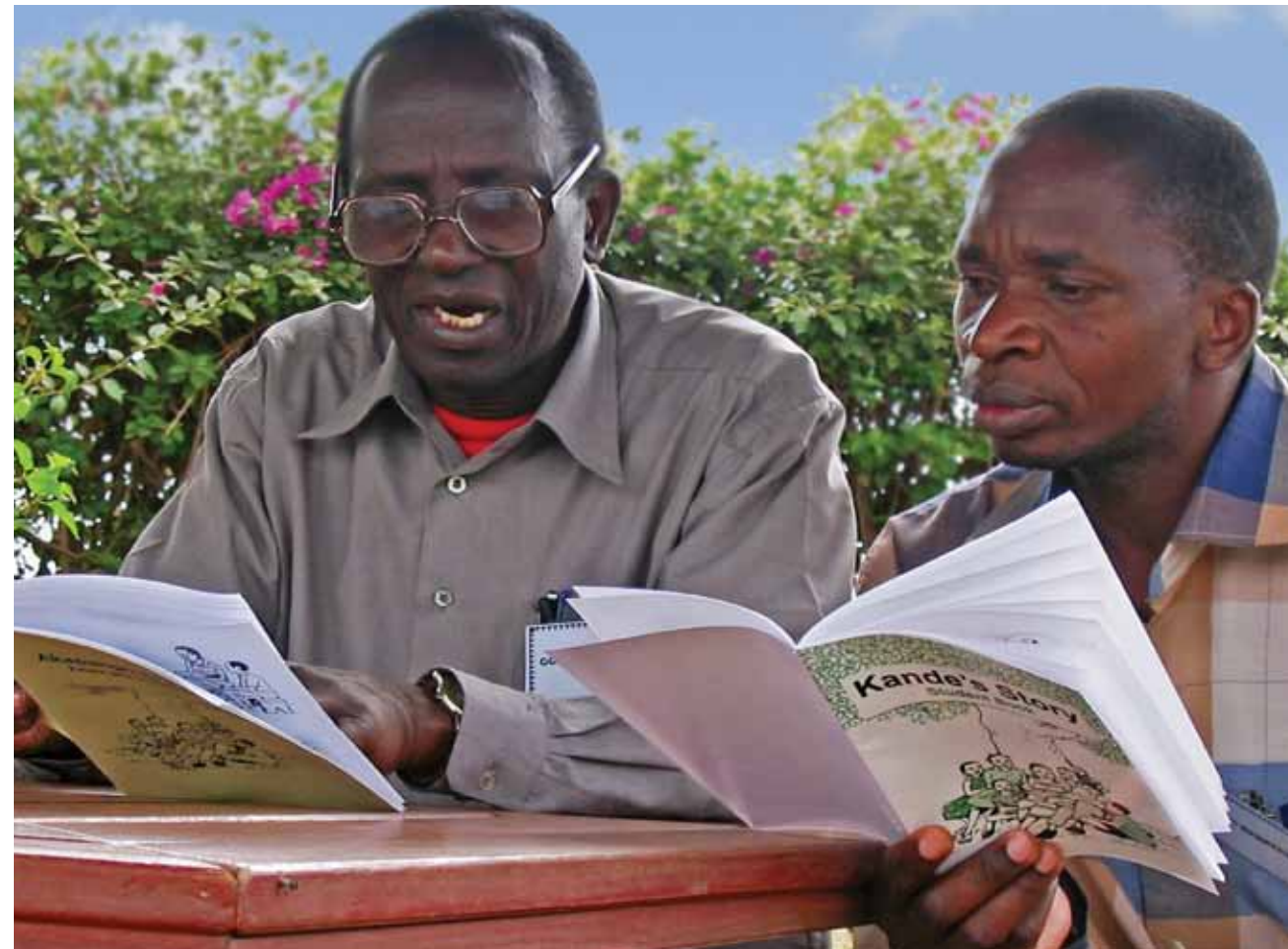
At the end of her training, Suma said, “I think MLE is the right way of education for the ethnic children of Bangladesh. We teachers understand this now.” She is prepared to help parents understand that education begun in the mother tongue is a key to their children’s future success in school and in life.



A teacher-training course in Bangladesh was supported by a coalition that includes the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), SIL International and other NGOs.



The harmonium is a common instrument in Bangladesh.



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



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.

Sudan

Ten people were chosen by each of the Southern Sudanese State Education Ministries to attend workshops conducted by MLE consultants to discuss principles for implementing transitional bilingual education. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology is using information and ideas from the workshops to draft its language and education policy.

Lifelong Learning

Building on a firm foundation

Young people and adults who gain fluency in reading and writing their mother tongue first are better prepared to transfer literacy skills to other languages—acquiring essential tools for lifelong learning. Strong mother-tongue-first education for adults enables members of communities to access the knowledge and information they need in order to take an active part in local and national development efforts. The results are the growth of self esteem, and a community that is better equipped to become literate in languages of wider communication.

A Vision for Mother-Tongue Literacy

Burkina Faso—Abdramane Traore created a successful soap-making and training business, selling 500 bars per month. As a child he did not complete his primary education because he did not know the school language. As a young adult he enrolled in a literacy class in his mother tongue, Témoignages. His eagerness to learn led him also to become a literacy teacher.

Mexico—A radio announcement in the Mazatec language advertised a two-week reading and writing course in the local school during summer vacation. The inspiration for this class was Felix, a Mazatec speaker who loves his language and has a vision for other adults becoming literate in their mother tongue. During the afternoons, two university-level students attended—they were fluent in reading Spanish, but also wanted to learn to read Mazatec, their mother tongue.

Argentina—Toba-speaking adults with some Spanish reading ability attended a class to transfer their skills so they could read their mother tongue. Nine graduates of this class later attended a primer-writing workshop. Using the COMELE method (Combinación de Métodos de Lectoescritura), they learned to write basic literacy materials. The week-long workshop resulted in eight guided lessons in Toba for non-literates or semi-literates.

SENEGAL—A woman completing her second year of basic Saafi literacy said, “Now I can help my children attending primary school to read their French readers.”



Abdramane became a Témoignages literacy teacher while conducting a successful business.



Felix teaches other Mazatec speakers how to read their mother tongue.



EAST ASIA—Mother-tongue classes for young adults train non-dominant language speakers to become literate in their mother tongue, while building a strong foundation for acquisition of national and international languages.

Solomon Islands

Though familiar with English and Pijin, a villager promptly bought two copies of story books he found in his mother tongue, Cheke Holo. He began reading aloud—to no one in particular—and suddenly exclaimed, “This is my language!”

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About SIL International

The purpose of SIL is to build capacity for sustainable language development through research, translation, training and materials development for ethnolinguistic minority communities. SIL recognizes that multilingualism promotes unity in diversity and international understanding.

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

Multilingual Education Resources

Advocacy kit for promoting multilingual education: Including the excluded. 2007. Bangkok: UNESCO. 5 booklets.

Beyond the bilingual classroom: Literacy acquisition among Peruvian Amazon communities. 1993. Dallas: SIL International and the University of Texas at Arlington.

First language first: Community-based literacy programmes for minority language contexts in Asia. 2005. Bangkok: UNESCO.

Language and education in Africa: Answering the questions. 2008. Nairobi: Multilingual Education Network of Eastern Africa.

Manual for developing literacy and adult education programmes in minority language communities. 2004. Bangkok: UNESCO.

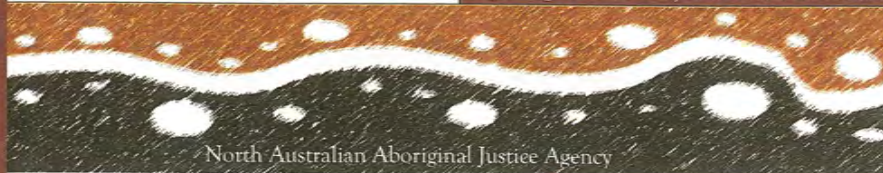
Mother tongue-based literacy programmes: Case studies of good practice in Asia. 2007. Bangkok: UNESCO.

Mother tongue matters: Local language as a key to effective learning. 2008. Paris: UNESCO.

Promoting literacy in multilingual settings. 2007. Bangkok: UNESCO.

Steps toward learning: A guide to overcoming language barriers in children's education. 2009. London: Save the Children UK.





Helpful hints for cross-cultural communication in the Top End



1. Use active voice, avoid passives

Change a passive voice statement to an active statement by supplying an actor (the doer). If the actor is unclear use 'they' or 'somebody'.

Instead of saying

"He *was arrested*."

"If you tease the dog you *will be bitten*"

"You *will be paid* extra for overtime work"

"He broke the law so he *was jailed*."

"His money *was stolen*."

Say

"The *police arrested* him."

"If you tease the dog *he will bite* you."

"If you work overtime *they will pay* you more money."

"He broke the law so *they put* him in jail."

"*Somebody stole* his money."

2. Avoid abstract nouns

Replace abstract nouns with verbs (doing words) or adjectives (describing words).

An abstract noun is something that is intangible, like an idea or feeling, and cannot be detected with the senses.

"It has no *strength*"

"That was due to his good *management*."

"His *patience* has run out."

"His *anger* caused him to be violent."

"It is not *strong*" (adjective used)

"That happened because he *managed* things properly." (verb used)

"He will not be *patient* any more."
(adjective used)

"He was violent because he was *angry*." (adjective used)

Instead of saying

Say

3. Avoid using negative questions

"Isn't he the boss?"

"Is he the boss?"

"You *never did* that before, did you?"

"Have you done that before?"

4. Avoid the auxiliary verbs 'to be' or 'to have'

Replace auxiliary verbs with a simple verb.

"I *have been* looking for you."

"I *looked* for you."

"You *have done* a good job."

"You *did* a good job"

"When he *had finished* work he felt hungry."

"He *finished* work *then* he felt hungry."

"I *am telling* the truth."

"What I *say now* is true."

5. Define words that are not familiar to the audience

Use the word, then attach a short descriptive statement.

"This is crown land."

"This is crown land, which is land that the Government owns."

"You have been given bail."

"The police gave you bail, which means you promised to come back to court next time."

6. Avoid multiple clauses in a sentence

Break into several sentences.

"Early resolution of disputes, including through mediation, that contribute to building safer community environments, is encouraged."

"The government wants to make communities safer places. This can happen if people resolve disputes quickly. Mediation is one way to resolve disputes."