

Newsletter for July 2017

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Symposium warns that lack of attention to language difference impedes Sustainable Development Goals

27 June 2017. The UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) fall short in their lack of attention to language, largely because of a more general failure to recognize the consequences, both positive and negative, of linguistic diversity – according to the Preliminary Conclusions of a symposium organized by the Study Group on Language and the United Nations, with support from the Universal Esperanto Association and other organizations.

Over one hundred academics, diplomats, UN staff, and NGO representatives attended the symposium at the Church Centre for the United Nations, 777 United Nations Plaza, New York, on 11 and 12 May. Its goal was to examine issues of language and vulnerable populations and their centrality in the development, implementation, and successful completion of the SDGs.

Keynote speakers at the symposium were Christine Hélot, of the University of Strasbourg, France, and François Grin, of the University of Geneva, Switzerland, and papers were presented by scholars from a dozen additional countries. The symposium opened with a panel discussion featuring representatives of the diplomatic corps, UN staff, NGOs, and academe: Ambassador Michael Ten Pow, Permanent Representative of Guyana to the UN, Carole Maisonneuve, Public Information and Multilingualism Coordinating Officer, UN Department of General Assembly and Conference Management, Christina Diez of ATD Fourth World Movement, and Humphrey Tonkin, president emeritus of the University of Hartford.

The symposium's presenters, many of them experts who have devoted their life's work to understanding the role of language in society, examined individual communities, development projects, and best practices. They highlighted the crucial role language plays in facilitating or hindering sustainable development, especially in regards to vulnerable populations, a largely heterogeneous group of primary stakeholders in the achievement of the SDGs. Three types of vulnerable populations were the foci of the symposium: permanently settled refugees/migrants, temporarily settled refugees/migrants, and indigenous or heritage language minorities. Within these three groups, adults and children were shown to experience significantly different language-related challenges.

The symposium was sponsored by a number of organizations, including the Center for Applied Linguistics, the Center for Research and Documentation on World Language Problems and its journal *Language Problems and Language Planning*, the Esperantic Studies Foundation, and the Universal Esperanto Association (an organization in consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council and associated with the UN Department of Public Information). Financial support was provided by the Center for Applied Linguistics and the Esperantic Studies Foundation. A final symposium report is expected shortly.

Members of the New York Esperanto Society assisted in the organization, including Ulrich Becker, Michael Brandini, Raul Garcia, Sofiya Soskina, and Allison Thorsen.

German scholar describes persecution of Esperanto speakers under Hitler and Stalin

13 May 2017. In the most recent presentation (May 12) in the series of Tivadar Soros Lectures sponsored in New York by the Esperantic Studies Foundation, German historian Ulrich Lins discussed the efforts of Adolf Hitler and Josef Stalin to suppress the Esperanto movement in Germany under the Third Reich and in Russia during the time of the Soviet Union. In his founding document of Nazism, *Mein Kampf*, Hitler described the international language Esperanto as a tool for worldwide Jewish domination. Soon after the Nazis came to power, the authorities began to put pressure on German Esperanto organizations, eventually closing them down altogether. Many Jewish Esperantists perished in extermination camps, and, when the Nazis invaded Poland, a special order was given for the arrest of members of the family of L.L. Zamenhof, founder of Esperanto. All but one, who was rescued by a Christian family, perished.

In the Soviet Union, Esperanto saw favour under Lenin in the early days of the Revolution, when the uprising in Russia was seen as the first stage in worldwide revolution and Esperanto was considered by many to be the appropriate language for worldwide communism. But under Stalin, as nationalist sentiments grew, the international contacts of Esperantists and their easy communication with other countries were perceived as a threat. Many were arrested as spies. Most of the leaders of the Esperanto movement were executed during the Great Purges of the late 1930s and others were transported to the Gulag. Only after Stalin's death did Esperanto gradually return to the satellite countries and eventually the USSR.

Lins's study of Esperanto under Hitler and Stalin is newly published in English in two volumes: *Dangerous Language: Esperanto under Hitler and Stalin*, and *Dangerous Language: Esperanto and the Decline of Stalinism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan).

The Tivadar Soros Lectures honour the internationalist father of the financier George Soros. Tivadar Soros published two memoirs in Esperanto describing his experiences in World War I and World War II. Both are now available in English (*Masquerade* 2001; *Crusoes in Siberia* 2010) and have been published in numerous other languages – most recently *Masquerade* in French and in Japanese.

At the next Tivadar Soros Lecture, on Friday, October 13, Professor of English Nico Israel (Hunter College, CUNY) will discuss "James Joyce and Esperanto."

Universal Esperanto Association representative warns: "We're good at deciding the fate of the vulnerable, not so good at listening to them"

22 June 2017. An upcoming day of discussion among NGOs, "Intergenerational Dialogues," planned for August 1 at the UN Headquarters in New York, has been the subject of praise and criticism by representatives of the Universal Esperanto Association. The Dialogues, an occasion for discussion of the Sustainable Development Goals and their realization, will, it seems likely, be conducted entirely in English and will be open primarily to representatives of NGOs who are themselves not among those individuals the SDGs are primarily designed to help. While discussion in itself is a good thing, UEA representative Humphrey Tonkin pointed out at a recent briefing session organized by the convener of the Dialogues, the NGO Branch of the UN's Department of Public Information, that it is important to note the absence of

the voices of the most vulnerable, who have neither the resources to travel nor, in most cases, the languages of international discourse – and indeed the absence of everyone who does not feel competent in English. “Language discrimination is hard to overcome,” observed Tonkin, “but it should not be so difficult at least to recognize and attempt to alleviate it.”

London conference discusses the emergence of United Nations language policy

26 May 2017. “The Languages of Internationalism” was the topic of a conference at Birkbeck, University of London, on May 24-26, organized by the Reluctant Internationalists Project. The conference brought together an interesting group of mostly younger historians and others to discuss such questions as international planned languages, language and expertise in international organizations, and language use in international social and political movements. Papers included a history of the development of United Nations language policy provided by Humphrey Tonkin (University of Hartford, USA) and Lisa McEntee-Atalianis (Birkbeck, University of London), and a survey of the rise and fall of Esperanto in the Soviet Union given by Brigid O’Keeffe, Brooklyn College, CUNY, USA.

Slovak ambassador reports on language policy declaration, stresses need for linguistic fairness and non-discrimination

11 May 2017. Attending the Symposium on Language, the SDGs and Vulnerable Populations organized under the auspices of the Universal Esperanto Association, Richard Galbavy, Deputy Permanent Representative of Slovakia to the United Nations, reported on the Nitra Declaration on language policy accepted by the Visegrad Group of four countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia) at its conference in Nitra, Slovakia, last July. The conference was timed to coincide with the 101st World Esperanto Congress taking place in Nitra at that time. The declaration addressed three main themes:

- Citizen engagement
- Multilingualism in the economy and in society
- Educational inclusion

The declaration stressed the need to “raise public awareness of the importance of language policy” and to launch a dialogue among “key stakeholders in language policy work.” It pointed out that a failure to promote multilingualism can lead to social exclusion and generate unfair discrimination. On educational inclusion, the Declaration emphasized the need for learning and using “smaller/neighbouring languages” and using language learning to promote “European identity and solidarity.” It also recommended further research “to ascertain which first foreign language is most likely to encourage subsequent language-learning” and to reduce school drop-out rates.

“The conclusions of the Nitra conference,” added Ambassador Galbavy, “are a small but constructive contribution of Slovakia and Visegrad countries to the on-going discussion on the future of Europe, which aims to strengthen the goals of linguistic fairness and democracy, and making European integration meaningful to its citizens.”

Esperanto youth organization TEJO participates in Riyadh International Forum

5 May 2017. In line with UNESCO’s efforts to move more of its events away from the headquarters in Paris, the NGO coordinating committee held its 7th Forum in partnership with UNESCO in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, from May 3 to May 7. The Universal Esperanto Association (UEA) sent two representatives, members of TEJO, the Esperanto youth organization linked to UEA. The Forum was trilingual: Arabic, English and French, with Arabic and English dominating. As is often the case in such events, the conversations in the corridors were as productive as the formal round tables, not least because they provided UEA representatives an opportunity to point out to officials and NGO representatives the lack of linguistic equality at the UN...

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