

Newsletter for July 2015

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Broadly International Audience Debates Language and Exclusion

May 8. A group of experts from a dozen countries attended the May 7 Symposium on Language and Exclusion organized by the Universal Esperanto Association and the Study Group on Language and the United Nations. The symposium took place at the Church Center, 777 United Nations Plaza, New York. Papers presented at the symposium covered a wide range of fields, all of them with international implications; particular attention was devoted to exclusionary practices in international organizations, with a special emphasis on peacekeeping.

Keynote speaker was Fernand de Varennes, of the University of Pretoria and the University of Hong Kong, well known in UN circles as an expert on human rights law. "The UN," declared Professor de Varennes, "has been noticeably timid in addressing the human rights dimensions of language," an omission all the more remarkable given the instrumentalisation of language claims "in many of the world's conflicts involving minorities." He called for greater attention to language both within the United Nations community and in its interaction with the larger world.

Lisa McEntee-Atalianis, of the University of London, offered an extensive analysis of language policy and planning within the United Nations, and Mekki Elbadri, of the United Nations Arabic Translation Service, described UN links with higher educational institutions in the field of translation and interpretation. In two papers, Izadora Xavier (Université Paris 8, France) and José Manuel Ferreiro (Lancaster University, UK) examined discourse in UN peacekeeping missions, while Jenny L. Meier (U.S. Army) and Kurt Müller (National Defense University, USA) offered papers analysing the use of second languages in U.S. peacekeeping and stabilization.

A paper by Rosemary Salomone (St. John's University, USA) provided updated information on the controversy over the use of English as a language of instruction in higher education in non-English-speaking countries, a topic also addressed by Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir, of the University of Iceland, Reykjavik, and Patricia Prinz (Mercy College, USA). Other topics dealt with included language policies in NGOs (Zhigui Zhang, Shanghai Maritime University, China), the impact of English-language discourse on international agendas (Thomas Cooper, Esterházy Károly University, Eger, Hungary) and language and education in conflict-affected contexts (Zeena Zakharia, University of Massachusetts Boston, USA). Nkonko Kamwangamalu (Howard University, USA) examined mother-tongue education in Africa, and Alisher Aldashev (Kazakh British Technical University, Kazakhstan) addressed economic returns to language skills and bilingualism in the Kazakh context.

The symposium was dedicated to the memory of Joshua Fishman, the eminent sociologist of language widely regarded as the preeminent figure in sociolinguistics and language policy, who died on March 1. Fishman was a member of the editorial board of the journal of the Centre for Research and Documentation on World Language Problems (CED), *Language Problems and Language Planning*. He founded the highly influential *International Journal on the Sociology of Language* in 1973, and also edited the massive 250-volume book series *Contributions to the Sociology of Language*. His landmark studies in language and society included *Yiddish in America* (1965), *Language Loyalty in the United States* (1966), *Language Problems of Developing Nations* (1968), *Sociolinguistics* (1970), *Language and Nationalism* (1973), *Reversing Language Shift* (1991) and *Can Threatened Languages be Saved?* (2001).

The day's proceedings began with a tribute to Joshua Fishman by Ofelia García (Graduate Center, City University of New York, USA). Esther Schor (Princeton University), author of a forthcoming study of Esperanto, provided opening comments. Concluding comments were offered by Björn Jernudd (USA) and Humphrey Tonkin (University of Hartford, USA). Tonkin drew attention to constant theme in the day's proceedings, namely that discriminatory language policies are widespread at the international level and that far greater attention needs to be given to the actual functioning of language at the United Nations.

Summaries of the papers can be found at www.languageandtheun.org

Preparations for the 100th World Esperanto Congress Proceed in Lille, France: Several Meetings on UN Topics Are Anticipated

July 1. The series of world congresses of Esperanto begun in 1905 and, except for the two World Wars, uninterrupted since then, will reach one hundred this summer in Lille, France. The 100th Congress will take place from July 25 to August 1. Lille was chosen for this year's congress because of its proximity to Boulogne-sur-Mer, where the 1905 congress took place. The congress topic "Language, arts and values in the dialogue of cultures" will be focused particularly on UNESCO's International Decade for the Rapprochement of Cultures. Meetings planned for the week include a symposium on UNESCO timed to mark that organisation's 70th anniversary and also the 60th anniversary of its resolution on Esperanto, approved by the General Conference in Montevideo in December 1954. This resolution, recognizing Esperanto's contribution to "international intellectual exchanges" and "the rapprochement of the peoples of the world," is generally regarded as the beginning of the Universal Esperanto Association's long record of cooperation with UNESCO, a relationship reinforced by a further resolution supportive of Esperanto approved by the General Conference in Sofia in 1985.

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