

Newsletter for May 2014

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Symposium on Language Equality Questions International Practice

Failure to promote multilingualism hampers the engagement of all levels in development and leads to top-down management in the mobilization of development resources. This was one of the principal points emphasized in the Symposium on Language Equality organized in New York on April 29, 2014

The symposium, held at the Church Center, 777 United Nations Plaza, New York, was held under the auspices of the Center for Research and Documentation World Language Problems (CED), the Working Group on Language at the UN (Language-UN), and the University of Hartford, and hosted by the Universal Esperanto Association, with funding from the Esperantic Studies Foundation. UEA and CED have organized similar events in the past, most recently two years ago.

Some seventy people attended the symposium. Registrants included NGO representatives, UN staff, academics, professional translators, members of UN missions, and others involved in language work.

The program was opened by H.E. Philippe Savadogo, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of La Francophonie at the United Nations, and by Mme. Françoise Cestac, former UN Assistant Secretary-General for Conference Services. Humphrey Tonkin, of the University of Hartford and a former president of the Universal Esperanto Association, chaired the symposium.

The keynote address was given by Mark Fettes, of Simon Fraser University, Canada, current president of the Universal Esperanto Association, who stressed the importance of language as a factor in international affairs generally and sustainable development particularly. He pointed out how little attention was given by the UN to language issues, leading to a tendency to operate from the top down rather than from the bottom up in much of its work.

A total of twelve additional papers were given by scholars and activists from six countries.

- Lisa McEntee-Atalianis, of the University of London, addressed problems in the implementation of the official policy of multilingualism at the United Nations, with particular attention to the International Maritime Organisation.
- Britta Schneider, of the Freie Universität Berlin, investigated the symbolic functions of language beyond issues of ethnicity, paying particular attention to popular uses of language, especially in popular music.
- Terrence G. Wiley and M. Beatriz Arias, of the Center for Applied Linguistics (Washington, DC), examined the limitations placed on education as a human right by unequal language legislation and practice in the United States.
- Esther Schor, of Princeton University, looked back at the founding of the Esperanto movement at the turn of the twentieth century in the light of the debate between liberal self-bearing rights and rights as inherent in communities.
- Yael Peled, of the Université de Montréal and McGill University, examined “Parity in the Plural: Language and Complex Equality,” in which she interrogated both the term language and the term equality, exposing some of the misperceptions potentially inherent in both.
- Daniel Ward, editor of the US periodical Language Magazine, discussed the problem of world language education in the English-speaking world, where language study has been declining in schools and colleges, especially in the United States.
- Helder de Schutter, of the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven and Princeton University, explored the implications of a world in which ownership of English is moving to second-language speakers, whose unequal relationship to English presents potential injustices.
- Rosemary Salomone, of St. John’s University, USA, addressed the implications of the growing tendency of institutions in non-English-speaking countries to offer education in English, particularly in graduate higher education.
- Anshuman Pandey, of the University of Michigan, explored global computing standards for languages and writing systems, and the challenges associated with creating a level playing-field for users in all languages.
- Eva Daussà, of the State University of New York, Buffalo, offered the example of Catalan as a large minority language within a broader state context, and the difficulties involved in establishing an equitable language policy that preserves and strengthens this minority.
- Dipika Mukherjee, of Northwestern University, examined religious identity and language in Malaysia, pointing out that the relationship between language and religion is insufficiently addressed, and that Malaysia has seen a decline in English as a lingua franca.
- Andrea Schalley and Susan Eisenchlas, of Griffith University, Australia, pointed out that in Australia a rise in multilingualism has been accompanied by a decline in the provisions for such multilingualism.

Mark Fettes led the symposium in a closing discussion of a “language equality research agenda.” One of the elements of such an agenda, according to some participants in the lively debate, should be an exploration of the language situation at the UN itself.

Ksenia Prilepskaya captured several of the papers on video and also interviewed a number of participants.

It is hoped that some of the papers from this extraordinarily productive symposium will be collected and published. Discussions on how to achieve this are continuing. Efforts are also underway to make the Working Group on Language at the United Nations more active in addressing some of the issues mentioned above.

Universal Esperanto Association Awards Scholarships for Terminology Study

Aida Čižikaitė (Lithuania) and Ariadna García Gutiérrez (Cuba) have been selected by UEA to participate in this year's Terminology Summer School, organized by the international terminology network TermNet. The announcement, by Mélanie Maradan (Switzerland), UEA's terminology commissioner, is a reminder of the constant need to expand and update terminology in Esperanto and to work with other organisations in this field. The summer school will take place in July.

Passport Service to be Revived by UEA's Youth Section, TEJO

Under the direction of Roy McCoy, its new appointee to administer Passport, the accommodation exchange operated by UEA's youth section is seeking to bring the service back to its level of activity of a few years ago, when hundreds of people across the world offered accommodation to visiting Esperanto speakers and thousands of people traveled using Passport's services. A new printed list of Passport members will be published by TEJO shortly and a new website is under construction. Passport is one of the many ways in which young people are using Esperanto to learn about the world.

99th World Congress of Esperanto in Buenos Aires Announces Scholarly Lectures

The 99th World Congress of Esperanto, to take place in Buenos Aires, Argentina, this July, will feature eight lectures on scientific and scholarly subjects planned for an international audience. All lectures will be in the international language Esperanto. The eight lectures are as follows:

Michele Gazzola (Italy/Germany), "Linguistic Justice: What is it and how can we measure it?"

Huang Yinbao (China), "Genetic Modification and Sustainable Agriculture"

Markos Kramer (Germany/Argentina), "Voting Systems, Group Decision-making and Their Problems"

Francesco Maurelli (Italy/Scotland), "Ontologies: Philosophical Concepts and Their Application to Robotics"

Jorge Montanari (Argentina), "Nanomedicine: Measured Freedom, Treatment Revolution"

Veronika Poór (Hungary/Germany), "Sustainable Economics for a Sustainable World"

Orlando Raola (USA), "From Acid Rain to Ocean Acidification"

Sara Spanò (Italy), "Utopia: Noplaces and Good Places in philosophy, history and psychology."

The lectures by Kramer, Poór and Spanò will be extended into three-session courses.

Office of the Universal Esperanto Association at the United Nations

777 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017.

212-687-7041

www.esperantoporun.org

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